

DIRECT PATH

RAMANA KENDRA
DELHI

May - July 2021

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*"The highest form of Grace is Silence. The experience
of Silence alone is the real and perfect knowledge."*

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi



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

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VOLUME XXIII ISSUE 2

MAY - JULY, 2021

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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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Healing Power of Bhagavan’s Teachings

Advait Shrivastav



Words and deeds can hurt. They can also heal. Just as a single source of light can dispel darkness all around, the words uttered by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi—a spiritual giant—can heal every trauma ever suffered.

Be it a bird, animal or human, traumatic events are alien to none. There has been an unprecedented rise in mental health issues owing to widespread violence and disease, both physical and mental. Internet trolling, which has become a norm in modern “civilization”, only adds to the malaise. People who carry pain in their hearts try to deal with it in their own ways. Some may resort to seeking revenge, develop addictions, turn bitter or evil; some adopt methods which involve stifling themselves;

others pay heed to masters and sages who prompt us instead to search for the “who” that is feeling the pain.

Feeling rage and hatred toward those who hurt us is normal, but these emotions erode us from within. Instead of wondering why this has happened to us, or blaming or rejecting God, we can allow the words of Bhagavan to do their magic. He said: “It is not possible for anyone to do anything opposed to the ordinance of God, who has the ability to do everything. Therefore, to remain silent at the feet of God, having given up all the anxieties of the wicked, defective mind, is best.”¹

God’s will is supreme and nobody can act against it. Thus, all the injurious events that have happened to us were approved by God and the people who

¹ *Guru Vachaka Kovai, #1191 by Sri Murugunar, translation and commentary by Sri Sadhu Om and Michael James.*

acted against us were merely His instruments. So, why hold hatred and grudge against them? We must remember that God's will always function for our highest good, no matter how painful it feels to the ignorant mind. After all, we are the children of God. Each person is potentially Brahman and thus, one wonders: who are we hating? Brahman resides both in us and in the one who has harmed us. In taking revenge, we would harm nobody but ourselves.

Another lesson from Bhagavan's life offers a panacea for every trauma of the past and any anxiety for the future: "Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent."² These words give us assurance that each traumatic event that happened, each person who harmed us — all were destined. Deep within, these words help us accept our past and move on. In this hyper-active and ultra-competitive world where freedom from anxiety is an aberration rather than a norm, accepting whatever happens as God's will can help us see the wonder of the present moment.

One might opine that all this is easier said than done since some scars seem

too deep to be healed. But, practising Bhagavan's way can gradually fill those scars with the nectar of wisdom, till these same scars become our adornments. People who seem to harm us are nothing but our own flaws and sins appearing before us. Somewhere, at some time, we must have sown the seeds of which these are the fruits. Through Bhagavan's teachings, we learn the power of surrender. When we achieve it, even for a few seconds, we experience the freedom of sitting on a swing swung by the divine Himself.

One of the most common mistakes people make is to assume that spiritual seekers ought to be pure and pious. Often, only when one is in a total mess does one wonder about the higher planes of existence. Generally, people in this situation are judged instantly, rejected, and deemed sinners; but Bhagavan accepts everyone, no matter who they are and at what stage of their spiritual journey.

Bhagavan says, "Even if one be a great sinner, one should not worry and weep 'O! I am a sinner, how can I be saved?' — one should completely renounce the thought 'I am a sinner'; and concentrate keenly on meditation on the Self; then, one would surely succeed."³ Instead of condemning the sinner, Bhagavan assures us that the path

² *Written by Bhagavan to Alagammal, his mother, when she tried to take the young renunciate back to her home.*

³ *Nan Yar, para 14 translated from the Tamil by Sri T M P Mahadevan.*

to enlightenment is available to each person who is willing to tread it with sincerity. These words heal the dark past and give hope; unending hope.

Depression, anxiety or any other mental illness are all in the causal body. Psychiatrists can cure only the symptoms that appear in the body-mind complex, whereas Bhagavan's teachings heal at

the causal level and have the power to make a flower bloom in a desert. His magnetic and compassionate eyes that once attracted Paul Brunton haven't gone anywhere. They are eternal and infinite. If we surrender and seek refuge in them, deep healing will occur at all levels, and our being will blossom. ■

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The Kendra continues to hold enlightening virtual *satsangs* in these tumultuous times. Swami Prakarshananda gave a scintillating discourse on Bhagavan's Aradhana Day; esteemed speakers like Gautam Sachdeva and Michael James graced the virtual platform; an innovative event saw devotional bhajans and dance offerings to Bhagavan by Aditya Pathak, Arunima Pathak, Elangovan Govindarajan, and Marie Elangovan – all of which can be accessed through the Kendra's YouTube channel.

After damaging many homes, the deadly second wave of COVID-19 has started receding significantly. With the vaccination drive in full flow, we can only hope to witness the end of COVID-19 soon. May Bhagavan's grace give us inner strength. Important events (from Bhagavan's time) falling in this current issue (May–July 2021) are as follows:

- Bhagavan's 71st Aradhana Day: 9th May
- Cow Lakshmi Day: 22nd June

Additional Note:

We have decided to discontinue the article “The Long Road to Bhagavan: Tracing the Pilgrim Life of Ella Maillart” by Michael Highburger. This article was serialized in nine parts in *Sarangathi* (Ramanashram's e-newsletter) over a period of ten months (January-May and July-October of 2018). Interested readers may access those issues from:

https://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/resource_centre/publications/saranagati-enewsletter/

The Transformation of a Curse

Geetha Ravichandran



*“Because I could not stop for death
/ He kindly stopped for me / The
carriage held but just ourselves / and
immortality. We slowly drove / he knew
no haste / For I had put away / my
labour and my leisure too / For his
civility”. –Emily Dickinson*

Parikshit was the king of Hastinapura who succeeded Yudhishtira to the throne. Son of Abhimanyu and Uttara, Parikshit, while yet in the womb, was attacked by the Brahmastra of Ashwathama. Apparently Ashwathama’s thirst for revenge was not quenched even after killing the sons of Draupadi, the Upapandavas. When his mother Uttara felt the searing weapon threaten her unborn child, she surrendered unconditionally

to Krishna. The unborn Parikshit was blessed with a vision of Krishna who gave him protection. Parikshit was wonderstruck. The benign presence of Krishna remained as a distinct memory throughout his life. It is said that Parikshit searched for this wondrous form in every encounter in his life.

Parikshit was thus blessed by the grace of the Lord even at birth. He was a righteous and noble king, the best among archers. His subjects lived in prosperity. Once, while wandering through his kingdom, Parikshit saw a bull and a cow being tortured by a man. Enraged at the sight, the king was about to kill the man. The man was Kali, the embodiment of the present yuga, times that signify strife, chaos

and unrighteousness. Kali fell at the feet of Parikshit, pleaded for his life and some space to live in Parikshit's kingdom. Being a king who could not refuse when he had power to give, Parikshit allotted Kali space in the gambling and liquor dens, brothels and slaughter houses and in gold. Kali could reign unchallenged in all these: symbols of greed, lust and violence.

However, a thoughtless action reduced all of Parikshit's merits and achievements to ashes. One day, thirsty and tired while out hunting, Parikshit wandered into the cottage of the sage Sameeka. When he asked for water, he got no response. In a fit of rage, he garlanded the sage who was deep in samadhi, with a dead snake. The son of the rishi, Sringi was outraged at this insult to his father and pronounced a curse on Parikshit that he would die a week hence, bitten by Takshaka, the king of snakes. The fact that Parikshit was a good and righteous king, of impeccable pedigree, born to a devout mother was of no avail. Nothing mitigated the disproportionate effect of a moment's impulse.

When Sameeka came out of his meditation and realised what his son had done, he chided him, as the kingdom would suffer the loss of a compassionate ruler. The only thing

that he could do was to warn the king of what was in store for him. When Parikshit learnt of the curse, he calmly accepted his fate. He handed over the kingdom to his son Janmejaya and, even without waiting for his son's coronation, went to the banks of the Ganges and met the assembled sages. He asked them the best way to obtain deliverance and attain the greatest peace in the limited time available. The sages remained silent, as they had spent a life time in penance in search of the same elusive peace, and certainly did not think that there was a shortcut by which it could be made available within the next seven days. It was then that Sukadeva, the son of Vyasa, who was enlightened from birth, happened to pass by. Parikshit did not waste any time in praising him. He asked him directly as to what a person at the door of death has to do to know the truth, the purpose and meaning of life and to attain eternal peace. Suka was thrilled to hear the questions of an earnest seeker and told him that a man who is in the throes of death should listen to the truth with a mind free from desire, realising that this body is only a temporary abode. Parikshit listened avidly to all the stories Suka recited, and at the end of the seventh day attained everlasting peace. The story of Parikshit and the dialogues

with Sukacharya are narrated in detail in the Srimad Bhagavatham.

Parikshit was of noble birth. His actions were just and compassionate. Therefore, his act of uncharacteristic rashness resulting in a fatal curse, is an enigma. It is sometimes said that Parikshit paid the price for accommodating Kali, the source of all unrighteousness. Granting concessions to Kali, he ended up as Kali's first victim. What Parikshit's situation underlines is that there is no immunity from suffering for even the most virtuous and righteous of men.

It is Parikshit's attitude towards impending death that is the most interesting part of the story. To every living person, death seems a remote possibility, although the reality of death is ever imminent. Death, that is essentially unknowable, evokes terror and dread. The most miserable human condition is sometimes preferred to death. When confronted with approaching death, the normal human attitude is to seek an extension to the lease of life. Unfinished tasks, desire for enjoyments, fear, responsibilities – all trigger this response of asking for more time. The common reaction is to try and fulfil outstanding desires; to experience happiness even in that atmosphere of doom; to accomplish something meaningful that could leave

behind something to be remembered by.

Parikshit spent the time he had left listening to stories that straddled the origin of the universe, the eternal tussle between gods and demons, songs of lovelorn gopis for the eternal Krishna and the heroic meditations of seekers after truth who spent lifetimes trying to grasp the meaning of reality. Listening to the tales of authentic struggles and genuine gains was the only way that Parikshit could ward off the effect of the curse. The curse was not just that the venom of a snake would end it all in a span of seven days. It was that Parikshit would writhe in agony, knowing that there was no escape.

The remedy for the thunderbolt of words that uttered the curse was Suka's words of truth that spoke of the ultimate and changeless reality – Brahman. This was indeed a shower of nectar, the greatest of blessings. There is no overt consolation in the words of these stories. But the narrator of the stories, the enlightened Sukacharya, whose heartbeat resonated in the heart of all beings (“Sarvabhutatmahridayam munimanathosmi”) brought about the ineffable transformation in the mind of Parikshit. Generations since then find the same calm and courage in the stories of the Srimad Bhagavatham

that Parikshit heard in the last seven days of his existence. The truth that the text embodies originates from the identification with the essence of all beings, which comes with freeing the body-mind complex from the rigidities of limitations imposed by time and space. The dimension of death remains a mystery. However, it need not intrude into the allotted time of life and wield the power to rob the mind of peace and happiness. This can happen if the truth of the human condition is realised that existence is not bound by the body or the mind.

In the words of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, “Birth and death are only ideas. They pertain to the body or the mind. The Self exists before the birth of this body and will remain after the death of this body..... Realisation means True Knowledge of the Perfection and Immortality of

the Self.” (Talk 487)

The last three months have been traumatic for many of us. The second wave of the Corona virus has shocked us out of a natural complacency and made us confront the disturbing reality of disease, helplessness and death. It has yanked us out of the orbit of a planned and steady life we had created for ourselves. We can spend our energies raging against the inefficiencies of the system or pick up the threads of putting together some solutions in this crisis, even while protecting ourselves. But the pandemic is also an opportunity for us to look within and infuse our minds with calm and strength, to find the equanimity that King Parikshit did, while looking death in the eye. Death may after all be a ride to immortality. ■

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A visitor: Should I give up my business and take to reading books on Vedanta?

Bhagavan: If the objects have an independent existence, i.e., if they exist anywhere apart from you, then it may be possible for you to go away from them. But they don't exist apart from you; they owe their existence to you, your thought. So, where can you go, to escape them? As for reading books on Vedanta, you may go on reading any number of them. They can only tell you, 'Realise the Self within you'. The Self cannot be found in books. You have to find it out for yourself, in yourself.

The Blue Planet

Christopher Quilkey



In December 1968, NASA in its continued pursuit of a successful space mission that would land man on the moon, sent out the Apollo 8 for the first physical exploratory mission. It was also the first time that human beings went out beyond what is called the Low Earth Orbit, that is, the circumference of less than a 1,000 kms around the earth. The mission was a success and the crew of three, after orbiting the moon ten times, returned to earth. One of the three crew members, William Anders, took a photograph from their capsule on the fourth orbit of the moon which later became famous and is known as the 'Earthrise' photograph. It

should not be confused with a later photograph of the entire planet titled 'The Blue Marble' shot in 1972 and taken from the last manned American mission to the moon, the Apollo 17 spacecraft. Though it is the most widely distributed photograph in history, it did not have the same impact as the very first shot from space that was so unexpected and created such wonder in people when they first saw it.

According to William Anders:

We came all this way to explore the Moon, and the most important thing is that we discovered the Earth.⁴

Many of the astronauts were radically changed by their experience

⁴ Anders, Bill, *50 Years after 'Earthrise', a Christmas Eve Message from Its photographer*. Space.com. Retrieved December 24, 2018.

of seeing the earth floating in space. So much so that there is a term for it, 'the overview effect'.

One cannot think of a greater disparity with the above scenario to the mayhem created in these times by the COVID 19 pandemic, particularly at such epicenters as Delhi and earlier in the US, decimating the population. Front line workers such as doctors, nurses, bank staff and others in essential services who interact with the public, face to face, are dying. At present there seems no glimmer of hope that the surge of deaths will abate. Inevitably it will, as time goes by, but that offers little consolation to those who are in the midst of it with no choice but to get vaccinated, keep social distance, wear a mask and be very disciplined in what they do outside the house, and, even inside, especially when a family member is infected.

We have two strong reactions to these two powerful happenings: wonder and fear. Wonder at the beauty of the earth, all alone in a dark endless space. Many who have witnessed this astounding sight come away with a renewed reverence for life. There also arises an urge to protect the earth, having seen how exposed it is to the immense forces at work in the universe, and how fragile it is in that

context.

Compare this with the fear we feel for our own wellbeing and safety and that of our family and friends. We navigate the treacherous atmosphere that surrounds us at present like a hidden crocodile lurking invisibly under water, which could grab us at any time. It seems to be a nightmare. It is, and India and the world will not be the same after it is all finished.

Though Kipling is a maligned figure these days he did write some profound perceptions in that remarkable poem 'If' which could help us keep our heads above water:

If you can keep your head when all
about you

Are losing theirs and blaming it on
you,

If you can trust yourself when all
men doubt you,

But make allowance for their
doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by
waiting,

Or being lied about, don't deal in
lies,

Or being hated, don't give way to
hating,

And yet don't look too good, nor
talk too wise.

Just as the earth responds to our negative behavior with consequences

many of us cannot comprehend because the time scale is so long, so also in our daily lives our behavior eventually has a cumulative effect, both on ourselves and others. We may think we are safe, but we are not. All it takes is a split second for a traffic fatality. On the larger scale, all it takes is yet more coal burners and plastic factories to pollute our atmosphere till one day, the result could be irreversible.

The current pandemic is a reminder that, like the delicate globe in space, we too are brittle and vulnerable and can crumble at the slightest shock.

We no doubt have heard all this before in various guises but what we are facing now is a fact that cannot be wished away. It is a step towards a reality that is radically changing us. Through all the suffering, many enduring hard earned truths are emerging. The fearless demonstrations of courage, the recognition of how important others are to one's happiness, how much one cares and how grateful one is to others. We are also being made aware of the often timely and extraordinary kindness shown by people we would never have expected it from, and the abject fear shown by others has also taken us by surprise.

Bhagavan was once asked what is fear. He replied:

“What is fear? It is only a thought. If there is anything besides the Self there is reason to fear. Who sees the second (anything external)? First the ego arises and sees objects as external. If the ego does not rise, the Self alone exists and there is no second (nothing external).”⁵

Admittedly this is hard for anyone to practice particularly if someone is right in the midst of the pandemic with all the chaos, uncertainty and turbulent emotions exploding all-round. Then I think of Bhagavan's philosophy of detachment. Can it be done? One can but try. If our understanding is theoretical and wafer thin it will become apparent as we navigate the madness around us. If we sincerely desire to practice the teaching and have faith, there is a chance to remain unscathed.

Bhagavan's practical teachings are a support. We cannot change the behaviour of others, we cannot make the COVID 19 go away but we can manage our own small space. The detachment we learn from the teachings gives us the strength to calmly see and endure the turbulence surrounding us. Just like the astronauts who spontaneously became detached in outer space as they looked back

5 *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk\$146.*

at Mother Earth, we too, through the unintended consequences of the pandemic, learn to keep our equanimity, whatever the outward chaotic circumstances may be.

The astronomer Carl Sagan said it all:

“The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for

the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we’ve ever known.”⁶

6 Sagan, Carl, *Pale Blue Dot*, 1997, p.6.

In the afternoon G.V.S. asked, “What is the difference between manasa japa and dhyana?”

Bhagavan: They are the same. In both, the mind is concentrated on one thing, the mantra or the Self. Mantra, japa, dhyana — are only different names. So long as they require effort we call them by these names, but when the Self is realized this goes on without any effort and what was the means becomes the goal.

Bhargava: What is awareness and how can one obtain and cultivate it?

Bhagavan: You are awareness. Awareness is another name for you. Since you are awareness there is no need to attain or cultivate it. This was obviously a bit too much for Bhargava and he was wondering how it was an answer to his question, but Bhagavan came to his help by adding: All that you have to do is to give up being aware of other things, that is of the not-Self. If one gives up being aware of them then pure awareness alone remains, and that is the Self.”

What Beckons?

Neera Kashyap



Two and a half miles below the surface of the ocean,
far beyond depths that light can pierce
where the water's weight can crush a human
What beckons?

What beckoned us to lower Argo, a twelve foot robot, angular
with cameras and sonar to probe the blackness of the ocean floor
to open doors to the Titanic, seventy years after it had sunk?

A famous staircase flows towards a crystal ballroom -
eerie shots of a lightless silence, uncorrupted by time.

On the surface, Mind is a sea of plastic, sun-pierced into bits
a soup, cloudy with floating debris.

Sub-surface, more debris –
more plastic, cans, rope, net, styrofoam,
paper, cloth, glass, ceramic, rubber, a shoe
among the ocean's moving weed and driftwood.

The sun reaches here but carelessly, fragments feel freer.
Currents crash, a gyre forms trapping fragments in its whorl
the centre is calm, observes the fragments break, released.

But what beckons the diver to go deeper?

Where waters are dark, cold and stable;
oxygen low and all decay held at bay.

Where things are the way they are.

No individual, no observer.

Where Silence is King.

What beckons?

--First published in Verse Virtual, an American community journal of international poets, May 2021. ■

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The Lever and the Fulcrum

The Neuroanatomy of the Strategic Mind (Part-I)

Michael Highburger



COVID lockdowns have been times of interruption and separation where our normal lives come to a near standstill. Jarring as they are, lockdowns have benefits as well, not least of all, giving us time to reflect on our lives.

One of the things I have found myself doing during lockdowns is taking stock of my relationship with Bhagavan. Recently, I began to wonder if I am too relaxed in my understanding of Bhagavan, especially with respect to the impulse to pare down Bhagavan's teaching into short simple phrases, both in my conversations with others and in my own reflections. I always feel a little tinge of remorse when I do that, as though I were betraying Bhagavan.

In the pandemic era when

there is so much uncertainty, it is understandable that we might want to make Bhagavan's teaching more accessible. It might look as though we are trying to simplify Bhagavan's teachings and make it into a sort of system, i.e. render it in a format that is digestible. But in doing that, we may inadvertently be putting Bhagavan in a box.

Historically, we see how religious traditions centred on an enlightened being can fall prey to some form of routinizing, i.e. streamlining the original insights in order to make them more manageable. In the digital era, such a trend may be a natural reflex to the busyness of our lives, not to mention the low-grade anxiety permeating the collective since the pandemic began. We could be forgiven

for wanting to reduce complexity given the increasing demands on our lives in a world where we just don't seem to have time for the transformation Bhagavan is calling us to. To make time, we would have to give up a lot, and herein lies our dilemma.

Devotees may recall the scene just prior to Bhagavan's *Golden Jubilee* celebrations in 1946 when the Master first glimpsed the new pandal that was intended to honour him on this special occasion. Bhagavan said: 'Just fancy, they insist on erecting this for me when all I need is the shade of a tree to sit under.'⁷

When devotees were pressing him about his wishes for the upcoming celebrations, Bhagavan got annoyed and said something to the effect, 'If you really want to know what I want, it is that all of you sit quietly and practice looking within to know the Self. That is how I would like you to celebrate. But you are not going to do that, are you, so why ask me?'

The impulse to package Bhagavan in neat nifty phrases is like worshipping Bhagavan from a safe distance. It insulates us from the vulnerability we feel when face-to-face with what Bhagavan is proposing. Again, this is understandable because he was

talking about bringing down the whole edifice while we are unwittingly trying to keep it standing. Sure, we would like to transcend the small self, but at the same time, the prospect of major change is daunting.

Our dilemma seventy years after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana is reminiscent of the 2nd century BC Greek mathematician, Archimedes, who once said: *Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the Earth.*

The problem in this declaration, of course, is the place to stand. Archimedes would need a second Earth from which to perform his operation. It need not be added that the Earth does not really need moving anyway since, astronomers tell us, it is already moving at quite a good clip in its orbit around the Sun—about 30 km per second. But that is not the real point. Archimedes' pronouncement raises a deeper problem, one that is analogous to the impulse to systematize Bhagavan. Archimedes' phrase is a sleight of hand, like picking yourself up by your bootstraps. Systematization involves a similar excess: the impulse to make Bhagavan's teaching into something graspable is bound up with the urge

⁷ *The Mountain Path*, January 1980, p. 17.

to domesticate, contain or possess Bhagavan (and the Self). But this is the very narcissistic compulsion that Bhagavan's teaching is designed to liberate us from.

System-thinking gives us a little boost and we imagine that an improved, spiritualized small self is preferable. If earlier we had a small self that said 'I'; now we have a small self that says 'I know'. It is understandable that we might mistake this knowing for true knowing but the knowing that Bhagavan is trying to lead us to is a knowing wherein the 'I' is removed altogether. Vast is the distance between *being* the one that knows and *being free from* the one that knows, yet still, we would like to have it both ways, namely, to be free without having to give up a lot. This urge is like that of Archimedes who wanted to move the Earth while standing on the Earth.

The *jnani* knows that making Bhagavan's teaching into a system cannot help him precisely because what most needs being left behind is what is all the while being clung to. It is like seeking to free oneself from suffering while clinging to its causes. Bhagavan knows that the mind cannot take us there. But if we cling

to systems, it is because we like their handles.

Grasping vs. Intuiting

Modern neuropsychology offers help in shedding light on the confusion between these two modes of knowing, between the impulse to system-thinking and the spiritual aspiration to *jnana*.

Neuroscience points out that the denotative mind, often thought of as the left-hemisphere, relishes detail and imagines that its ability to name things constitutes higher knowledge. If we find ourselves trying to reduce Bhagavan's teaching to something conceptual, it is because we feel we can get our hands on concepts. They are graspable and wieldable. Neuroanatomists have suggested that conceptual knowing and the grasping function of the hands are neurologically related, that the ability to manipulate objects with the hands (what neuroscientists call *manipulospacial functions*) helped bring about human language. Indeed, similar neural mechanisms are required for referential language and manipulating objects⁸ and the neural functions needed for grasping in the sense of a physical object as well as grasping in the sense of a mental

8 *The Master and his Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist, p. 348.

concept take place in the same area of the (left) brain.

But what do these findings from neuroscience have to do with understanding Bhagavan's teaching?

The fact is, Bhagavan is trying to lead us away from the grasping-knowledge of the left hemisphere. If system-thinking is sequential, centred in the strategic mind of the left hemisphere, Bhagavan's *jnana* is spiritual knowledge, i.e. global awareness centred in the right. Of course, both the left and right hemispheres are needed and the distinction between the two is only *modal*, rather than *spatial*.⁹ But we often confuse them and think that knowing means *grasping* in the mode of concepts, whereas Bhagavan's knowing means *intuiting* beyond words and labels. If devotees resist meditation or inquiry, the reason may be that practicing them demands we give up the strong allure of the grasping mind.

How to better understand the difference between these two forms of knowing? One neuroscientist proposed the image of a mother-bird that goes to a tree and pecks at the bark to retrieve

a worm. The denotative awareness of the bird's left hemisphere (*focused attention*) is activated in studying how to get at the worm. Simultaneously, the right hemisphere's panoramic awareness (*open attention*) surveys its surroundings, listening passively for potential threats or the cries of her chicks. Both hemispheres are active but while the right hemisphere's global awareness is aware of its surroundings including the pecking at the bark, the strategic mind's retrieval work is only aware of the work itself and has no real knowledge of the right hemisphere's objectless awareness.¹⁰ It is this orientation to detail that makes strategic awareness salient. The left hemisphere's strategic functions are visual, lucid and clear while the right hemisphere's panoramic awareness is indistinct, intangible and subtle. Here we encounter the divide between detail orientation and faith. Faith, while expansive, is dark and unclear, but the strategic mind is only interested in what is graspable, clear and distinct.

Over the centuries, spiritual traditions have sought to cultivate right hemispheric intuitive awareness,

⁹ Experts tell us that the two hemispheres in a healthy brain are lateralized (i.e. in communication) and that the neural correlates of brain and body functions are distributed throughout the brain, thus strict topographical mapping in terms of two hemispheres is oversimplified. From an explanatory point of view, perhaps the language of left and right hemispheres is still useful in distinguishing these two contrasting modes.

¹⁰ *The Master and his Emissary*, p. 74; also, from a talk by Iain McGilchrist at Oxford University, 10 February 2011.

one of the aims of religious life. If, as has been said, *science teaches us how to take things apart so that we can understand how they work* (denotative consciousness), *religion teaches us how to put things together to understand what they mean*¹¹ (connotative consciousness). Both modes are essential but the digital revolution has magnified the quantitative axis of these two poles, and the trend in the 21st century is toward abandoning anything that looks like faith in favour of the certitude that comes with tangible data and information. Having lost sight of the sacred in preference for strategic functions is related to prioritizing the *how* of life over the *why* of life. Denotative consciousness is linear, sequential, analytic, explicit and known, but also isolated and decontextualized. By contrast, connotative consciousness, though never fully graspable, is interconnected¹², intuitive and broad-based; it has a sense of context for living beings situated in a complex world and endeavours to make meaning of that world. But, again, both modes are required. One neuroscientist describes the two modes like this:

Knowledge mediated by the left

*hemisphere is knowledge within a closed system. It can never really 'break out' to know anything new, because its knowledge is only of its own representations. Where the thing itself is 'present' to the right hemisphere, it is only 'represented' by the left. Where the right hemisphere is conscious of the Other, the left hemisphere is only conscious of itself.*¹³

These insights from neuroscience can help us map the distinction between Self and ego, i.e. global all-encompassing awareness vs. representational mind that names and identifies objects. Here we see why Bhagavan urges us to inquire into the ego-self. The strategic mind by its nature *cannot*, neuroanatomically, know about its surroundings and *cannot know that it doesn't know*; it naturally assumes that the task before it is all there is. In other words, it misses the forest for the trees. True Self-knowing, on the other hand, arises in connotative awareness. Sustained investigation exposes the illusion of the systematizer which imagines itself as the master but, in truth, the systematizer is only master of that which is outside of itself, i.e. objects, forms, ideas, labels,

¹¹ Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in a talk at Oxford University, 12 Feb 2012.

¹² *The Master and his Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist, p. 547.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 548.

and concepts. Inquiry unmasks the phantom and brings the light of all-encompassing awareness to bear on the true identity of the master.

The reader may recall occasions in the darshan hall when a devotee would ask Bhagavan about a philosophical problem. Bhagavan would reply: 'Find out who you are first, then ask that question.' In other words, rather than attempting to solve the problem with the strategic mind, cultivate all-encompassing awareness.

Bhagavan knew that Self-knowledge cannot come about through thinking and conceptualization. The Self does not lend itself to systematization because it is not an object. Indeed, however we visualize the Self, It cannot be *that*. The mind that seeks to view the Self is itself contained *within* the Self. If we invoke the term 'witness' to envisage the Self, we fall headlong into the same Archimedean hole. When asked about the witness, Bhagavan gave this interesting reply:

'Witness' is applicable when there is an object to be seen. [But this] is duality. The Truth lies beyond both.

And then further on:

Subject, object and perception [...] appear and disappear, whereas the

*Truth is eternal.*¹⁴

Like Archimedes' lever, systems tend to lose sight of the fulcrum. The fulcrum of any system is the knower of it, the ground on which all knowing rests. It's not that Bhagavan's 'system' is unknowable, but rather, that Bhagavan's is not a system at all, and in fact, is beyond all systems. In short, words trap us in the division which only pure awareness can overcome. This is the territory Bhagavan is trying to guide us to.

Conclusion

Readers may recall Muruganar in the years after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, when on various occasions, a devotee would approach him and ask him to say something about Bhagavan. Muruganar would take the request to heart and slowly prepare himself to say something about Bhagavan. He would start out very carefully with, 'Bhagavan...' and then he would trail off. He would pause and redouble his efforts, and begin a second time, 'Bhagavan..., Bhagavan...' and then he would fall silent again. In the struggle to form a single coherent sentence about his Master, tears would begin to well up in his eyes. Finally, he would just give up. After all, what words could ever capture the vastness

¹⁴ Talks §466, §376 and §146.

and mystery of Bhagavan, of the Self?

When we call this scene to mind, we lament the loss of a simpler time. We lament not just the COVID pandemic and its attendant concerns, but advancing digital infusion into our lives. While the digital realm offers myriad benefits, not least of all, democratization of knowledge through greater access, it may simultaneously be thwarting our capacity to cultivate the intuitive wisdom needed for the path that Bhagavan laid out for us. We intuit the predominance of strategic thinking within ourselves even if we cannot see it directly. And if studies show that intensive device use causes overstimulation of the strategic mind and diminishment of right hemispheric

functions, and if altruism studies in recent years are devastatingly dark simply because altruism, empathy and compassion belong to the atrophied right hemisphere, then we may feel overwhelmed. But the outlook is not so bleak. Even with the passing of generations, we too have access to Bhagavan, to the Self, is it not so?

The light at the end of the tunnel is Bhagavan himself, and his teaching, which provides a map, one that, if followed, can lead us out of any predicament. What this map might look like will be the subject of the next segment. ■

(to be continued)

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Talk 604

A certain lady was singing a devotional song. It said among other things:

“Thou art my father,

Thou art my mother,

Thou art my relations,

My possessions and all,” and so on.

Sri Bhagavan remarked with a smile, “Yes, Yes, Thou art this, that and everything except ‘I’. Why not say ‘I am Thou’ and finish it?”

#BothNotHalf

Bharati Mirchandani



When the sky is very dark, a million shining stars appear to hang just above our heads. The bright stars make the dark sky appear darker, as though made of velvet, a fabric that deepens the blackness with its tuft of shafts burrowing inward.

In terms of physics, an object is said to be dark when it absorbs light, causing it to appear dim compared to other objects.¹⁵ But the dark sky between stars is transparent, made of air (near the earth), and only ether in the vast distances of inter galactic space. This ether is also transparent or we wouldn't be able to see the stars. Sky and space do not absorb starlight the way black velvet would.

Any star, like our sun, radiates

light in all directions. We see only that light that comes towards us. We don't see the light racing away in other directions. A spaceship sends us photographs only of the light headed toward it. It is a very exciting thought! The dark sky is actually crisscrossed by rays of light from countless planets, stars and galaxies. The dark sky completely hides this crisscross of light.

When opposites are so perfectly contained within the one, we have to bow in awe to the amazing form of Shiva, Ardhanarishwara. Here male and female, usually considered polar opposites, are elegantly portrayed as one. This is no effeminate man, nor barren hermaphrodite, but a perfectly balanced merging of a fully

¹⁴ From the Wikipedia definition

mature masculine figure with a fully developed female. This is not even a lust-filled sexual union, nor a denial of the two genders, but a merging that transcends sex and sublimates gender in graceful equipoise and harmony. The *jivatma* and the *sthul-sharira*, the creative principle and the protective sustenance respectively, the emotions and the intellect, each counterpoint and binary, united in divine harmony. Not two, but one.

Ardhanarishvara indicates that the male and female principles are inseparable, *advait*, not two. Parvati, as Shakti incarnate, yearns for Shiva, who too longs for her. His left arm reaches out to embrace her, while his right hand enacts his dharma of being *prajapati*, protector of all living creatures. As she climbs onto his lap, the combined intensity of her longing and his yearning cause them to meld. Shiva's whole left side becomes Parvati, and Shiva is now half, *ardha*.

The male half of Ardhanarishvara represents Purusha and the female half Shakti or Prakriti. Purusha is the male principle, shown usually as the right side of the figure. It is the intellectually dominant force of the universe, activated only by the energy of Prakriti, this feminine energy usually shown on the left which holds the heart, the seat of emotions.

The male and female principles are constantly drawn toward each other, leading to creation and renewal of the universe.

All living creatures, plants, insects, animals and people, have within each both male and female aspects, but usually one or the other dominates. Perfect balance is divinity. Cleanliness, they say, is next to godliness; but perhaps the flawless and precise symmetry of opposites is the true mark of divinity. It brings a stillness that is not static or even remotely tamasic but dynamic, to use Sri Ramana's description, like a top spinning at such a high frequency that it appears not to move at all.

This precise balanced being is as incapable of procreating as an infertile person would be, perhaps even more so, as illustrated by the story of Sri Ramana blessing a farmer's seeds, giving them instant moksha, ensuring no further rebirth for them! Not a single seed sprouted. Being totality, with no trace of incompleteness, there's no need for more, no void seeking fulfilment. This totality is the promise and underpinning motivation for all our sadhana. Our intuitive understanding of these concepts makes this *rupa* of Shiva so attractive.

If Ardhanarishwar symbolises the holding of light within darkness, it

follows that the male and female principles cannot be opposites, but aspects of oneness. How then do we relate to god as Ardhanarishwara without also facing ourselves, our own sexuality, our own opposites?

All our lives we are taught to believe we are either male or female. Girls don't do this, boys don't do that; women are like this, men are like that; thus all manner of conditionings are imbibed. We are taught to override our sexual orientation with guilt and shame. Societies everywhere evolved different 'norms' so that sex, which has a firm place in the natural order of life, often becomes so riddled with complexities that it is forced to express itself in twisted forms. The energies, instead of flowing in natural currents, collide or coagulate within innumerable knots.

On the spiritual path, an aspirant sooner or later has to confront her/his own sexuality. What is this thing called kaama, lust? The basic obstacles on the path, we are told are kaama, krodha, madha, lobha, moha, maatsarya or lust, anger, pride, greed, attachment and envy. Each of these obstacles is sublimated through the lessons life teaches, a process speeded up by sadhana, and transformed into instruments available for use.

Kaama is the sexual energy that

many consider the life force ensuring continuity of life. Sexual energy is the same psychic energy that drives all aspects of an individual. Like electricity, it does what it is directed to do, light a bulb, run a washing machine or a computer etc. Energy used in one act means that much less is available for other acts. This is why celibacy is often advocated for spiritual progress; as the novice soon learns, inner work is hard work, and needs focused energy!

Although sexual activity may use some psychic energy, it does not preclude spiritual progress. However, attaching guilt and shame to chance transgressions can. Knowing this in theory, reading this in an essay, it is easy to nod in agreement. However, when faced with a sudden assault on what one holds most sacred, all hypothetical equanimity vanishes. I wish to share one such shock I experienced.

Always interested in knowing and understanding the peoples of India, I backpacked intermittently for 14 years, experiencing firsthand the powerful network of human love. When travelling days ceased, books provided scope for mental journeying. Dalit writings in English became a new channel of exploration. Their style of expression was raw and rather brazen

about bodily functions: sweating, aging, menstruating, copulating, defecating. It felt rather refreshing and honest, revealing how attitudes are dictated by the ambient society.

Yet I froze in disbelief when lovers in a Dalit story used deepam at Arunachala as a metaphor for physical sex. I stared at the words; yes, they were there! I could read no further. Years later, other Tamil Dalit stories I read used the same or similar metaphors. This association with lust seems to be as common in some societies as it is an association with divinity in mine. I admonish myself: Arunachala belongs to each equally. Sacred and profane are part of one continuum. Holiness and obscenity are equally expressions of divinity. True understanding for me felt a long way off.

I believe that as long as each of us does not locate and enshrine our inner Ardhanarishwar, we will remain prone to being swept away by any storm we face. Wounds inflicted by

people, the pandemic, nature's fury, the vicissitudes of life, all will make us feel empty inside, causing us to reach out blindly, seeking succour anywhere. The world senses our vulnerability, our emptiness, and rushes to fill the void. What comes may be benign or malignant. Only by becoming Ardhanarishwara can we pre-empt this vulnerability.

No exquisite rose, delicate lotus flower or even cactus bloom is without roots buried in mud and manure. The beautiful flower is as much a part of the plant as the parts groping in mud. They sustain and give purpose to each other. The composite whole includes, rather acknowledges and celebrates each part. This world too, the male and female, the dark and the luminous, the saintly and the evil, me and you, are all one magical, wondrously woven, interdependent WHOLE. There is not, never was, nor ever will be, any opposite sex. ■

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Talk 568

Mr. V. G. Sastri showed a cutting to Sri Bhagavan. It contained some prophecy of Sri Rama Tirtha that India would reach the full height of her former glory before 1950 AD

Sri Bhagavan said: Why should we think that India is not already in the height of her glory? The glory is in your thought.

Free Will and Destiny: A Satsang with Michael James

Marie Elangovan



Michael James in Tiruvannamalai

Ramana Kendra presented an online Q&A satsang with Michael James on 16th May, 2021. The centrepiece of the session was his answer to the query: ‘According to me, man has free will only to choose whether he wants to realise the Self or not. The rest is predestined. Is my understanding correct?’

Michael elaborated his answer in the light of his deep understanding of Bhagavan Ramana’s teaching. He said: ‘It isn’t exactly like that. What is predestined is our prarabdha. Our prarabdha is the fruit of actions we’ve done in past lives. Actions which bear fruit are called agamyā. The fruit of

agamyā in each life gets stored in sanchita. Sanchita is the store of all the agamyā we’ve done in past lives. As more fruits are accumulated than we are able to experience, since we have more desires than we are able to experience, sanchita is an ever-growing pile.’

He went on to say that God or Guru, all-loving and compassionate, selects those fruits to experience that are most beneficial to our spiritual development in a given lifetime. ‘From our narrow viewpoint, what we experience in this life might appear to be good or bad. In reality, everything we experience is for our ultimate good: attaining mukti. In sum, all what we are given to

experience according to prarabdha is what is productive to our advancement on the spiritual path.'

Coming to the issue of freedom of will and destiny, Michael brought up an essential distinction: 'Agamyā is the sum of our actions that bears fruit. These actions are driven by our will. What is predetermined is prarabdha, the fruit of actions we've done, using or misusing our freedom of will in past lives.' There are three types of karma in Advaita: sanchita, prarabdha and agamyā. Michael explained how freedom of will is absolutely necessary to the unfolding of our destiny: 'Without freedom of will, we couldn't do agamyā, without agamyā there wouldn't be fruits, and without fruits there wouldn't be any prarabdha. According to Advaita, there is no incompatibility between freedom of will and what is predetermined.'

Michael continued by elucidating the meaning of what we call freedom of will, often a very loosely defined term: 'Bhagavan was far more precise when he spoke about this concept in Tamil. Generally, in English, when people talk about free will, what is meant is freedom to do what one wants.' He brought an important distinction, stating that freedom to do what one wants isn't freedom of will

but freedom of action. He called the fundamental freedom, the freedom of will, Isha swatantra and the freedom of action, kriya swatantra. As freedom of action is closely related to freedom of will, Bhagavan also often spoke about Isha-kriya-swatantra. But whenever he discussed this topic more precisely, he made a distinction between the two.'

Michael continued: 'Our freedom of will is totally free and illimitable. It signifies that no one can make us want what we do not want or stop us from not wanting what we want. And because we have so many desires, our will has the tendency to be scattered in many directions. We often talk about lacking will power. We all have will power but what we actually lack is the ability to focus our attention on any one particular thing at a time, since we have so many desires.'

While our will is totally free, our actions are obviously not completely free. When we misuse this freedom of action, we create agamyā. The actions that we do as per our will are not constrained by predetermination. We have freedom of action to try to achieve what we want, but what we are going to experience is according to destiny. Therefore, our experiences are predetermined. In order to experience what we are predetermined to

experience, there are certain actions of the mind, speech and body that we will be made to do for our prarabdha to unfold.'

Michael offered this example: "Suppose it's our prarabdha to become a doctor or an engineer. To become a doctor or an engineer, we need to study. Our body, speech and mind would be made to do those actions so we achieve what we desire. This doesn't mean that all the actions we do with the body, speech and mind are according to destiny. Bhagavan implies that we have freedom of will and freedom of action, when he said: 'Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may.'" Elaborating further, Michael said that if everything was predetermined, even our efforts would be predetermined so there would have been no need for Bhagavan to say those words. Though we can't experience what we aren't destined to experience, if we want to experience something, efforts can be made in that direction. But, no matter how much we try and want the experience, we won't be able to experience what we aren't destined to.

Bhagavan's detailed words were: 'Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as

you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.' Since we do have freedom of will, Michael affirmed that we must use it to turn our attention within. Once our attention is turned in, we have the freedom to choose whether or not to try to achieve things.

Many spiritual aspirants wonder how to know which actions are predestined and which the result of free will. Michael said very clearly: 'We do not know, we cannot know and we need not know. Bhagavan told us that whatever is destined to happen will happen in order to make us understand that we need not worry about actions that we are made to do according to destiny. We need to be concerned only about the actions that we do by our will.'

Bringing listeners to a new depth in understanding, Michael mentioned that by default we can say that most of the actions we do are according to our will. Even if these actions are according to prarabdha, they are driven by our assertion of will in prior lives. Following the same analogy of becoming a doctor, he said that to become a doctor we have to study and pass the exam which is according

to destiny. Most people who become doctors achieve that because it's their destiny, but also because they want to. They may have various reasons, but most who become doctors, do so by their own will. This is an example in which actions are driven both by freedom of will and destiny.

Michael said: 'The problem lies not in the actions but in the will. It's at the level of the will that we need to tackle this issue. That's why it is stated that on the path of self-surrender, the attempt is to surrender our will to the will of God. Surrender always begins by surrendering our will. If we didn't have freedom of will, we couldn't surrender or follow any spiritual path. The will, in the grossest form consists of desires, attachments and fears; likes and dislikes. When we dislike something, we fear it or desire to avoid it. Therefore, underlying our desires and fears are our likes and dislikes. And underlying our likes and dislikes are our inclinations or vasanas.'

Bhagavan said that the whole world is nothing but the projection of our own vasanas. Vasanas are broadly divided into two types: Vishaya-vasana, the attachment to worldly objects, and sat-vasana, the inclination to know who we really are. The aim of spiritual practice is to weaken

our vishaya-vasana and strengthen our sat-vasana. The ultimate goal being to surrender the ego. When ego is surrendered, everything else is surrendered.

What we are going to experience is according to destiny but destiny isn't a random selection. Destiny is tailor-made to suit us. Bhagavan knows the vasanas we have and how best to heal ourselves from each. Accordingly, he ordains the prarabdha. How does Bhagavan ordain? By being Himself. In the 17th paragraph of Nan Yar, Bhagavan says, 'Without desire, resolve or effort, the sun rises and in its mere presence the lotus blooms, water evaporates, people perform their various functions and then rest. Just as in the presence of the magnet the needle moves, it is by virtue of the mere presence of God that the souls perform their actions in accordance with their respective karma.'

The selection of prarabdha happens by the mere presence of Bhagavan. Bhagavan is infinite love. By his infinite love, everything happens automatically. We always have a choice. We can let ourselves be swayed by our vasanas or not. If we didn't have a choice, our actions wouldn't be driven by our will but by destiny. Without acting as per our will

there would be no agamyā, hence no fruits, and no prarabdha.

Applying this to the path of Bhagavan, the path of self-investigation, the vāsanās we should allow ourselves to be influenced by are the sat-vāsanās. The vāsanās we should try avoid pursuing are the viśhaya-vāsanās. We can do this by practicing Self-attentiveness. Our śāstras teach what we should and shouldn't do. This implies we have freedom of will. Using our freedom of will correctly is very important.

Throwing light on which of the two prevails, freedom of will or destiny, Michael referred to Bhagavan who

said: 'Such disputes arise only to those who don't have discernment of the root cause of both faith and will. The root of faith and will is ego. Those who don't understand the nature of ego will argue about which prevails, faith or will.'

Michael's conclusion: 'What we want to experience is according to our will. What we are to experience is according to destiny. There are no conflicts between faith and will. Faith and will prevail in their own domains. Those who know the reality of the ego are free from both faith and will.' ■

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Talk 368

A group of people came on a visit to Sri Bhagavan. One of them asked: "How can I keep my mind aright?"

M.: A refractory bull is lured to the stall by means of grass. Similarly the mind must be lured by good thoughts.

D.: But it does not remain steady.

M.: The bull accustomed to stray takes delight in going astray. However he must be lured with luscious grass to the stall. Even so he will continue to trespass into the neighbour's fields. He must gradually be made to realise that the same kind of good grass can be had in his own place. After a time he will remain in the stall without straying. Later a time will come when, even if driven out of the stall, he will return to the stall without going into the neighbouring fields. So also the mind must be trained to take to right ways. It will gradually grow accustomed to good ways and will not return to wrong ways.

D.: What are the good ways to be shown to the mind?

M.: Thought of God.

Winning and Losing

Advait Shrivastav



A man from the mountain's peak
 Mocks the man at its base
 Since one can only descend,
 And the other will only ascend
 Meeting midway, they'll speak
 As they move at their own pace

Their meeting is the eternal question
Who is winning, and who is losing?
 Fools do the act of choosing
 The wise go beyond this junction
Knowing the cycle repeats its function
 By reversing the men in position ■

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Fiction and Reality: An Incident at Ramanashram

Sharada Bhanu



Between the drunkard and the teetotaler there is an absolute dissonance, a divide that no leap of understanding crosses, or so said the popular film lyric, decades ago: “Jo na piye woh kya jaane, peete hai kyon hum dewaane, yaar!” I found all through my life, the same absolute divide opening up between lovers of fiction and the dismal supporters of “reality”. As decades went by, I witnessed a world in which cricket, martial arts, video games, body building, beauty culture, fashion, shopping, even alcohol and of course work, all became acceptable forms of addiction but parents still existed who would spend on a pizza but not on fiction for their kids and idiot fundamentalists proliferated who could proclaim they had read nothing but the One Good Book. Even films and film music, once beyond the pale, now achieved new respectability because they

were so commercially successful. Not Fiction. Newspapers ceased to publish short stories. Magazines renounced fiction or went out of print. Bookshops shut down. Fiction was the Inadmissible. People had no time for this. It would be pointless to say that Aristotle had long ago stated that poetry purveys a truth different from history. In popular opinion if you wanted truth, you could read the news, or non-fiction. If you wanted a fictional fix, films or television could give you a quicker and much more powerful jolt of pleasure. Behind all of this was the universal assumption that sane, well-adjusted individuals were satisfied with the enduring “facts” of the world. Fiction was a distraction; nothing was more important than the careful crafting of a “successful” life.

In such a world it was embarrassing to admit to be actually engaged, as I

was some years ago, on research linking western fantasy fiction for children and the Indian philosophical system of Advaita. Both are recondite areas. I came to realize that even in India not too many people felt comfortable with Advaita. People could enter with greater sympathy into the multiple modes of Bhakti. The Gita, *sankeertan*, temple going, *japa*, even meditation were better understood. Jnana would never appeal to more than a small minority. As for knowledge of western fantasy fiction for children, it did not often extend, at any rate in adults, beyond amazement at the money generated by the Potter phenomenon.

Moreover, I was working on writers that hardly anyone had heard of in India - among them the American writer of fantasy and science fiction, Ursula Le Guin. I had known nothing of her till I had started research. I mostly had to keep to myself my pleasure in her ability to combine an engrossing narrative, which at one level any reader over twelve could access, with an effortless profundity that most literature for adults could not equal. I reveled quietly in *The Earthsea Cycle*, remembering how Bhagavan had remarked when a devotee, a Professor of English, had read out Keats's views on negative capability to him, "So there are Upanishads in English too."

What delight discovering sacred wisdom innocuously concealed as

fantasy fiction for kids! Only fiction of a certain caliber, can not just state, but demonstrate the fictive nature of so-called "reality", not real of course, but a mind-generated construct. This is the truth undisclosed in newspapers or scientific tracts and conveyed only by some schools of philosophy (in particular, Advaita) and exhibited in some brilliant fiction. What one sees is not what is out there but depends entirely on the seer. In Le Guin's texts one can see this *drishti-srishti* in operation. Ged, a young magician in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, pursues a terrible and implacable enemy, a ghostly shadow which is finally controlled and destroyed only when he can identify and name it with his own name. What reality has this shadow, apart from himself? Pure Advaita!



Ged and the Shadow by Alexandra Wood

Could there be a more resonant name for an archipelago than Earthsea? This name for a group of islands, always in

danger of flooding precisely captures a non-dual world where those opposites, earth and sea form a whole. Outside of Namdev, I had never encountered a value system which more prioritized the mystic power of the name, of one's own name. And yet here was a writer who reached into the stillness when all names fell away. My hair would stand on end as I read this magnificent evocation of the power of silence as distilled by Ogion, Ged's master and teacher:

“Ogion would come in from roaming the icy forests or from looking after his goats and stamp the snow off his boots and sit down in silence by the fire. And the mage's long, listening silence would fill the room, and fill Ged's mind, until sometimes it seemed he had forgotten what words sounded like.” (A Wizard of Earthsea 19)

I would quietly remember again that silence is not in Advaita the opposite of speech, it is the state of natural unity in which the individual self and the transcendent are one. Ogion's listening silence, in the quotation cited above suggests a willed suspension of speech and thought in order to live within a primordial unity between the perceiver and the universe.

It was good to connect with Bhagavan's comparing silence to an electric current flowing invisibly through the wires; speech being the interruption of this

current through a device such as a bulb for a specific, limited purpose. “Silence is ever-speaking; it is a perennial flow of language; it is interrupted by speaking. These words obstruct that mute language.” (Talks 200). In A Wizard of Earthsea the epigraph to the whole novel, reads:

Only in silence the word
only in dark the light,
only in dying life:
bright the hawk's flight
on the empty sky.

It was specially appropriate that I was at Tiruvannamalai, both reading about and living silence. I was there for a week – a rare luxury, my stays usually only lasted a day or two. I was working on my dissertation and meant to spend most of my time in Ramanashram's library which was well provided with texts on Advaita. Ramanashram had always been for me not just sacred space but home to the spirit, a place where things naturally fall into order, where the sleeping soul awakens. I worked quietly, with an unusual sense of ease and speed. I did not ask why my work was going so well or why I found that journal with those lucid articles on work and play by sheer accident. I simply took Bhagavan Ramana's gifts.

I usually avoided discussing my work, uncomfortably aware of having to give explanations. Philosophy and fantasy for

kids? The former produced some token respect, the latter contempt. People were mostly bewildered by the connection or rather, the absence of any. When out of the company of the books I was reading, I wondered sometimes, myself. Was I fancying connections where indeed there were none? Research can be lonely.

Even unspoken prayers are answered at the feet of Bhagavan. One evening in the dining hall, I happened to be sitting beside a foreigner who introduced herself as we were drinking tea. She was British and had written a seminal work on Irish Law which she updated every year. She made enough to spend most of the year in Mumbai, studying Advaita and this was her first visit to Ramanashram.

I somehow found myself telling her I was trying to establish a connection between Advaita and children's fiction and she responded with a surprised pleasure, not the bewilderment that I was so used to. And then she said, "I don't know if you have considered writing of Ursula Le Guin?" It was an amazing moment for me because hardly anyone I had met had read Le Guin, let alone so swiftly made the mental connection which my research hoped to establish. But then, I remembered, she was British and better read, in all probability, in western fantasy fiction that most Indians could be. So, I told her of my joy in Le Guin's fiction and asked, "Have you read

this author as a child?" Then the cream of the joke burst on both of us. She had heard of Le Guin only because an Indian friend in Mumbai had introduced her to her books, saying that he was NOT a believer and knew nothing of the Indian philosophy which she was studying, but empathy with what Le Guin wrote was the closest he had got to a religious feeling. She had then read the Earthsea Cycle with amazed delight and told her friend, "If you love Le Guin, then you are an Advaitin without knowing it!" In silence, we savoured together the irony of the Indian discovering his spiritual roots through the fantasy of another culture and the Westerner introduced to her own culture's fiction by the Indian.

Both of us agreed that reading Le Guin was a depth experience. We acknowledged the special grace of Arunachala and Ramanashram, but could not discuss it. It was hard to find words for that chord which vibrates at Tiruvannamalai. We did not meet again. I looked for her the next day at the ashram, but she had left. Lingering in my mind, this experience came to signify more than coincidence or even synchronicity. Perhaps all that exists is linked on another world wide web. And when one is especially in need of reassurance, the web quivers, the Guru grants and one ... simply connects. ■

[e-mail: sharadabhanu@gmail.com]

“Who Am I” Sadhana: Simple and Not so Simple!

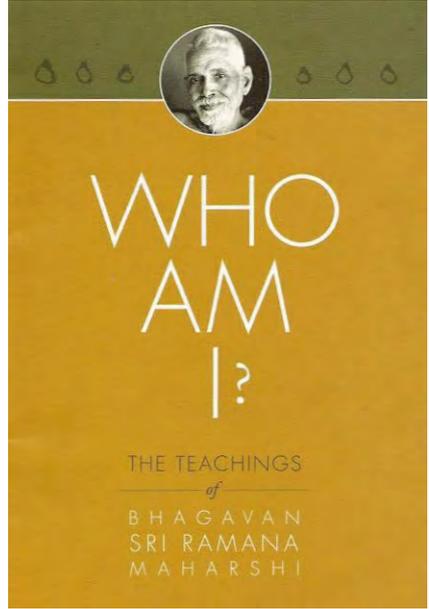
Sridhar Nagarajan

Bhagavan’s “Who Am I” upadesa is seemingly very simple and direct. However, He seems to have packed the essence of all the Upanishads in this short work, that too in the unconventional prose form. In fact, Bhagavan has clearly and boldly stated many Vedantic truths in this work.

It is very similar to how Sri Krishna took a bold and revolutionary approach in the Gita, to present Vedanta with freshness and relevance for that age, which remains as pertinent now as also for future generations. Furthermore, the spiritual teaching is imparted in the unconventional setting of a battle-field. This is not surprising, as Bhagavan is none other than the one Brahman speaking to our minds in today’s battle-field, much as Sri Krishna spoke then.

To illustrate some of the bold proclamations made by Bhagavan in Who Am I:

“I am” is pure awareness i.e., Sat-Chit-Ananda. He has proclaimed the mahavakya from the Vedas, “*Prajnanam Brahma*” – pure objectless consciousness is Brahman.



The world is unreal. There is no difference between the waking and dream states.

Constantly watching our mind through the “Who am I” practice will ensure that it finally merges in the Self.

Desirelessness is the goal. He cuts no slack here! However, in Talks 515, he indicates that of the two types of desires or vasanas, *bandha hetu* (that which binds) should be eschewed and *bhogahetu* (that which can be justly enjoyed, e.g. desiring a good meal

after a hard day's work) is allowed.

One has to transcend knowledge i.e., even the scriptures, to attain a direct experience of the Self.

God = Guru = Self

No one, not even the Guru can give Self-realization; it has to be attained through one's own efforts, made sincerely and diligently, following the directions given by the guru.

Happiness, the sole pursuit for each of us, is not manufactured outside but is our true inner nature. We get to stay in that state for a few seconds or minutes or days or weeks, depending on whether an object desired is attained or another object hated is removed. In other words, we continue to mistake ice-cream to be the source of happiness!

The Gita does not open up its treasure in the first few reads and, significantly, never stops yielding treasures after the first level of sincere but fruitless reading is transcended. It is exactly the same with "Who Am I". This simple prose work of Bhagavan's, authentically translated into many world languages, is usually taken lightly by devotees as our intellect falsely conveys to us that we have gained a good understanding within a few readings. In fact, a daily reading of this work, which takes

merely 5-7 minutes, is what yields unending treasures from this great Master of our times.

This work contains all the instructions which Bhagavan had packed in pithy verse in Upadesa Saram and Aksharamanamalai. Thus, it is the essence of the essence! Similar to the Gita which is the essence of the Upanishads - themselves the essence of the Vedas and Puranas.

In 'Who am I', Bhagavan has defined many commonly known aspects of spiritual seeking in a fresh and contemporary way. Some illustrations given below exemplify this:

The best devotee is the one who totally surrenders to the Self, i.e., no concept of the other arises in his/her mind. This seems contrary to the common theme of Bhakti with its focus on the dualistic. However, this is the highest definition of a bhakta according to the direct experience of many realized beings.

In God or Self, creation happens and He is in no way affected by its joys and sorrows.

There is no difference between the waking and dream states: while inside a dream, the world feels as real as in the waking state. (This was clarified in a discussion with Major Chadwick.

Bhagavan also gave him a direct experience as proof.)

The mind itself is not the problem, but its nature of spreading its tentacles is. So, a clean and controlled mind is the objective of spiritual practice. Bhagavan boldly declares in Talks (191, 204, 317, 323, 451...) that the pure mind is nothing but the Self or God.

Now we come to the caveats and pitfalls:

When something seems simple, there is a tendency to conclude that we have fully understood its import, so misinterpreting its depth with our superficial attention.

The “Who Am I” method explained by Bhagavan is comprehensive and complete. However, it cannot be fully unlocked without soaking it in with humility, and patiently waiting for Grace to open it for us.

Let’s illustrate this through one example:

If anyone reads Q&A 11, the instructions on how to practice “Who am I” are very clear and straightforward. This leads aspirants, who are new to the path of Bhagavan to think that it’s easy. More damaging is the presumption that they need not make any corrections to their lifestyle, concepts, etc., as all that is needed is to

apply the instructions with constancy. Unfortunately, this is far from what Bhagavan instructed, as seen from his subtle but very important pointer in Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam.

Sri Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni has stated that verses 3, 4 & 5 of Pancharatnam are direct instructions on how to follow the Jnana, Hatha Yoga (Prana control) and Bhakti paths to attain one’s spiritual goal of Self-realization. Bhagavan has given his consent to this interpretation. So let’s focus on verse 3 which is a summary of the elaborate “Who am I” instruction given in Q&A 11. In this verse, Bhagavan points out the type of mind, when it pursues the “Who am I” practice, gets immediate results to justify the epithet “Direct Path”: the pure mind. The adjective he used is “*amala*” or “pure”.

How to purify the mind?! The answer is in verse 5 which extols the Bhakti path, also inhering Karma yoga as elaborated by Sri Krishna in the Gita. So, one way to purify the mind is to direct it towards God by reciting his names, by doing pujas, etc. The other is to gradually pursue selfless action, i.e., action done as serving the Lord’s will, without attachment to its results.

Now, if an aspirant reads “Who Am I” and concludes that mechanically

going through the steps would yield quick results, as this is the direct path indicated by Bhagavan, he/she would be in jeopardy. Following the path of Jnana includes Karma and Bhakti too, as all these purify the mind. Without the regimen for purifying the mind, the mind will never become “*amala*”, which Bhagavan says is a prerequisite for the “Who Am I” practice to bear fruit.

In conclusion, while the path is indeed direct, we need to first qualify ourselves through various spiritual practices to be able to walk that path. Out of compassion, Bhagavan has included in “Who Am I” two simple but potent steps to purify our mind for the direct Path i.e., *sattvic* food in moderate quantities and *satsang*. ■
[e-mail: sridharpost@gmail.com]

Obituary: T.T. Kumaraswamy



Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

Dear all,

Sri T T Kumaraswamy, a former employee of Ramana Kendra merged into Bhagavan yesterday due to COVID. He was earlier looking after as a member of Direct Path editorial team. His wife was also an ardent devotee of Bhagavan and was a regular with *seva* activities during many of Bhagwan’s events.

Please join me in praying for the departed soul.

Namo Ramana

Anuraag Sunder

Secretary

Ramana Kendra Delhi

Kendra Bulletin

April – May 2021



April 11th



In this satsang, Michael James threw light upon the path of Bhakti and self-surrender. According to Bhagavan, Bhakti is the mother of

Jnana, as without an all-consuming love to surrender ourselves, we cannot annihilate the ego.

In “Who Am I?”, Bhagavan says that the ultimate driving force behind all desires is the desire for happiness. We all desire happiness because that is our real nature. As ego is not our natural state, we will be perfectly happy only when we are free of the rising ego. Thus, we need to surrender ourselves i.e. the ego. We all seek

happiness, but the fact that happiness is attainable only by surrendering the ego isn’t recognized by most of us.

Since, at the early stages of the path of Bhakti, God is a means to an end, it is *Vishaya* Bhakti and not *Deva* Bhakti. If our expectations are not fulfilled, we get disappointed with God, which, Michael said was immature. But, after many *janmas* of doing this kind of Bhakti, the mind matures and we understand that the difficulties given by God are for a good reason, and that He takes care by doing whatever is good for us. Gradually, *Vishaya* Bhakti gives way to genuine *Deva* Bhakti in which we love God for His own sake.

Giving the analogy of human relationships where when we genuinely love someone, we don’t

seek to gain things from them but just wish the person to be happy, aligning and sacrificing our wishes according to theirs, this is exactly what happens in our relationship with God, said Michael. When we begin to understand that God wants what's best for us and what stands between us and God is our own will, the Bhakti path begins to merge in surrender. When we surrender our will to His will, we begin to give up our likes, dislikes, desires, and attachments; accepting that whatever happens is according to His will and therefore best for us.

So long as we rise as ego, we seem to be separate from God, but in reality, we cannot be anything other than Him. In order to surrender the ego, we need to understand its nature which Bhagavan reveals to be of a formless phantom, always attending to things other than itself. If ego begins to investigate itself, it dissolves back into the source.

Bhagavan says that when we attend to our Self so keenly, thereby giving no room for the mind to attend to anything else, that alone is surrendering to God. The pinnacle of all spiritual practices is the path of Bhakti, whose pinnacle is surrender, whose pinnacle is *atmavichara* (self-enquiry), the culmination of all spiritual paths.

On the path of surrender, we

surrender ourselves (body, speech, mind) completely to Him and He makes us do the actions we are destined to do. Thus, we should leave everything (even the act of thinking) to the will of God and cling firmly to Self-attentiveness. Bhagavan explains this with a beautiful analogy. While travelling in a train, instead of carrying our luggage on our head, when we put this on the luggage rack, we travel comfortably; likewise everything is being taken care of by God, and hence we can confidently leave everything to Him.

Michael said that, in reality, while we act according to God's will, we also act according to our own will, thereby creating *agamyā* (karma carried forward to future births). While some of the *agamyā* happens to be in line with God's will and thus bears fruit, some isn't in accordance with His will and thus, does not bear fruit. The *Agamyā* that bears fruit is stored as *sanchita* (accumulated karma of all previous births) from which God selects the *prarabdha* (karma to be borne in the current lifetime). He only selects that fruit which is most beneficial to our spiritual progress. Bhagavan often said that whether you call it *prarabdha* or the will of God, it's one and the same thing.

In conclusion, Michael recalled

Bhagavan's words highlighting the importance of being silent by surrendering ourselves to God's will. As Bhagavan said: "Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent."

— Advait Shrivastav

April 14th



Mahaparinirvana Room at Ramanashram

On the solemn occasion of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's Aradhana Day, head Acharya of Chinmaya Mission, Delhi, Swami Prakarshananda began his talk by remembering Bhagavan with the bhajan, *Manas bhajo re guru charanan* followed by chants of Om Namah Shivaya and Arunachala Shiva.

Referring to Sri Ramana Maharshi as a great Mahatma whom everyone loves from the core of their hearts, he said that Bhagavan was

like a beacon on the path of spiritual knowledge. He remembered his days at Sandeepani Sadhanalaya, Mumbai, where Bhagavan's books, Upadesa Saram and Saddarshanam were studied in depth as part of the curriculum, and how extremely dear these texts are to all at the Chinmaya Mission. He then threw light on how one reaches the state of *sannyasa* by elaborating on a verse from the Bhagavad Gita. In Chapter 18, verse 49, Sri Krishna explains *sannyasa* to Arjuna as '*asakta buddhi sarvatrajitatmavigatsprihah.....*' meaning, one whose mind and intellect are detached from everything worldly, including body identification. This happens to one who has done enough reflection on the Self, not just in this life but in previous lives to achieve complete purity of mind in this birth. This pure mind becomes '*jitatma*' or a victor over the senses through rejection as unreal all sense objects; and by contemplating the Supreme Reality alone.

A *sadhaka* knows the importance of control over the mind and senses, yet it is very difficult in practice. It is only through steady practice, patience and focus that one can slowly attain *Atma-sanyam Yoga* (yoga of self-restraint to control the mind, cultivate equanimity and stabilize it in the Self for union

with it) as explained in the Bhagavad Gita, chapter 6. In this yoga, there is no identification with thoughts. Its 'phalam' (resultant fruit of action) is becoming 'vigata-sprihah' i.e. the mind drops cravings for all the five senses – sight, touch, sound, taste and smell. The one who has gained complete control over the senses remains dispassionate towards all five.

The outfall of this dispassion is 'naishkarmya-siddhi paramaam' – a state of actionlessness where the I is totally detached/disidentified from the body-mind-intellect complex and thereby from the world around. Such a person, even while performing actions, does not get bound by its fruits. This is the attitude of *sannyasa* and Sri Ramana Maharshi is such a *sannyasi*. His teachings, which all his devotees need to understand and follow, are well explained in the classic text, Upadesa Saram.



Since actions are not without defect and we can't live without activities, Bhagavan provides the right way for performing actions – with mind and intellect devoted to Him. This purifies both mind and intellect, ridding them of egocentric motives. When the action is

done selflessly, with an attitude of total surrender towards Him (Ishwar), it is not bound by its fruits, which would otherwise lead to a chain of action and reaction and be the cause of eternal misery and bondage. In such a state, the *sadhaka* considers the whole universe made up of the five elements together with the *manas*, *buddhi* and *ahamkara* to be He and He alone. With this attitude of performing actions devoted to Ishwar, the *sadhaka* purifies the mind further, which enables the mind to dive deep into the ocean of devotion that leads to the Supreme Reality.

Swamiji then talked about the most difficult hurdle in the path of knowledge – Ego. One who can drop it will reach the Supreme Truth. The way for this is the famous direct path of enquiry propounded by Bhagavan – 'Who am I?' When the mind wanders into a desire for the objects of the world, one needs to enquire, 'Who is it that desires?' This deep and continuous enquiry will lead to a state where the ego disappears completely because, in reality, there is no entity called ego, it is just our wrong notion of its existence. One who through right reflection and through the study of the scriptures realises one's own true nature is the highest Supreme truth also realises that bondage is only a

false notion.

Swamiji said that the best Guru *dakshina* or gift that devotees can give to our Guru Sri Ramana Maharshi would be to realise our true nature through steadfastness and devotion in our spiritual practice. He ended the talk with the bhajan - *Guru mahimaapaarmahima*.

—*Rashmi Vyas*

April 25th



It was a satsang with a difference. In the midst of fear and uncertainty caused by the huge second wave of the pandemic, this dance and musical evening sought to bring a calm into our lives through soothing song and dance clips that brought Sri Bhagavan directly into our hearts.

Arunima and Aditya Pathak, a sister-brother duo have sung before at the Kendra. Responding enthusiastically to their song recordings, Kendra Secretary, Anuraag Sunder invited them to sing their selection of Hindi bhajans which they were able to

do, despite both having only just recovered from Covid. The solo songs sung by Arunima (she is named after Arunachala) are the popular Hindi bhajans, *Din jaae din aaye*, originally sung by Lata Mangeshkar and *Guru Maat pita* by Chitra Roy. Arunima's gentle melodious voice set the tenor to the evening. The tone deepened when Aditya, playing the guitar, took up the lead for two bhajans, *De Ma nijcharnon ka pyar* and *Mera Jeevan teri sharan* (both originally sung by Jagjit Singh with lyrics composed by members of Sri Aurobindo Society). A musical resonance was struck as Aditya sang the lead verses, the refrain echoing in Arunima's soft voice as it trailed off in surrender. Both see Sri Bhagavan in their daily lives in two forms – as Mother and as Guru, so their choice of bhajans. Added Aditya, “We also chose these songs as we have loved them from childhood.”

Prarthna suniye Shri Bhagavan was a plea to the Almighty on behalf of humanity facing this period of trial and tribulation. The concluding piece was the chanting of the traditional mantra, *Jai Radha Madhav* (originally sung by Jagjit Singh), a simple melody that both soothed and invoked Krishna as a symbol of love and *Ananda*.

The next segment was a dance and musical performance in five clips by

Marie Elangovan, with songs sung by her husband, Elangovan Govindarajan. The Mrindangam was played by Manohar Balatchandirane and the flute by Raghuraman Govindarajan. Choreographed in Bharatanatyam style, the dance for each clip was performed by Marie herself.



On the Kendra's Managing body, Marie is an active and valued contributor to the Kendra's activities. She started visiting the Kendra in 1998 and nurtured a secret wish to express her devotion for Bhagavan through dance. Finally, expressing this wish to the then Secretary's wife, Shiromani Vijay, she was invited a few weeks later to perform at the Kendra on Jayanti 2015. Says Marie: "I was

elated. I had worked all these years to purify my mind by diving deep into sacred texts and poetry for every new Bharatanatyam performance I choreographed."

Guided by Secretary P.N.Vijay and Shiromani, Marie prepared a choreography based on Bhagavan's life, while Elangovan penned the lyrics and composed music for the dance. The choreography was conceptualised in such a way that the dance was performed on either side of the stage so as not to obstruct the view of Bhagavan's photo in the background. I remember it to be a riveting performance, full of the resonance and beauty of worship.

Says Marie: "At the start, I stood on the side of the stage, holding flowers in my hands, ready to offer them to Bhagavan. As I was about to move forward, I felt a cool presence enter my heart. To the chant of Om Namoh Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya at the start of the traditional Pushpanjali, I felt Bhagavan bless me with his presence in the heart. Ever since, this presence has not left me."

At the satsang, the first four pieces presented were in praise of Ramana. The lyrics for Ucharika and Padame were composed by Senthil Kumar and music by L. Krishnan. The composer for the lyrics and music of Gangadhara

is unknown.

In Ucharika sung in Ragam Revathi, the lyrics state that the lips become sweet when we sing the name of Ramana with devotion. Accompanied by Elangovan's deep and rich voice, Marie had the poise of a sculptured goddess in meditation, even as she expressed the sweetness of words on the lips.

Sung in Ragam Hamsadhvani, the last line in Gangadhara, 'Hridaya Niwas, Ramaneshwara', conveys the assurance that Ramana resides in the heart. Marie's dance rippled like the waves of the Ganga even as she conveyed Siva's rock-like meditation. Padame, sung in Ragam Darbari Kanada described the wondrous lotus feet of Ramana, the lyrics raising the question, 'What is there to fear when we can take refuge at Ramana's feet – his feet lit like lamps in our hearts?'

Annamalai Tanil was written and composed by Elangovan himself. Sung in Ragam Mayamalavagowla, the song is a resonant appeal for protection, and praise for Ramana's teaching of the direct path which removes ignorance and delusion from its very roots. In this, the constant refrain of 'Ramanadeva' showed us Bhagavan in different ways: still like a rock; relaxed, head resting on hand, a smile playing on his lips.

The whole performance came together in the finale with the first fourteen verses of Aksharamanamalai, and including the 108th verse. As part of the choreography, Marie moved in circles around the stage to portray Bhagavan himself performing pradakshina around the sacred Arunachala as do his devotees. Viewers could feel His presence, grace and protection and hearts overflowed with devotion and gratitude.

—Neera Kashyap

May 9th



Gautam Sachdeva wove his satsang on the theme: Peace of Mind in Daily Living, selecting quotes from *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*. When he first met his guru, Ramesh Balsekar, Sachdeva was also meeting many 'godmen', clairvoyants etc. Balsekar's pronouncement that everyone was seeking peace of mind, whether they knew it or not, conflicted with what others had said, and his mind was

assailed by doubt. Then he chanced to read Ramana Maharshi's Talk #146: 'The state of equanimity is the state of bliss.' This one statement immediately removed all confusion.

Bhagavan speaks in a way that is simple and easily understood by all. Truth is simple. There is beauty in simplicity. If truth was complicated, Sachdeva said, everyone would get it. The ego loves complexities. He went on to another quote from *Talks*: 'That which results in peace is the highest perfection.' Mind is restless by nature. Develop the habit of turning it inward. Begin by ignoring the external world. If peace of mind is dependent on ever-changing external things, then we shall never attain permanent peace. Moreover, peace is always there, as is experienced in deep sleep. The ego's compulsive passion for the dead past or the imaginary future veils peace. We have a deep-rooted sense of doership. The ego constantly says: I did this, I did that!

We often give away some of our belongings. Bhagavan tells us to give away the idea of me and mine instead. That requires intense vairagya and would destroy the very seed of possession. Joel Goldsmith, a modern-day mystic suggested that when we say: I gave MY money, I gave MY time, we should ask: Who gave us

the situation that allowed this giving? We, who have no control over our next breath, our next heartbeat, should realize that we are mere instruments through which things flow.

Bhagavan tells us that through 'sympathetic contact' with great sages, we absorb the peace that emanates from them, and gradually develop the habit of samadhi. But it is up to us whether this reference from *Talks* remains book knowledge or permeates our actions through the day.

Anandamayi Ma had said, 'To be a human being means to be a seeker after Truth.' A long silence followed, to allow this to sink in. Many such potent periods of silence intersperse Sachdeva's talks, combining with his tone and demeanor to enhance a sense of peace. He went on to say that if we have surrendered, then we have to abide in the will of god. No longer can we nurse a grievance against what does not please us, but realize that the long term effect of an event differs from what may be immediately apparent. Balsekar had said that there must be no rejection of anything. Rejection creates enormous psychological suffering. If anything has been brought into awareness it means that awareness has already accepted it. The world does not exist except as impressions that arise within

our own consciousness. Thoughts, feelings, whatever we see or hear, arise only within our consciousness. ‘Can I exist outside my awareness?’ he asked.

Referring to the Gita where Arjun refuses to raise his bow against his preceptors, Bhagavan explains Lord Krishna’s response, ‘It is the higher power that does everything. As long as you refuse to fight you have a sense of doership. Who are you to refuse or accept? Instead, submit as a tool. This is manliness and heroism.’

The significance of Jesus and the cross was discussed. Ramana said that the cross represented the body. When the ego is eliminated, pure awareness remains. This glorious survival is termed resurrection.

Considering that, with a pandemic raging, we are all being confronted by death around us, he recounted

that Bhagavan said, ‘Good’ when told of someone’s death. ‘The dead are really happy. It is the others who mourn. Why wish for continuance of bodily shackles? Die to the “me” and “mine” and connect to the eternal I.’ In *Ramana Periya Puranam*, Bhagavan is reported to have said, ‘Coming and going are only a trick of the mind. Our commitment is to the silence and peace within us.’

After fielding some questions from the audience, Sachdeva concluded with sharing his experience of being with those who recently had lost loved ones. In such situations he felt that words are superfluous. What we should offer is our silence, our being present, the gift of pure being. The session concluded with two minutes of pure being, as we united in our silence. ■

—*Bharati Mirchandani*

Talk 590

Two ladies, one Swiss and the other French, visited Maharshi. The younger of the ladies asked several questions, of which the most important was: “Brahman is the same as jiva. If the jiva be under illusion it amounts to saying that Brahman is under illusion. How is that possible?”

M.: If Brahman be under illusion and wants disillusionment let Him raise the question.

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 thoroughly enjoyed reading the Feb-Apr issue. I have done some editing so I know what an achievement it is to get out a journal with not only lively pieces but without irritating mistakes. I particularly liked Bharati's accounts of the talks delivered by Swamiji and Michael James. Very lucid, detailed and useful. Your poem had a mastery of rhyme and rhythm as you presented the *vairagya* of the monk. Ms Neera's was very creative and challenging in its exploration of light and darkness. Swagat's article was rich in human interest. ■

Sharada Bhanu

Talk 368

A young girl of 9 or 10, whose mother is a Research Scholar in Sanskrit in the University of Madras, accompanied by Mr. Maurice Frydman met Sri Bhagavan in Palakothu at about 12 noon. Sri Bhagavan, as usual with Him, kindly smiled on her. She asked Sri Bhagavan: "Why is there misery on earth?"

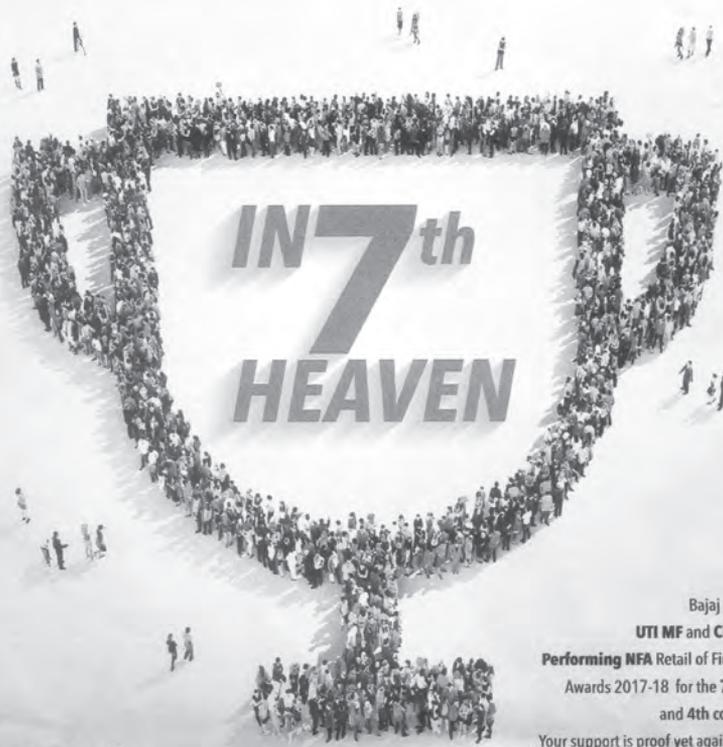
M.: Due to Karma.

D.: Who makes Karma bear fruits?

M.: God.

D.: God makes us do Karma and gives bad fruits for bad Karma. Is it fair? Sri Bhagavan almost laughed and was very pleased with her. Later he was coaxing her to read something on returning to the hall. Since then He is watching her.

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%
JUICE
CONTENT

New **Real**
Wellnezz
jamun

- 900g* of Jamun in a pack
- No added Preservatives

| | | |
|---|--|--|
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|---|--|--|

*Acc. to ACN retail index report, June 2015



*Avg. weight of 1 Jamun = 12g



15
Years

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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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47. Om abhayapradaya namah

Giver of freedom from fear.

48. Om daksinasya nibhaya namah

The equal of Dakshinamurti.

49. Om dhiraya namah

Intrepid, imperturbable one.



