

DIRECT PATH

RAMANA KENDRA
DELHI

Nov 2021 - Jan 2022

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"The end of all wisdom is love, love, love."

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi



53. Om bhagavate namah

Master of bhaga; god or godly person.

54. Om idyaya namah

One worthy of praise, one able to elevate those who honour him.

55. Om bhumavidya visaradaya namah

One well-versed in the blissful experience of the pure 'I AM'.





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

Direct Path

VOLUME XXIII ISSUE 4

NOVEMBER, 2021 - JANUARY, 2022

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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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A Diamond Amidst Coal

Advait Shrivastav



While coal and diamonds are constituted of the same carbon, the difference is immense. Amidst the rampant coal-like dark materialism of south Delhi, Ramana Kendra, Delhi shines like a diamond. Though I am only twenty-two years old, my association with the Kendra goes back many years. My Buā (father’s sister), who lives with us, took me to the Kendra regularly when I was barely four years old. I remember virtually nothing from those days, except my excitement on receiving the sweet white cardamom-flavoured prasad and in walking on the white circles¹ that led to the shrine.

I had lived a mostly pleasant childhood but my teenage years had dif-

ferent plans for me. Depression and anxiety created years of suffering, held helplessly as I was in their devastating grip. The outcome of this was that I came to believe that pain and suffering are the gateways to wisdom. This is echoed in our beloved Bhagavan’s words when he said, “Suffering is the way for Realisation of God.”² In the same year, 2017, I began ordering spiritual and philosophical books online, upgrading my tendency from the previous year of ordering literary classics and autobiographies of sportspersons.

As time went by, my obsession for collecting spiritual books and magazines became intense. I had heard about Bhagavan from my fa-

¹ *White marble circular stepping stones led across the lawn to the shrine*

² *Talk # 107*

ther during the course of our regular discussions on spiritual topics, and wanted to buy books of his teachings. I discovered the Kendra's website and decided to visit the Kendra for the sole purpose of buying books and the Kendra's journal, *Direct Path*.

I can never forget the experience of profound silence that descended on me on bowing before Bhagavan's framed photo in the Kendra's shrine. An enlightened saint's presence, whether visible or invisible, wards off negativity and takes one from darkness to light. What Ramakrishna Madhavpeddi, who underwent depression too, wrote in *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi* echoes the same: "On the morning of the fourth day I was sitting in the hall with my eyes closed. At one point I happened to open my eyes and saw the Maharshi looking at me intently. Suddenly, all thoughts vanished from my mind and I experienced a delightful blank, or void. Then a resplendent light enveloped me fully. I was empty of thoughts but full of immense happiness. I was one with that immense peace and resplendent glory. After some time I again became aware of my body. This experience made me believe in God for the first time. In spite of all my theories of Marxism, dialectic materialism and atheism I could not

deny the truth of this wonderful experience. This condition continued for three days. I witnessed my body go through its daily activities but I remained fixed in that immense peace. The Maharshi's look pierced into me when I sat before him and even when I was not before him. The eyes of the Maharshi are the kindest and most powerful energy of the universe, and it brings me to ecstasy remembering those first days with him in his Ashrama. I left the Ashrama after six days, but even after leaving I would suddenly go into meditation. Such was the effect of the Sage's presence."

Philosophy has become my doctor and friend. Bhagavan's teachings have given me inner strength and healed me. Realizing that I had moved far away from the centre of my being, I could connect with Bhagavan's view on depression. He says: "You think that your health does not permit your meditation. This depression must be traced to its origin. The origin is the wrong identification of the body with the Self. The disease is not of the Self. It is of the body. But the body does not come and tell you that it is possessed by the disease. It is you who say it. Why? Because you have wrongly identified yourself with the body. The body itself is a thought. Be as you really are. There is no reason

to be depressed.”³

Though I am inspired by many other Indian spiritual giants and read their teachings, Bhagavan, I believe, has accepted me. A boy who was once in tatters has become the editor of a spiritual magazine related to Bhagavan. If this isn't his Grace, then what is? Bhagavan's teachings have transformed me. His grace has blessed me in both spiritual and worldly affairs. He waits to give infinite gifts to those who come under his umbrella, but are

we willing to surrender? Most people are busy searching for illusionary diamonds, which are, in fact, coal, ignoring the one and only real and eternal diamond shining within. I still crave many ephemeral worldly pleasures, but deep within, I know all this is a mere dream. I now possess sufficient detachment (or maybe I have been blessed with it) to enjoy the world while treating it as what it is – a grand confusion, a grand illusion. ■

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3 Talk # 462

For its online satsangs, the Kendra hosted various esteemed speakers in the past few months. In addition to a Q & A session by David Godman and the regular and lucid talks of Michael James, Shri Raghav Kumar shared his years of learning with devotees by speaking on the forty-two verses of Bhagavad Gita selected by Bhagavan. All these enlightening talks are available on the Kendra's YouTube channel.

In another pleasant development; Ramana Kendra, Delhi reopened for the devotees on 18th October.

Our country is recovering after going through traumatic times brought about by a microscopic entity. More than hundred crore vaccines have been successfully administered in India. Let's hope Bhagavan's infinite grace keeps guiding and protecting us all. Important events (from Bhagavan's time) falling in this current issue (November 2021 – January 2022) are as follows:

- Deepavali: 04th November
- Karthigai Festival commences: 10th November
- Deepam: 19th November
- 142nd Jayanti of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi: 21st December

A Red Summer

Neera Kashyap



Visiting the Yogini, Indian miniature, Murshidabad, 18th century (Columbia University)

‘O great Yogini, we have travelled far in this heat of summer to search for you in these forests. You are known far and wide. Your forest is cool. The women from the palace are weary. Here, no sooner do they drop to the ground, the leaves stir, hot winds turn cool to rest their bones...

The Yogini smiles gently.

‘O great One, is it the forest that has made you restful?’

‘The forest was my destiny, gentle lady. It is not the forest that is restful but the mind. The mind follows one even into the forest. If the mind is stormy, the forest will be stormy too.’

‘The Princess cannot rest, O great One. She stands apart and gazes into the future. Her mind knows great fear. Her father, the King is afraid of being

defeated by a neighbouring king who has conquered many a small kingdom like ours. We hear he is a cruel man, treats the defeated like serfs, cages women in his harem. Our King wants to give the Princess in marriage to this man, to strike an alliance, hoping with this he buys peace for his people. The Princess is afraid. Our women are afraid.’

The Yogini looks to the women with gentle empathy.

‘O Yogini of the forest. The Princess wants to have your grace and protection. May we leave her in your care? See the red on my hands. They are stained with blood – of violent emotions, of palace intrigues, of the Princess’ fear. Our women shroud themselves in white to hide their fear. But the red, this blood will not go.’

The Princess turned to the Yogini. Her

eyes were stricken. The Yogini gazed long into her face. It was the Princess' eyes that first showed the descent of calm, the calm slowly easing her features. Her eyes lowered.

The Yogini spoke: 'Today the mind is gripped with fear. Tomorrow perhaps by great elation. How can we trust an entity that changes like quicksilver, from day to day, moment to moment? It is like dealing with a shadow or a ghost that changes shape and disappears altogether when we enter deep sleep?'

Replied the Princess: 'I know nothing but fear. It is a ghost. It grips me by the neck so I am unable to breathe. It follows me in my dreams. I fear for myself, my parents, the ladies of the court, my maids, my...'

'Ask 'To whom is this fear?' Your answer will naturally be, 'To me'. Then as calmly as you can, ask: 'Who am I?' Do not try to answer this. Wait for whatever follows.'

'But who am I? Am I not the Princess of my father's kingdom?'

'Yes, but as the mind changes so can the status of a princess. By enquiring 'Who am I' and not allowing doubts or other mental answers, we try to get to the root of the mind, to the root of the fear – to cut it off there. The aim is to empty the mind. How do we empty it? By questioning the mind, its very existence. It cannot stand questioning for, essen-

tially, it is insubstantial and changeable and disappears like an unwanted guest on our investigating it. The enquiry has to be constant, first with strong emotions and then with every thought that comes.'

'Where will this take me, O great One? Will it change my destiny?'

'It will take you beyond the mind – to a centre that is unchanging, eternal and peaceful. Holding more and more to this centre – to this ever-existing principle – and less and less to the whims of the mind, we acquire steady calm and equilibrium. When the mind is emptied, it resolves in this principle, no longer shrouding it. This may alter our destiny, but what is certain is that it will give us the power to face whatever is destined.'

The wind now blew in strong cool gusts, shedding leaves on the gathered women. The Princess sank to her knees, bowed deeply to the Yogini. All sat before her in meditative calm for a long time. The silence was broken by the noise of birds coming home at dusk to roost. The Yogini bid the women to rise and follow her to her dwelling.

'I had gathered fruit yesterday for us to eat together today. Summer's ripest fruit. Come let us go,' she said, as she led the way deep into the forest.

The royal lady with red hands noted they were no longer red. ■

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Neera Kashyap: The Guiding Force

Anuraag Sunder



“I shall not be actively involved with Direct Path after November.”

These words came across unexpected but I knew they were not casual, because the individual behind these words chooses her words carefully, after deep thought, and most importantly with the best intentions in mind.

Having received these words, for a moment there was a sense of being lost because she has been my compass; guiding, advising, challenging in her own loving way. She would be one of the first few people to call in matters of importance because I knew the One inside her

would guide me the best. Though most of us know her through her articles, poems, and active role at Ramana Kendra Delhi; she has been a silent bulwark and deep force in creation of so many new ideas and concepts for which no credit was ever sought. Whether it was the Ramana Kendra video, or planning the next set of speakers for Sunday Satsangs, or curating the online version of it, or even starting all-night Mahashivratri celebrations at the Kendra, her guidance has been pivotal. I have witnessed Bhagavan’s blessings in action through her when she would bring out impossible results from nowhere, or she would help construct a new initiative. Speaking of which, the one which she had created so lovingly – singing of Parayana at the Kendra – became a victim to the second wave of lockdown. There are plans underway for this program to resume soon.

Her predilection and passion for high quality writings and drawing out the best from limited resources is inspirational. Whether she be in Delhi or travelling a few hundred miles away, nothing would miss her attention when it came to Direct Path. She would be willing to engage through any platform – Email, phone, WhatsApp, etc. – with a single-minded

focus on bringing out Direct Path in a timely and high-quality manner. At those rare times when there would be a difference of opinion between us, it was never lost on me that she was always coming from the point of best intentions for the Kendra and complete devotion for Bhagavan.

I may not have had enough opportunities to thank her during the last couple of years, but, Neera Kashyap Ji, you have been an embodiment of Bhagavan's teachings and a fine example of devotion personified. My silent response to her "I shall not be actively involved with Direct Path after November" was – "Your sapling of Direct Path is finding roots and branches now, Neera ji. I am happy that you choose to step away from it because

now we have the opportunity of working together to create new and additional Ramana Kendra activities!" You may choose to step aside from Direct Path but Kendra will always find reasons to have you with us. The team and resources you have created for Direct Path shall continue the legacy you started. And, of course, your blessings and guidance for Direct Path shall always be needed.

Through this short piece, I have attempted to give everyone a peek into Neera Kashyap Ji's boundless devotion for Bhagavan and Ramana Kendra Delhi. My salutations to her.

May Bhagavan guide us all. ■

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Dilip Kumar Roy read out another poem composed by him on Bhagavan. Then he sang a few songs. Then he asked Bhagavan, "What is the best way of killing the ego?"

Bhagavan: To each person that way is the best which appears easiest or appeals most. All the ways are equally good, as they lead to the same goal, which is the merging of the ego in the Self. What the *bhakta* calls surrender, the man who does *vichara* calls *jnana*. Both are trying only to take the ego back to the source from which it sprang and make it merge there.

Roy: But which is the best way for me? Bhagavan must know.

Bhagavan did not reply. (This is only usual with Bhagavan. He leaves it to each devotee to find out what *sadhana* appears most easy to him).

Tales from Arunachala: Part-2

Swagat Patnaik



A visit to Arunachala has always blessed me with unexpected fortunate experiences which help me grow by forcing me to reconsider things about myself. It is a wonder how being near Arunachala invariably brings about subtle and sometimes radical changes in me. Arunachala has sown invaluable seeds in me which have grown of their own accord. As seekers, our minds get clouded by thoughts of our effort, our journey, our progress, etc. But being in the presence of Arunachala clears up such irrelevancies. It makes us feel that it is only Arunachala's grace that guides this existence. Finally, being near the mountain fills the heart with such deep joy that one is compelled to surrender oneself to its majesty.

It was the third day of my visit to

Tiruvannamalai in December 2020. I started the day with my usual meditation, then roughly planned the day's activities. I thought the best would be to explore a few places, then find a quiet place to spend the day. I knew my favorite places – the old hall and Virupaksha cave – were closed (due to COVID-19) so I had to find other places for quietude. I also felt a bit displeased, that despite being in Tiruvannamalai, I would not be able to visit Ramanasramam. Thus it was with some discontent that I started from the hotel in the hope of exploring other sites in Tiruvannamalai.

I started off by going to Ramanasramam to see if there was any update on the opening up of the ashram. While making enquiries with a guard, I gently asked if I could make a quick visit

to the shrine. To my surprise, he told me to seek permission from the office. So, I walked past the old Iluppai tree en route to the office with suppressed joy. Because of the guard's permission, at the least, I would be able to visit the bookstore and buy new books on Bhagavan. In the office, I was greeted by an elderly gentleman who asked how he could help. I asked for permission to make a quick visit to the ashram shrine and temple. In a gentle yet firm way, he asked who I was and the purpose of my visit. I told him that I worked with a private company in Delhi and had come to Tiruvannamalai for a couple of weeks. Then, while sizing me up with a curious attentiveness, he specifically asked me why I had come to Ramanasramam. Once he learnt that I was there on pilgrimage, he told me I could visit the ashram for 15-20 minutes, while not answering my other queries relating to the dates for the ashram's opening. He gestured me to report to Bhagavan first, then come back to him with queries.

The moment he gave me permission, my happiness knew no bounds. In utter amazement, I walked towards the large Samadhi hall, bowed down to the shrine, circumambulated it and gazed at the familiar walls, the well, and the old hall. My feet automatically moved like a child's in wonder-

ment. The blessed feeling of my bare feet touching the sacred ground of Ramanasramam sent waves of bliss through me. After moving around, I finally sat in the old hall for a while, after which I went to the bookstore. I was still in a state of confusion and disbelief at my good fortune. Despite this, I was able to observe a thin radiant gentleman pack books at a table. It was rare to see someone paying such attention to what they were doing. In fact, it felt he was blessing the books he packed for devotees. I felt how wonderful is the grace of Bhagavan that even the Ramanasramam bookstore is a living temple.

For the rest of the day, I moved around Tiruvannamalai absorbing some of its sights. I had a pleasant lunch with a friend, then walked around enquiring about renting a place closer to Ramanasramam. By evening my friend had left for Pondicherry, and I was alone to ponder over what do to in Tiruvannamalai for the rest of my stay. Many of the places I knew had strict timings or were not open to the public.

Later that evening while dining at a restaurant near Ramanasramam, I shifted between reading a book by Nisargadatta Maharaj and staring at the book titles in the restaurant's showcase. Suddenly, I felt inspired to

ask a bearded middle-aged gentleman on the next table about the places I should visit in Tiruvannamalai. Surprisingly, he came over to my table to tell me more about Tiruvannamalai.

He began his conversation with mild and sometimes intense questioning about what was I doing in Tiruvannamalai, why I was reading the book on Nisargadatta Maharaj and what I was learning from it. In fact, his questioning style sometimes paralleled self-enquiry. Even when asking about a mundane topic, the intensity in his eyes seemed to stir me to ask, 'Who am I?' Each question I answered led him to question some more, till I reached a kind of silence. Then he began to tell me about Tiruvannamalai. He suggested I visit Yogi Ramsuratkumar's ashram, and whenever possible, walk and sit on the hill. He further advised avoiding going to the mountain after dark and recom-

mended doing Giripradakshina when I felt mentally tired or dull. Although he gave mostly generic advice, his sincerity and intensity had an unexpected effect on me. His words fired my curiosity and led me to have many interesting experiences in Tiruvannamalai. It was only during the latter part of my stay that I learnt about his fascinating adventures and how he came to Tiruvannamalai, which I will share in a subsequent article.

I feel it is only the grace of Arunachala that led me to meet him and gain from his knowledge. It is only the grace of Arunachala which brings even the most undeserving of seekers to Itself and takes care of their needs. It is only the grace of Arunachala which quenches the insatiable thirst of long-lost travelers on their journeys. I hope we all will realize our Arunachala and quench our thirst in this lifetime. ■

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A visitor: I don't know what *kundalini* is.

Bhagavan: *Kundalini* is one name given by the *yogic* people for what may be called the *atma sakti* inside the body. The *vichara* school calls the same power *jnana*. The *bhakta* calls it love or *bhakti*. The *yogic* school says that this power is dormant in *muladhara* at the base of the spinal cord and that it must be roused and taken through the various *chakras* on to *sahasrara* at the top, in the brain, to attain *moksha*. The *jnanis* think this power is centred in the heart, and so on.

The Diminishing of Dr. Emerson's Golden Sash

Anonymous



I was born near Detroit, at the same time the Ford Mustang appeared, in a town blessed or cursed with the weight of prosperity from the automobile industry. My grandfather was in part responsible for building the large gothic kirk, which means church in Scottish, which we attended every Sunday. His involvement entitled us to the carved front pew with a red velvet cushion. To my embarrassment, ten minutes after everyone else had been seated, we walked down the long center aisle with our shoes echoing against the stone floor. I spent the next hour and a half mainly procuring mints from my grandmother.

When I turned 16, I decided to become a member of the church. I attended the meeting for new membership with our imposing

Presbyterian pastor, Dr. Emerson. He was there in full regalia, pleated robes and a long sash with gold embroidery. He seemed plaintively exhausted. I was the last to arrive and he greeted me with a small grimace that looked as though he might fall with the exertion.

Once we were all seated, he asked us if we believed in the life of Christ. I was the first in line. I furrowed my brow and realized that I had no idea whether Jesus, in the literal sense, had been a living person. I wasn't expecting this question. I thought I would be given a small pin and a certificate or something, just for showing up. So I said "mmm, I'm not sure." Then a brilliant thought came to me and I said "I mean, do we have the evidence?" The Pastor leaned forward looking very different

from the Dr. Emerson who stood at the pulpit in church with a kind, always understanding, demeanor. I left the meeting and became an atheist after that.

That same year I became vegetarian for no specific reason. I didn't know why. I had never given it a single thought. In the land of meat eaters, I was always inconveniencing someone every time a meal was prepared.

Absolutely nothing of interest happened to me after that. There was only one little thing that was a thread throughout my life which became a rope as years progressed. I could not tolerate anyone purposely harming animals, reptiles, insects, even flies... This was seen by others as some kind of pathological oversensitivity. So, I wasn't receiving any awards for that, either.

Eventually, I found I was losing my already tenuous ability to make money. It finally coalesced into my being absolutely unable to motivate myself. Every time I approached a new job opportunity, I couldn't do a thing in that direction. Interiorly I was already miserable, and I just couldn't add that to the heap by becoming a slave to any occupation that was intolerable as well. I moved into my car. I was filled with a gentle inspiration, I created

in the back of my Volvo, a long, flat area with a comfortable mattress and sleeping bag, books, and a string of lights on a branch which I read under. With the last of my money I bought a car cover that puffed over the car, but let in plenty of air. To me, this was camping, but to everyone else, it was homelessness. And homeless in the U.S. means pariah. In the West we do not recognize wandering mystics, sadhus or renunciates. In Western culture that kind of thing has to be within the confines of established hierarchy and authority. Unless you are wealthy, in which case you fall into the category of harmless eccentric.

I started reading self-help books, an annoying barrage of new labels about what had to be fixed in one's life. It was all very serious, with complicated strategies that were, at least to me, internally violent.

Over time different books fell into my hands, and I started attending a few retreats, satsangs and intensives. They were all alike in that they charged a lot of money. So most of the people attending were upper middle class. And then there was that thing, like a mist of arrogance floating in and out of view behind the eloquence of these teachers. I couldn't muster the respect and reverence that others

seemed to have. But it was a new narrative for me, and the words were hugely important because they were being used in a very different way. Still, I would sometimes get a feeling that I was being handed another more sophisticated kind of self-help.

Soon I passed through a month or two of studying J Krishnamurti, his life and his teachings. As an antidote, I then read profusely about U.G. Krishnamurti, who I could relate to, or at least to the part of his wandering about London, homeless.

During this time, I found myself often quietly looking at a picture of Ramana Maharshi on the cover of a book that I owned. I hadn't read it yet, because I knew it could not be read for entertainment. I would rather have visited him physically, but he wasn't exactly available. I was looking around for some other teacher, while things in my life got more real. I was diagnosed with a confusing illness that didn't have a simple solution while still living in my Volvo wagon. It had been 3 years now in my car, and it dawned on me that I could not return to the world that I had taken a sabbatical from. I had been sucked through a wormhole into another reality and slept through the whole thing. The world was making me a bit queasy.

So, I admit that I clung to the book by Ramana and I slowly started making my way through his writings with the help of Michael James, David Godman and others. I realized in his teachings and in the stories of his life that I began to see differently all the things that appeared, according to my culture, to indicate ineptitude on my part. 1) An aversion to eating animals was commonplace. This was bolstering to me, because although I was no longer 16, I had been alienated for that imposition on others. 2) Here was someone who may have understood my sense that all spiders, sparrows and cows were probably more perceptive and rarified than I was. 3) In his ashram there was at least one person who felt he could not touch money, although he was teased. I don't know how he arrived at that way of viewing things, but it had heartfelt meaning for me. And there were those, perhaps including Ramana, who had no inner inclination to earn money to justify occupying a space in the world 4) Ramana had lived often with no real home, in caves, basements and under trees, and was ridiculed for it. This gave me a much more universal perspective and the realization that there are benefits that can come from these ways of living, even in the United States, and

that being utterly alone is not the same thing as solitary confinement in the form of punishment. For some of us it's a requirement, for certain knowledge only comes through the quietude of aloneness. Of course, it can also mean difficult karma, but I had a warm shelter and no bills. One person's hard karma is another person's good fortune.

These discoveries were important to foster my moving forward in utter disregard to the false authority of my culture. Choiceless awareness, a term perhaps originating from J Krishnamurti, may go entirely unrecognized in Western societies because it conflicts with a deep and underlying sense that we are the independent engineers of our lives. Our ideas about liberty are precious to us, but they have appeared, in my case, to be only a gilded cage from which one parrots the dead passages of institutionalized education, borrowed authority and religion.

I know I could have seen many examples of these things outside of the influence of Ramana, but it was his type of quietness and shimmering watchfulness that made me have faith in his teachings of silence and self-enquiry. And that gave me some interior stability from which I was moved to try to accept silence itself as my teacher.

When I sometimes feel distress about not living in Bhagavan's vicinity, or in his era, I remember my old pastor Dr Emerson and his embroidered sash with the gold fringe flipping backwards as he walks. I would have been a terrible church goer as an adult. I'm certain that I would have passed mints to those around me.

If I had to put my story into one quote, possibly most to the point:

“As the dark prison of mental bondage crumbled and disappeared, I became his servant finding joyous life in the open sky of his ambrosial gaze.”⁴ ■

4 Quote by Muruganar from Sri Guru Prasadam.

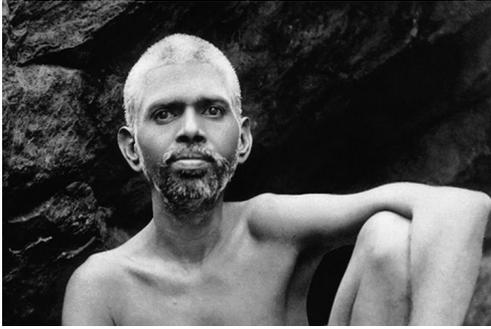
Talk 6

A question was asked by a monk (*sannyasi*) about how to prevent the mind from being distracted.

M.: You see the objects on forgetting your own Self. If you keep hold of your Self, you will not see the objective world.

Ramana Maharshi

Advait Shrivastav



The spiritual giant born in Bhārata's south
Having an eternal might of a silent mouth!
At an age when boys are full of ignorance,
He witnessed His Self's silent performance

You keenly enquired 'What is it that dies?'
When a current gave You the fear of death
The Force it was; O it was Him in disguise:
The Self, which later became Your breath!

'I'm going to my Father,' You announced
With ease, that boy of sixteen renounced!
On Arunachala hill, He gave spiritual tests;
Stoic to attacks of those vermin and pests!

Grr! Ignorant urchins pelted stones at You
When you were busy effacing each "two"
Meditating on Self; the One, you became
You saw Brahman in each; all were same!

Teaching us all to investigate 'Who am I?'
You've helped many to go beyond the sky

Of the Self, You instructed each to enquire
Helping us to face truths of a burning pyre

Ramana! When to Reality, I could not rise
Your grace and teachings turned me wise!
O Ramana! The compassion in Your eyes;
Leads me up towards and beyond paradise

My Ramana! You have accepted this child
Who, once, was sinful; ignorant; and wild!
Spreading them all through mouth and ink
Never shall I let Your lucid teachings sink!

I fear the cycles of illusion and their design
But O You're with me; O Ramana, Divine!
The one who meditated in Virupaksha cave,
Ah! Me, my Bhagavan Ramana will save! ■

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Talk 4

Maharshi was asked by an educated young man: “How do you say that the Heart is on the right, whereas the biologists have found it to be on the left?” The man asked for authority.

M.: Quite so. The physical organ is on the left; that is not denied. But the Heart of which I speak is non-physical and is only on the right side. It is my experience, no authority is required by me. Still you can find confirmation in a Malayalam Ayurvedic book and in *Sita Upanishad*; and he produced the quotation (*mantra*) from the latter and repeated the text (*sloka*) from the former.

Q & A with David Godman

Neera Kashyap



On August 1st, 2021, David Godman gave detailed answers to questions sent to him by devotees. The following is a record of this online satsang.

Q1. How does one know if one is ripe or not for self-enquiry?

DG: The answer is provided by Bhagavan in Ramana Gita where he says that the two signs for fitness are a sense of the transitoriness of the body and non-attachment to sense objects. If you feel a distaste for the goings-on in the world and you want to transcend them, then you are fit for self-enquiry and don't necessarily have to go in for other practices such as stuti or japa. Bhagavan never said you had to have some moral attainment/virtue before starting self-enquiry. No

preliminary practice was necessary. He said if you practise self-enquiry, then all the virtues and dharmas accumulate/are acquired within. In the preliminary dialogues of Sat Darshanam Bhashya, Bhagavan says: 'Whatever the previous developments, vichara quickens the development'.

In 'Day by day', Bhagavan said in sum: Self-enquiry is the direct and easy method. How can it be difficult to go to one's own Self? Whatever other method is chosen, there will always be a doer. Who that doer is must be found out. Till then the sadhana cannot be ended. So eventually all must come to find out Who am I? You have the 'I' to start with. You know you exist always whereas the body does not

always exist, for example in sleep. Sleep reveals you exist even without a body. We identify the Self as having a body, having limits hence all our trouble. All we need to do is to give up identifying ourselves with the body with forms and limits, then we should know ourselves as the Self that we always are.

The bottom line: if you feel this is the method for me and you undertake it with faith in Bhagavan's teaching who said it was the direct method, then you are qualified to start the practice.

In the book, *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, Bhagavan has said that if an aspirant is not temperamentally suited to vichara, he must practise bhakti or devotion to an ideal – God, Guru, humanity in general, ethical laws or even the ideal of beauty. Once possessed of these, other attachments grow weaker, dispassion develops. Alternatively, he also recommended pranayama and karma yoga, nobler instincts and intuition developing simultaneously with the latter. It is important to know that Bhagavan never ever told a single devotee that he/she was unfit to practise self-enquiry. The only qualification you need is a passion to do it and a passion to succeed.

In Verse 18 of Upadesa Saram, Bhagavan says, Mind is only thought. Of all thoughts the thought I is the root thought. What we call mind is only I. In Verse 19 he says if you look internally at the rising place of I, the I will die. This is self-enquiry. But the really important statement is in Verse 17: when one studies the nature of the mind without forgetfulness, one discovers there is no such thing as mind. This is the direct path for all.

My advice to devotees is not to delay taking up the practice, thinking you may need to do other preliminary practices as preparation. Start doing self-enquiry. Do it badly at first until it gets better and better, until it gets more automatic, more natural.

Q2. Is a physical Guru necessary for Self-realisation?

DG: Bhagavan himself never had a physical guru. He did say a Guru was necessary but he need not be in physical form. He cited the story of Dattatreya and his 24 gurus; the cumulative effect of all these teachings led to him realising the Self. Bhagavan wrote that Arunachala was the power that brought about his own realisation and that Arunachala is the Guru.

He never said Arunachala was my Guru, for Arunachala could perform this function for others too. Bhagavan always taught that the Guru is the Self within. The inner Guru is always available to those who turn their attention inwards. Most need the physical form or a Guru's teachings. Both routes would take you to the true Guru, the inner self, destroying your sense of I to make you one with the Self.

Q3. Is holding on to the I thought the thought-free state? If yes, is this manolaya?

DG: An absence of thought may be a consequence of self-enquiry but is not the enquiry itself. In self enquiry you are being asked to place your full attention on the entity that thinks the thought, that perceives the perception. At the same time, you are not to pay any attention to any thoughts or perceptions that distract you from a vigilant focus on the I. If there is an absence of thought, be aware of this absence, for the one who observes this is still dealing with the object, the thought, 'I have a quiet mind'. Thoughts are not the problem, the problem is the one who thinks them. You first frame your thoughts, identify them as objects seen by a subject, then

withdraw attention from them and put it instead on the I that is thinking them. Self-enquiry does not suppress or remove thoughts. It treats thoughts as observed objects, then removes attention from them to the observer of the objects observed.

In Bhagavan's teachings, Manolaya is seen as an undesirable state. It is a state of torpor and dullness. It appears to be thought-free, but lacks the radiant clarity of a thought-free state. It can make you stuck for quite a long time. People in these states for long periods think these are great states but this is not conducive to progress. Bhagavan said that self-enquiry should be done in the midst of worldly activities and when the body is active, so there is no danger of falling into states of manolaya.

Q4. Did Bhagavan prescribe a daily routine that seekers could follow?

DG: Bhagavan was not prescriptive. He said to put your attention on family when they need your attention. At other times try to keep your attention on the Self or on any other practice to which you have an affinity. Kunju Swami serves as an example. When he settled in Palakotu, he found he could not

do self-enquiry all day. When his mind resisted this, he did other things: parayana, japa, reading a spiritual book. Bhagavan approved this, but encouraged people not to give up self-enquiry when the mind resisted, but to return to it at the right time.

Q5. Except for reading the Bhagavad Gita, my reading of Bhagavan and other scriptures has been very limited. Recently, I had a very powerful experience of silence after listening to Bhagavan's devotee, Papaji, speak on video. Am I on the right track?

DG: Having a head full of book learning is often more a handicap than a help. Bhagavan certified as self-realized only his mother and Laxmi, the cow, neither of whom were scholar-readers! When it comes to meetings with jnanis, newness and a complete lack of experience in the teachings can actually be an advantage. The words that come off a liberated being can put you into silence, even via a video or when the jnani is no longer in his body. Those words have the capacity to show you who you are. If they land in the right place, they can put you into an intense state of silence, even give you an experi-

ence of the Self. The only thing you need to get that experience is a quiet receptive mind.

I lived with Papaji in the 1990s and I watched deep experiences happen regularly to the oddest of people at the oddest of times. To me, these people did not seem to have developed spiritual maturity in the classic sense. So I asked Papaji if devotees were more ready to have these experiences after a lot of practise and meditation or are these preliminaries not necessary at all. Papaji replied: The only difference I see among devotees is between those who can listen attentively and those who can't. If the words of a jnani land in an empty silent mind without being thought about, considered, disputed, categorized, they have the capacity to put the listener in the space they are pointing at.

The fact that you had the experience means that you are on the right track. Look after the silence, cultivate it by not putting your attention anywhere else and make it welcome inside you. Papaji spoke about Miss Peace. Miss Peace comes to you occasionally. You get an inkling that she is standing at your door. You get out of the way. Invite her to sit on your chair. In other words, you

make yourself into nothingness in the process. Keep your attention on her, absolutely; otherwise, easily distracted, she will get up and walk out. Allow Miss Peace to take you over by keeping your undivided attention on her.

Q6. Does stabilizing in the Self hasten the passage of karma?

DG: Bhagavan would say, until there is a definitive experience of Self-realization, karma will always be there. With glimpses of the Self, karma may recede, but when individual identity returns, karma will return too. If you identify with the body, think you make choices, plan for the future, karma will be back life after life. If Self is the locus of identity, karma ends for good. There is no gradual diminution of karma. Karma is binary. It will never end until the I thought goes. And if you don't have an I thought, there is no karma at all.

Q7. How do I know if I am doing Self enquiry correctly and making progress?

DG: People try self-enquiry and if they don't get tangible results, except sporadically, they come to the wrong conclusion that they are not doing it correctly. If you are trying to get back to the I-thought,

then you are doing it correctly. Don't judge yourself, don't have expectations. Self-enquiry is not a technique for instant gratification. It does not produce immediate results. You get a free bonus when you start, with nice happy states. Then the hard work begins. If you stick to the practice, refuse to be distracted and return to the I, you are doing it properly. Bhagavan said: 'To whatever extent one becomes free from thoughts, to that extent one can say one is making progress.' Another way of looking at it is this: Do you care for it enough to do it more and more? Are you drawn to It? Do you really want to succeed at it, to attain liberation? One sign of progress is that you want to go back for more. You want to transcend samsara. You can evaluate the correctness of your practice by how much you care about it, how much time you are willing to put into it. Yet another way of looking at it is this: Don't doubt the teacher, don't doubt the teaching. Have faith that Bhagavan has given you a good method and is leading you in the right direction. In following his teaching and by sticking to the letter and spirit of his instructions, the Grace from the Guru begins to flow. ■

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Forgetting NOW, Tomorrow Pours In

Bharati Mirchandani



Thanks to the innovation of cinematic technology, a few moving pictures of Sri Ramana are available for us today to be viewed via the internet, anywhere in the world. The cinema was a novelty in Sri Bhagavan's days. A strip of film, the light of a projector, a blank white screen on which action occurs provide apt metaphors to explain how the world in all its variety appears on the blank screen of the Self. The screen remains unscathed by whatever happens in the film, no matter how violent or destructive the scenes may have been. This analogy is elegant for its simplicity and clarity. Yet as a metaphor it is already dated; cinema now is digital movements on LED screens.

New technology necessitates new ways of applying Ramana's eternal teachings of pure Advaita. Artificial In-

telligence (AI) is the current buzzword; AI is a simulation of human mind processes by machines. Machines, mainly computer hardware and software, are programmed for specific tasks, fed a huge amount of data, and given step by step instructions to handle dreary repetitive jobs faster and with greater accuracy than by humans.

When I play a computer game, the computer becomes a playmate. When I use a robotic vacuum cleaner, I have replaced a person sweeping and swabbing by a machine with sensors and memory that, after the first run, remembers directions to automatically get the chore done. When elderly or disabled persons use a robotic dog or cat to be an assistant as well as to provide emotional therapy, the machine has been enabled to understand and anticipate human emo-

tions and behaviour. AI has already developed to the stage where technicians are working on creating ‘real’ looking human faces and bodies as robots in an attempt to replace people, while acknowledging the socio-psychological needs of humans as social animals who need human company.

In the 17th century, the French philosopher, Rene Descartes wrote the famous dictum, *Cogito, ergo sum*, ‘I think, therefore I am’. He took the act of thinking as proof of his existence, because thinking implies the presence of a thinker. Two hundred years later Ramana guided us to investigate our existence directly by going to the source of the thinker; seek where thoughts arise. He stated clearly that, when explored, the thinker/mind/personality is found to be a phantom, with no real existence at all. This spontaneously causes thoughts to subside, indicating that the thinking faculty of the brain is peripheral to fulfilled living.

AI technology shows clearly that the functions of the brain: to collect and analyze information, forge connections and find solutions, categorize, judge and imagine are all merely mechanical processes that technology replicates. What then is being human? Are we merely machines that occasionally also sweat or shed tears? Mere mobile computers that grow from infancy, maturity to old age;

that eat and defecate, that make friends, make love, and procreate?

I find three things that seem to set us apart from machines. First is that we have feelings: love, anger, jealousy, revulsion, amusement, wonder. Love is the most special aspect of being alive. Love for parents and children, friends, teachers and students; love lubricates relationships, making life fragrant. Love for order and cleanliness makes our environment beautiful. Love for work makes our days enjoyable. Love for knowledge, for food, for power and control, for adventure, for plants and animals— the list is endless and actually covers every aspect of existence. Even something hateful can be seen to be merely a distorted interpretation of love itself. Anger can be caused by some expectation being betrayed; jealousy from loving things or people unequally; humour from our love to be happy; wonder from the sheer power that love has over us.

This leads to the second aspect that makes humans differ from machines: that humans believe in the existence of a higher power. Perhaps this faith is needed to explain the wonder of existence, and some concept of God provides a possible answer. God is always defined as one who loves all. God is love. This is often said. Then what about all the millions of gods in our pantheons?

I suggest that apart from the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara, who are symbols for the primordial A-U-M, the one AUM or OM, all other gods are created as names for our different and ever-changing human emotions. As I walked, rather wonderstruck, around the deserted open-to-sky Chaunsath-yogini temple located far from any town, surrounded by miles of rice fields and palm groves, each of the 64 idols was facing the centre of a large circular court the feminine version of a corresponding aspect of Shiva. As I walked the circle, looking at each, I felt I was being washed by different emotions by turn; opening up to each emotion seemed a way to be cleansed of each. The awe that filled me was perhaps triggered by the contrast to the previous week that had been spent in the ancient temple town of Bhubhaneshwar, visiting hundreds of temples all built in the sacred architectural pattern of enclosed courts, with succeeding smaller rooms nestled within each other. There, one is drawn deeper into a temple to reach the presiding deity, resplendent in the very heart—the sanctum sanctorum; enclosed, sacred, full of mystery.

The circular yogini temple, by contrast, had many gods arrayed around the periphery. Open to the sky, to variations of seasons and breeze, movements of the sun and moon, and the stately canopy of the star-studded Milky way on dark

nights, all the mysteries of the cosmos pulled the person's soul upwards, enchanting with hints of enormous expanses, making infinity feel possible. Standing in the centre of the circle of gods, something deeply profound enters the heart.

Faith in divinity is reinforced by life's experiences: the power of prayer, premonitions and oracles, near death and past life experiences, and repeatedly sensing divinity in people, places or things, in what are called miracles. Supernatural experiences are supported by developments in science, with scientists like Einstein showing us that space can curve, that time moves at different speeds for objects in motion, that the Newtonian laws of nature do not apply to subatomic particles which obey a different set of rules, those of quantum mechanics, where it has been proven that the observer affects the behavior of particles being observed...

The third thing that distinguishes humans from machines is that we can stand apart even from these emotions, and watch ourselves feeling and doing acts. We can be aware: I think, read, sleep, worry, fall in love, invent machines. This awareness, this ability to watch ourselves, to be both the subject and object of our attention, makes us human. Bhagavan called the subject the Self; that our attention should dissolve

into pure attention; and the object he termed the ego owes its existence only to the energy borrowed from the subject.

As machines take over our thinking, how do we utilize the energy that has been freed from adding up huge numbers, from remembering facts and organizing them into categories? Are we going to seek ways of learning to understand ourselves, to seek happiness and peace, to improve the quality of living? Or will we just become lazy, or lazier! To save travel time, motor cars were invented. But then we created reasons to spend ever longer hours travelling, covering greater distances and overcrowding the roads. The basic problems of Shankaracharya's time, and the more recent years of Sri Ramana, remain unchanged: we continue to live life as though in a slumber, with only partial awareness, unaware that our actions are driven by unconscious and subconscious desires. To be alert is to be witness to ourselves, separating subject from object so that attention can begin to be focused on the subject.

The body and mind are the instruments we use in our spiritual journey. The stages to return 'home' start with honing the free flow of energies to make the body capable of efficient activity through hatha yoga; purification of the mind by

right actions, karma yoga; enabling the purified mind to concentrate and focus efficiently through meditation or raja yoga; only then is this refined body-mind prepared and ready to leap into the secret yet ever-present dimension of Reality through enquiry, or jnana yoga.

Just as Adi Shankara used the analogy of the rope and the snake, each spiritual master uses examples from the age in which his/her manifestation occurs. The truths expressed are eternal, as far as our understanding of eternity stands. The clothes Truth wears to express itself must follow the trends of the times. And the times today are of lockdowns, tourist rides to space, genetically modified plants, RNA vaccines, and body part implants. AI applications penetrate ever increasing areas of human endeavour. The gap between 'human' and 'machine' narrows by the day. Has technology crossed the point of being 'within programmable control'⁵? Have humans relinquished commandeering of their lives to algorithms? Will microchips or nano-computers soon be implanted in our brains? What then will happen to all the samskaras we have already accumulated, the prarabdha and the sanchita? Will they be assisted or overruled, by the microchip implant? ■

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5 *The Emergence of Technology Beyond Programmable Control, title of book by George Dyson*

Mr. Goon Finds Out

Sharada Bhanu

I longed to be one of the five elect
But never found four friends who bonded
Or the right dog. Couldn't master disguise
Or even learn to ride a bike
And usually needed help to detect
My own misplaced keys. Declasse and suspected
Of difference, I could remember neither a name
Nor a face. Bumbling goon,
Laughingstock, despised by family,
Victim of crude spies,
Controlled by others,
At the mercy of the changing Moon,
I stumbled clueless
Through the coal cellar of life.
Yet I was called; handed
A torch and a cake of soap,
Never allowed to Clear Orf;
'Come, solve the hardest
Mystery in the universe,
And you can at last
Step off the world
And go home;
Just find
Your own
Self.' ■



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Vimala Thakar

Kaiser Irani



There was an invisible saint who lived a regular life, not drawing attention to any of her powers or sainthood; a sannyasin in plain clothes who lived a simple life in the midst of people, not away in any cave. She taught through her life how one can live in society and yet maintain the attitude of renunciation and connectivity with the Divine. She lived and showed how there was no difference between spending time in meditation and moving through daily chores; that a sannyasin need not be a burden to society; that one can live one's daily life by the tenets: 'Ask not and reject not'; live through the daily routine of life without taking any initiative, just by being an observer.

In a poem, Vimalaji gives a small introduction of herself which sums up how quietly she lived her life, out of the limelight. Her words:

Residing in the body.
And moving in the universe.
The Inner light, roams in all the
three worlds.
The body is the cave.
The whole universe is the
courtyard.
The seven heavens are the
neighbourhood.
The body is like the holy
Himalayas,
The pranas are like the birds,
The ida and pingala, are the
Ganga and Yamuna.

The seven elements are the seven
spheres,
The divine light expresses itself
in the seven spheres
Lord Narayan has ten
expressions.
The sound of Omkar resounds in
every pore of my being
And its resonance pervades the
thousands of nadis.
With every breath truth is lived.
Through every exhalation pure bliss
overflows.
In every breath sways the pure
energy of Goddess Jagadamba.
The body is a temple, in it is the
lamp of the pranas.
The Atma is idol of the cosmic
Lord himself.
In the purified village of the
sense organs,
In the mighty royal mansion of
the five pranas
Resides the Lord.
Self-luminous and Self-realized.
The form is Vimala.
The name is Vimala.
The karma is Vimala.
The dharma is Vimala.

This is just a brief introduction
of mine.
Vimalaji describes her *Avadhooti*
in another poem:
We are Avadhoot⁶,
Avadhoot are we,
In a female body.
See for yourself!
Our Avadhooti is of bygone
centuries.
It is even before the rishis of the
Vedas.
We are Avadhoot,
Avadhoot are we!
The universe is contained in this
body.
Universal mother is contained in
our heart.
We are Avadhoot,
Avadhoot are we!
We are in the guise of an
individual,
But are in essence the pure
Universe
In a female body we are Narayan
We are Avadhoot,
Avadhoot are we!
Her basic teachings are

⁶ *Avadhoot/Avadhūta is a Jīvanmukta who gives his insight to others and teach them about his realization of the true nature of the ultimate reality (Brahman) and self (Ātman) and takes the role of a guru to show the path of moksha to others. (Wikipedia)*

summarized in the book “Vimalaji on Intensive Self Education”; her poems in “Friendly Communion”; and her biography in “Avadhoot of Arubudachal”⁷.

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More about Vimalaji⁸

Vimala Thakar was no ordinary teacher. She herself would say that she is not a teacher at all, but a friend who comes to share her perception of life as she understands it with whoever wishes to be present. In her opening words at the last seminar held outside India in Holland in 1991, she said:

“You will find out for yourselves, my friends, that these gatherings become festivals of friendship. They are informal and intimate get-togethers of those interested in enquiring into what this mystery of life and living is... We will be enquiring together; it will be a joyous enquiry, joyous and serious simultaneously, deep and yet vibrating with vitality at the same time...”

These words express perhaps better than any the personality of Vimala Thakar: vital, passionate about life, full of compassion for her fellow beings. Her total dedication to the search for ever deeper and subtler truths began at the very early age of five, and has never stopped. She said: “The day I stop learning I will stop speaking.”

Vimala Thakar was born in India and spent her childhood amidst the deeply spiritual atmosphere of her family and their friends. Her father soon noticed his daughter’s aspirations. He made her promise not to depend on the authority of teachers, past or present, but to rely on her own inner understanding as her guide in life. She met many spiritual leaders of her day, read eastern and western philosophy at university and joined Vinoba Bhave⁹, a renowned scholar and saintly man, in his Land Gift Movement. She was with this movement for a period of ten years during which she walked the length and breadth of India, sometimes alone, sometimes

⁷ *Vimala Thakar’s books are available from:*

Vimal Prakashan Trust

Vimal Saurabh, Vaniawadi St No 9

Rajkot 360002, Gujarat, India

Phone: +91-281 2454007, +91 99255 29096, + 91 98254 16769

⁸ *Bharati Mirchandani has gleaned most of this text from ‘Vimala Thakar Homepage’ created over half a decade after she left her body.*

⁹ *She told BM she joined Vinobaji because he was rare in that his politics was founded on spiritual values.*

in the company of Vinoba and his friends, till the physically tough life compounded by serious injuries in a road accident forced her to retire in 1962.

Vimalaji moved to Mt Abu where years of intense self-inquiry led to deep inner blossoming. She understood that only inner transformation could overcome violence and aggression, the source of so much misery in the world. Thus, she began, at the request of a few friends, to share her deeply felt realization. Invitations to other places began coming in. And so, gradually during the next thirty years, Vimalaji undertook an ever-increasing schedule of travel, to places such as North and South America, Australia, Japan, many European countries and New Zealand. However, having to adjust to widely different climates and foods began to tell on her health, and in 1991 she had to tell her audiences abroad that this was to be her last visit. After that, she lived mainly in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India.

Her exceptional ability to put into words that which is in fact beyond words, made her especially qualified to share what she had directly experienced. And those who had the privilege of being present at

such gatherings felt the purity and compassion which filled not only her words but also her very presence.

“Life is divinity; there is no divinity apart, outside or independent of life. And divinity is creativity... It seems to me, my friends, that to live is to perceive divinity, to be aware of the creativity of divine life, partaking of that creative energy, receiving it, assimilating it and sharing it with all the fellow beings that inhabit the planet... The act of living implies an interaction with that sanctity of life, with that creativity of life.”

Vimala Thakar passed away on 11 March 2009.

**Extracts from
Avadhoot of Arbudachal
Biography of Vimala Thakar
by Kaiser Irani¹⁰**

● ‘We achieved through Bhoodan a replacement of the psychology of class conflict, class hatred and class violence by class cooperation, goodwill and mutual trust. This replacement of motivation is a tremendously important factor in human growth... There has been no compulsion in Bhoodan Movement either through guns and bullets or through legislation. There has only been an appeal to the goodness of man

¹⁰ Excerpts selected by BM

and an appeal to the compassion that resides in his heart.’¹¹

● ‘My work outside India was an experiment of working together without any organization, based on friendship, based on joint effort and cooperation... This is the way the work was done in twenty-two countries. Cooperation came from middle-class people who had a job or a business. They were able to get the work done. It was not the rich who got the work done. Many millionaires did make offers. I said, “I am not one of those saints who is kept as pets”... God has kept my self-respect and the work has taken place based on a stream of love, spontaneous living and collective effort....’

The phase of world travel began without any background or sponsoring of international organizations. Small groups under the name of ‘Friends of Vimala’ were formed spontaneously. Conferences and camps were organized. Discourses and dialogues got organized at various universities in Europe, UK, USA, Canada, South America, Australia, New Zealand and Poland in East Europe.¹²

● ‘Though my student life was hard, and working with Vinobaji was

hard, this international travelling was much much harder. From 1962–1972, I travelled alone, taking care of all my personal work: cooking my meals, washing my clothes, pressing them, correspondence, interviews, camps, lectures, an inhuman amount of exertion of my body and brain. It was only after 1972, when I collapsed in a Birmingham conference, that friends volunteered to accompany me on my foreign travels. My friends are not from affluent classes, but between 1972 and 1980 they took upon themselves to see I had a companion.’

‘Soon talks presented during visits overseas were published... Unbelievably, they got talks translated into Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Polish, entirely through the initiative of local friends in the respective countries. It was only in Brazil, Argentina and Italy that friends found some publishers to publish them. I remained a vigilant witness to all these happenings.’¹³

● ‘If you study the history of India, you will find that whenever there have been political defeats, it is only those people who had access to the spiritual source who could lead the people...’

¹¹ pp180-181

¹² pp240-242

¹³ pp 238-239

‘I did not take active part in J.P.’s andolan.’ (In a note to him, Vimalaji communicated thus—) “J.P., I am in agreement with the main purpose of your andolan but I cannot take active part. Because I am a spiritual person, I cannot accept the means you are using and the people you are taking with you to do the work. I can give you moral support, and I have written many articles... in support of your principals...”¹⁴ When I reached Norway, (in November 1975) I received news that some officials of the Indian government were planning to impound my passport.... we had to go through a lot of such incidents, but we did not consider it a difficulty. I told all my satsangi friends that this is the language of satsang: anything could happen. One’s head could be cut off or all one’s property could be taken away. I asked my satsangi friends to take permission from their spouses if they want to be part of this satsang... my friends stayed with me throughout the emergency.¹⁵

● ‘India is a land of rishis, yogis, gurus and saints. This is a land where science of life and living

blossomed. We call it spirituality. This science proclaimed thousands of years ago, and proclaims even today that Life is an indivisible, homogeneous wholeness; that it is non-fragmentable; that Life is a totality in which everything is related to everything else.¹⁶’

● ‘Spirituality gives you a science which is a direction for search, examination, exploration and experimentation. It has no method, because Truth is a pathless land, there cannot be techniques. Truth cannot be systematized; you can systemize things. But when you have to allow the mind with all its conditionings to go into voluntary abeyance, how can there be any system? In silence how can there be any system? In that emptiness which is full of creative energies that are unknown, how are you going to control them? Are you going to dictate terms to the Divine that it should reveal itself to you at a certain time by a certain method and only with a certain measure of intensity which your nerves can stand? I think there comes a time when the realm of effort comes to an end and there is that realm of effortlessness or relaxation.¹⁷’ ■

¹⁴ p322

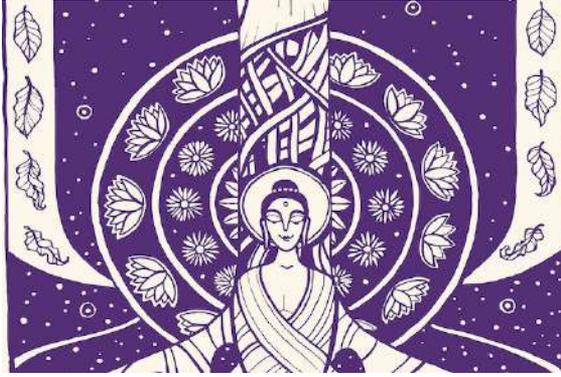
¹⁵ p325

¹⁶ p310

¹⁷ p280

You Stay as You Are

Dr. Sanjay Raghav



You are not good, you are not bad
You stay as you are: peaceful and calm
You neither make friends nor enemies
You stay as you are: peaceful and calm
You are beyond love and hate
You stay as you are: peaceful and calm
What others think about you is not your concern
You stay as you are: peaceful and calm
You don't want to think or not think
You stay as you are: peaceful and calm
Ego is old but you are eternal
You stay as you are: peaceful and calm
Joy and suffering come and go
You stay as you are: peaceful and calm
You are Presence not a person
You stay as you are: peaceful and calm ■

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Bhagavan Ramana: My Life

Sanjay Lohia



Bhagavan came into my life more than thirty-three years ago. My wife and I visited Tiruvannamalai around 1988. We had gone to Vellore for a medical issue. I had carried my first book on Bhagavan's teachings on this visit, so was already caught in Bhagavan's net of grace! Since Vellore is very near Tiruvannamalai, I felt the urge to visit Sri Ramanasramam and see the famous Arunachaleswar temple. Thereafter, I continued to visit the ashram and to read more and more books on Bhagavan's teachings.

I ran a restaurant called Ramana's in Bangalore until about a year and a half ago, but we closed it down last year. This was a blessing in disguise, because I now have plenty of time to focus on my love: Bhagavan and his

teachings. Reading, reflecting on, and practicing Bhagavan's teachings have become the aim of my life, taking up almost the entire day.

Bhagavan is both God and guru to me, which, Bhagavan says, means the same thing. However, I value his role as sadguru far, far more than his role as God. God can give us this or that – that is, He can make our life in this world relatively comfortable – but are we here to enjoy samsara or transcend it?

Samsara means wandering, revolving, perpetual movement, restless activity, worldly existence and the cycle of birth and death. We all are trying to give up these things through our spiritual endeavours. We are here to destroy samsara and not to enjoy it.

The guru is *timirahara*, which

means he is the one who dispels *timir* (darkness). Bhagavan has pointed out exactly what darkness is. It is nothing but ego, the false awareness 'I am this body'. This ego is the root of all samsara, and therefore the root of all problems that an embodied existence entails. Not only has Bhagavan pointed out the root cause of all our problems, but he has also given us a simple, direct and infallible weapon to destroy this root, once and for all. This is the simple practice of keen self-attentiveness.

The practitioners of Bhagavan's teachings aim to experience the light which shines within them as awareness. At present this light seems to be mixed up and conflated with our bodily-awareness. Thus our aim is to isolate pure awareness from all its unreal adjuncts. We can do so only by holding on to our self with more and more keenness. We struggle to hold on to our self for any length of time because of our strong vishaya-vasanas (inclinations to attend to things other than ourself). However, the more we practise self-investigation, the more these vasanas are weakened and eventually we will be able to turn fully within to experience our self alone.

We have a fundamental choice: do we attend to our self or do we attend

to vishayas? We all have this choice from moment to moment. Whenever we allow ourselves to be swayed by our vishaya-vasanas, we experience vishayas as preordained. What we consider to be our 'fate' is nothing other than that part of our accumulated karma Bhagavan selected for us, as he knows exactly what we need for our inner growth. The spiritual path is the path of evolution. We evolve from cruder states of mind to more and more refined states, until eventually we surrender our mind totally at the feet of Bhagavan.

Bhagavan seems to appear before us as the name and form of Ramana. But he has made it clear that he is not that name and form, he is not that body. He is that which shines in us as pure awareness. The light, love and peace that emanates through his form is the real Bhagavan. The ultimate reality is described as sat-chit-ananda-priyam (being-awareness-happiness-love), which Bhagavan is. He is pure awareness shining in the heart of each and every jiva. Do we not see love and peace in the eyes of Bhagavan whenever we look at his photos? As our love for Bhagavan deepens, we relate more and more to his real form, which is not even a form, but formlessness. We experience him as seated in the

very core of our being.

Obviously, since we see Bhagavan through the veil of a body, the light emanating from this body also appears somewhat veiled. However, the deeper we dive within our self, the brighter and clearer this light becomes. ‘Even a single effort to still a single thought even for a trice goes a long way to reach the state of quiescence... a state of perfect awareness and perfect stillness combined... It is not dullness; but

it is Bliss. It is not transitory but it is eternal.’¹⁸ Eventually, we will be swallowed by this very light. Only this pure light of awareness is the real God and guru. It is the one *vastu* which shines in us without appearing or disappearing. It is the base for everything that appears and disappears. ‘If you are free from thoughts and yet aware, you are That Perfect Being.’¹⁹

Tat-tvam-asi. ■

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18 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi #608

19 *ibid*

Talk 36

An aristocratic and distinguished lady visitor from the North accompanied by her Private Secretary arrived at noon, waited a few minutes and asked Maharshi soon after he returned to the hall after lunch:

D.: Maharajji, can we see the dead?

M.: Yes.

D.: Can the yogis show them to us?

M.: Yes. They may. But do not ask me to show them to you. For I cannot.

D.: Do you see them?

M.: Yes, in dreams.

D.: Can we realise the goal through yoga?

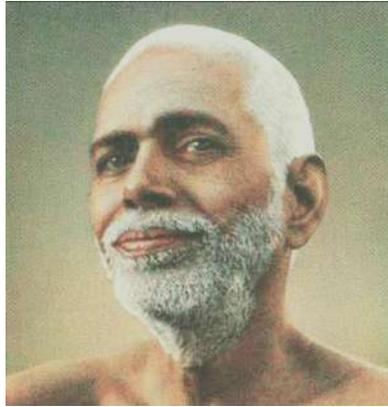
M.: Yes.

D.: Have you written on yoga? Are there books on the subject by you?

M.: Yes.

After she left the Master observed: “Did we know our relatives before their birth that we should know them after their death?”

Bhagavan's Grace



Thirteen years ago, I found myself in a life and death situation. Sudden and shocking as it was, the fact of the matter was that I was given only a few minutes of survival. As I lost consciousness in the maddening frenzy of doctors and nurses, the only word I remember coming out of my mouth was 'Bhagavan'. There was nothing else that I could ask for or express because of the situation, but the word 'Bhagavan' uttered silently was enough to culminate in peace and calm. Mr. R. Krishnamurthy, former MD of SBI, was my boss in those days. He had very kindly introduced me to Bhagavan sometime earlier. He witnessed the entire episode and saw how His Grace did the unthinkable. A medical miracle they said; but it was 100%

His Grace. Bhagavan does look after everything!

—Anuraag Sunder

I had an accident on 9th June, 2021. I had started off for Rishikesh with my driver early that morning but had to drop him off mid-way, just before the Uttarakhand border, because an RTPCR negative report was needed and he had not been tested. Telling him to take a bus back, I drove on by myself. I had driven alone earlier, so this was not the first time, but there was a certain feeling of tiredness since I hadn't had a good sleep the night before.

I crossed Rishikesh, and my destination was still about an hour away. As I was driving up with the Ganga on one side and the mountain on the

other, I started feeling drowsy. I do not know when I fell asleep. When I woke up (which must have been within a few seconds), I realised that I was about to crash into the mountainside, so I turned the steering wheel, oversteering it in haste. The car hurtled towards the other side, beyond which was a long drop to the Ganga. Realising this, I turned the steering wheel again but I was no longer in control of the vehicle and it turned turtle, hitting the mountainside.

The strange part was that I felt as if the car turning turtle was happening in slow motion. In the process, I started murmuring Bhagavan's name. Fortunately, the glass of the window on the driver's side was so crushed that I could crawl out of the window totally unhurt. The car was completely smashed but I didn't even have a scratch. I was as amazed as the passers-by to find myself unhurt, considering the condition of the car. When I sent pictures of the car to a few friends, one of them phoned to ask how I was still alive! All is the grace of our beloved Bhagavan.

—Jyoti Legha

Divine Grace is a manifestation of the cosmic free will in operation. It can alter the course of events in a mysterious manner through its own

unknown laws, which are superior to all natural laws, and can modify our so-called destiny.

Being a professor in a management institute, I used to drive down daily for work at about 8 A.M. One morning on the Tughlakabad road in New Delhi, I did not notice a big stone jutting out from the sidewalk and, somehow, one of the car wheels got lodged in the stone and the car spun. I can definitely say that, at that moment, I remembered my husband and son and said to myself: "Okay guys... I am gone!"

The car was literally spinning but as soon as I remembered Bhagavan, the car spun once more, coming to rest on its wheels on the other side of the road. I was very shaken, yet opened the door, came out and sat on the side of the road. My bag and its contents had flown out and lay scattered. People gathered all around. Even they could not believe that I had been driving a car which was now just a mess of metal, and had come out alive, unhurt.

Similarly, my husband was shocked but thankful to our Bhagavan when he saw I was absolutely fine. Till date my parents are unaware of this accident as I did not want them to worry nor stop me from driving. If I had been hurt in any way, I would not have been able to hide the accident from

them. This again was the sheer grace of Bhagavan.

—Anuradha Sharma

I have been bestowed with a second life after a major chest surgery. Till then I had not heard of Bhagavan. Married with two wonderful sons, I was facing the challenges of life on both personal and work fronts. Managing a small family business, I was under debt and tremendous stress, as is wont to happen when entangled in worldly life. In May 2015, a small viral infection led to pneumonia in the lungs. Since I was also diabetic, the infection went out of control and eventually I had to undergo an open chest surgery.

I had worshipped Lord Shiva for many years, chanting the MahaMrityunjay Mantra every morning. Hitherto, Shiva to me was only a deity we see in temples and nothing else. So, while I was on the operation table, just before my surgery, I chanted the MahaMrityunjay Mantra and asked Shiva to take care of my family if I didn't come out of the Operation Theatre alive. Even if I did, to take care of my life which I had messed up badly through my own deeds. In a way I had surrendered, despite being completely unaware of the real meaning of surrender at that time.

I was advised complete bed rest and isolation for a month after getting discharged from the hospital. During this month, I started giving more time to a social media platform, and through common friends, got in touch with devotees of Bhagavan. Through their posts and personal interactions, I began reading Bhagavan's teachings, and became friends with some residents of Tiruvannamalai. Slowly, my journey towards Bhagavan started.

Lord Shiva took my surrender rather seriously and came into my life as Bhagavan. One blessed morning, just before getting up, Bhagavan gave me darshan and blessed me with His initiation. Since then, my life transformed miraculously. Both personal and work life got sorted out on their own. I had been a regular drinker but have not touched a single drop of alcohol since my surgery. Non vegetarian food dropped off by itself in subsequent months, and now only Bhagavan breathes within me 24×7.

—Vineet Anand

I had read about Bhagavan from both books and the internet and wanted to visit His Ashram. I, along with a relative, went to Tiruvannamalai in September 2017, going straight to Arunachaleswar temple. After the Darshan, we went to Pathala Lingam

temple where Bhagavan, who had attained supreme awareness at the age of sixteen, spent days lost in deep absorption. It was morning, the temple was closed, and the grill was locked from outside. We both looked at Bhagavan from outside through the gap between the grill bars. Just then, we heard a voice from behind asking us to move aside. We saw a Pandit standing with a key in his hand. Only the two of us were there at that time. The Pandit told us that it was his usual breakfast time, and as he was setting

off for breakfast he heard a voice that came from somewhere saying, ‘two people are standing outside my temple, you should open the door’. That is why he had returned to open the door. On hearing these words from the Pandit, tears rolled down my eyes and I thought: Bhagavan has accepted me and taken me into His fold. From that day onwards, I visit Tiruvannamalai and Sri Ramanashram regularly, at least three to four times a year.

—K. Shankar

Talk 343

D.: Even as the hand is cut off, one must remain unaware of it because *Bhagavad Gita* declares that the Self is different from the body.

M.: Does *jnana* consist in being unaware of the pain of injury?

D.: Should he not remain unaware of pain?

M.: Major operations are performed under anaesthetics, keeping the patient unaware of the pain. Does the patient gain *jnana* too, at the same time? Insensibility to pain cannot be *jnana*.

D.: Should not a *Jnani* (a sage) be insensible to pain?

M.: Physical pain only follows body-consciousness; it cannot be in the absence of body-consciousness. Mind, being unaware of the body, cannot be aware of its pains or pleasures. Read the story of Indra and Ahalya in *Yoga Vasishtha*; there death itself is said to be an act of mind. Pains are dependent on the ego; they cannot be without the ‘I’, but ‘I’ can remain without them.



8th August

In a Q & A session, Michael James spoke on who qualifies for the path of AtmaVichara. He referred to Bhagavan's statement that sincerity in the enquiry is the qualifier. As long as ego rises, our idea of God is imperfect; and in worshipping Bhagavan, we must remember he is not only God but Guru as guide.

—Marie Elangovan

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFMQ92qw1eY>

22nd August

Beginning a series on the 'Song celestial', a selection of 42 verses made by Bhagavan from the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Raghav Kumar covered Verses 1-5 of the text. He suggested that this selection were teaching indicators and Bhagavan's answers on the Gita statements for deep reflection.

—Neera Kashyap

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

29th August

Shri Raghav Kumar covered up to verse-6 of 'Song Celestial' and said that Bhagavad Gita is a Moksha-shastra directly revealing the Truth about oneself. A disciple gets the key to the scriptures through the sieve of the Guru. Con-

sciousness is ever-existent and changeless but its reflecting medium Mind is what changes continuously.

—Rashmi Vyas

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEWjGRLMC94>

1st September

(Advent Day & Ramana Kendra Delhi Inauguration Anniversary): The dual celebrations had pujas, bhajans, and a discourse on Bhagavan's concept of seva by Michael James. When, through self-inquiry, we discover and permanently abide in our true nature; our actions no longer generate karma. To be instruments of the will of God is the highest form of seva.

—BM

Online link to this talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_6BbRj1KHE&t=1914s

12th September

James' experience with translating Bhagavan's words facilitates the way he dissolves doubts raised by sadhakas in a Q & A session. The precise meanings were explained by comparing Tamil and Sanskrit versions of Ulladu Narpadu. Faulty use of words like vasanas, manolaya, witness, leads to faulty understanding, which in turn become obstacles to achieving pure awareness.

—BM

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEzTS0Lrn0c>

19th September



Shri Raghav Kumar in V-6/7 explained that all beings in this world are affected by 5 elements and undergo six transformations (shad-vikaras) and how these are negated in the Self/Atma like projections on a screen do not affect the screen itself. True knowledge under Guru's instructions frees one from Avidya, root cause of suffering.

—Rashmi Vyas

Online link to this talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAjv8S6C_Tw

26th September

Taking up Verses 9 and 10 of Song Celestial, Shri Raghav Kumar spoke of the need to focus on the ‘Isness’ of the ever-existing Sat, not on asat (nama and rupa). Though the Atman is present in all beings, it is unstained by the experience of both doership and enjoyership.

—Neera Kashyap

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

10th October



Answering questions from devotees, Michael James said that when ego is destroyed, Sancita, Prārabdha, and Agāmi cease to exist; ‘Heart’ symbolizes the core basis of existence, not something existing within time and space; Bhagavan, in His grace, chooses His devotees; and sleep is a transient state of pure awareness.

—Advait Shrivastav

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyFeeSly9co&t=31s>

17th October

Expounding on the eleventh verse of Song Celestial, Shri Raghav Kumar said that we assume light to be something coming from outside but it is nothing but the light of one’s consciousness which neither the sun nor fire can illuminate. Having attained the supreme consciousness, one never returns to bondage.

—Advait Shrivastav

Online link to this talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zV_-KXNUw0

24th October

Shri Raghav Kumar said that Bhagavan’s sequence of his selected verses is important. A person who has realized the formless, timeless Self by following the scriptures is freed of petty conceits and attachments; has humility born of realistic understanding; and lives in the imperishable state here and now.

—BM

Online link to this talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOw2zriP6PA>

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 relished your editorial on the simplicity of Bhagavan’s thought. I am ashamed to admit that I have been Bhagavan’s pupil for decades and have to still refrain from engaging on futile quests. I congratulate you on the directness of your spiritual gaze. I greatly admired the compassion of Bharati’s article and the way she had welded diverse personalities, the loneliness of COVID and facts relating to Bhagavan’s life, some of which were new to me. Neera’s poem radiates serenity, wisdom, and love.

Wish you and *Direct Path* continued success.

Sharada Bhanu

Hello Advait,

The issue is quite beautiful. A wide range of topics have been discussed to a very good depth. I especially liked Shiromani’s informative article on ‘Vishistadvaita’.

Swagat Patnaik

(Former editor of Direct Path)

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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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