

# DIRECT PATH

RAMANA KENDRA  
DELHI

May - July 2020

Vol. XXII, No. 2

*"Without awareness of Reality, can Reality exist?"*

*Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi*



***35. Om curnitakhila vibhramaya namah***

One who has destroyed all illusions.

***36. Om veda vedanta tattvajñaya namah***

One who has understood the inner significance of the Vedas  
and of Vedanta.

***37. Om cinmudrine namah***

One who is bestower of supreme wisdom by silence.

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2019  
YEAR OF SOLUTIONS  
*Complexities Simplified*





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

# Direct Path

VOLUME XXII ISSUE 2

MAY - JULY, 2020

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**Editor :** Swagat Patnaik - e-mail: [editor.dp@rkdeldhi.org](mailto:editor.dp@rkdeldhi.org)

**Editorial Board :** Prof. Vijay Vancheswar, Dr. Tuktuk Ghosh, Neera Kashyap  
and Bharati Mirchandani

**Website:** [www.ramanakendradelhi.in](http://www.ramanakendradelhi.in); **E Mail:** [directpath@rediffmail.com](mailto:directpath@rediffmail.com)



## Editor's Note

The lockdown due to the COVID-19 virus has been lifted in Delhi. But given the rising number of cases, utmost precaution is required for containing the death toll due to the virus. Even now most of our COVID warriors (in healthcare, security, and other essential services) are overworked and require a lot of support and encouragement from all of us. I hope Bhagavan's grace protects them and their families during these difficult times.

These precautionary days have also affected our kendra activities. We only had couple of events in the period March to May. The first event was a satsang by J. Jayaraman who is a long-time resident of Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai. The second event was an online function held on Bhagavan's Aradhana day to celebrate Bhagavan's mahasamadhi. This was the first online event organized by our kendra. And we hope many such online events would be organized in the future for benefiting the devotees.

Some of the important events (from Bhagavan's time) falling in this current issue (May-July 2020) are as follows:

- *May 16th: Mother Alagammal Maha Puja*
- *July 2nd: Cow Lakshmi Day*
- *July 5th: Guru Poornima*

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# Call for Articles

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

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

We look forward to hearing from you!

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# Meditation benefits: a practical discussion

Swagat Patnaik



In this age of productivity and pragmatism, any discussion regarding meditation practice or *sadhana* will eventually steer towards its supposed benefits. The key question underpinning these discussions is ‘What exactly will I gain from this?’. And thus, begins one of the most complex series of mental jugglery to estimate the value of *sadhana*, after all a cost benefit analysis is at the heart of any practical task.

My mental jugglery with regards to the meditation’s benefits began about 10 years ago. This was the time when I was quite enthusiastic about weight training. I discovered that sitting (for 2-5 mins) with my eyes closed during the cool down period helped my body relax much better, and it gave a minor

boost to my concentration. These were some of my earliest memories of consciously getting introduced to myself and my inner world of abstract sensations and colours. But given the demands of studies, I always restricted this activity. After all, closing your eyes and slowing down seemed like the most unproductive thing to do.

After a few months of doing this I somehow stumbled across a TED talk about the benefits of meditation measured through complex instruments. In the TED talk by Matthieu Ricard, he talked about the research on the brains of Olympics level meditators (monks). He narrated that their brain activities have permanently changed for the better. Their tendency for experiencing turbulent emotions is almost zero. In

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fact, they can even suppress some of the most innate body reactions like a startle response to a sound of gun shot. I remember one key idea which stuck with me was the fact that their left brain hemisphere (a proxy for happiness) activity is much more than right brain hemisphere. The level of this activity was a 4.5 standard deviation above normal. This means that only a few among hundred thousand people will be experiencing such levels of happiness. Furthermore, he also suggested that with regular mind training even ordinary people can radically improve their share of happiness.

This idea was quite revolutionary to me. I reasoned that we undertake many different pursuits our lives but we are never guaranteed any lasting happiness from the same. But here is science suggesting that meditation can objectively give us lasting benefits, yet I never knew about this. I felt I was cheated by myself and others for never being introduced to meditation.

So, in this article I will discuss some of the important ideas related to the benefits of meditation which really helped my *sadhana*. I believe some of these ideas and concepts may be of some interest to those who are more scientifically inclined. Another important point to note is I have mainly drawn readers' attention

to meditation practice. But in reality, there are a variety of practices like *japa*, *kirtan*, *hath yoga*, selfless service (*karma yoga*), prayers, etc., which can be equally beneficial to the *sadhaka* in a practical sense:

### **1. Meditation as a practice is a well-founded system with proven benefits:**

This idea can indeed be a shock to your system. Given our busy way of life, we often resign ourselves to the anxieties of life with an implicit understanding that this is the normal way of being. Further, anybody suggesting otherwise are gullible impractical people. Thus, this was one of the most difficult ideas to accept. Accepting this idea would mean that we would have to accept our ignorance, put in a lot of effort and will have to change a lot of our usual ways. A lot of scientific studies have shown that meditation greatly improves our immunity, focus and mental health (see <https://liveand-dare.com/benefits-of-meditation/>). Yet we often fail to grasp the gravity of the practice and keep striving for scraps of happiness here and there while overlooking the treasure box of gold which we have always been sitting on.

### **2. The benefits accrue over years and decades:**

Now, we are somewhat convinced about the benefits and start striving on

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the path. We may share our motivation with others and we will put in mighty efforts towards the same. But soon we become frustrated with our lack of progress. We had a rose-tinted picture of our imaginary ideal. We felt once we start putting in the effort, our entire journey will become a cloud filled joy ride. But reality is often very different from our imagined expectations. Our knees hurt, our back hurts and our own gibberish company feels like a never-ending Indian summer. In the beginning we often do not realize that the time scale for perceiving benefits in this practice is at odds with our habit of instant gratification. Few months or few years are usually necessary to even start noticing any glimpses of benefits.

### **3. Complete state of thoughtlessness is possible:**

Over time I also got introduced to idea of complete thoughtlessness through a talk by Gary Weber. In his now famous presentation, he talks about how fMRI machines can measure these states. He mentions in his many talks that these states can in fact be permanent. This was again a strange concept, which really intrigued my imagination. It is one thing to accept the general improvements in concentration through meditation but to claim existence of thoughtless state

is quite an ambitious hypothesis. If such states are possible then are there any other goals which are even worth pursuing in life. This is very unsettling information to put it mildly. Thus, it led me to a gradual re-evaluation of my beliefs which is still continuing.

### **4. Forget about benefits:**

Overall, after a few years of struggle with the practice. I became more and more confused and disillusioned with the ideas of progress and benefits. One invariably finds out that the many usual motivations for practice never lead to any lasting wholesome states. Thus, it gradually dawns that any mental calculation about benefit or loss are themselves a major distraction. It is a severe impediment to observing here and now. It conceals our many unconscious desires which rampantly keeps churning our mind towards its old clever ways. This insight has been even more difficult for me to assimilate and it may require a few lifetimes of struggle to keep the practice wholesome. Perhaps forgetting about the benefits and loss, itself is the practice.

Now that I have shared some of my ideas related to benefits of practice, I would like to end this article with Bhagavan's very vivid description of our own tussle with our mind. He says in Talk 326, that our mind is like

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a rogue cow who has the habit of eating grass from neighbour's field. Even if we keep her in the stall forcibly tethered, she simply bides her time to play rogue again. If we tempt her with fine grass in the stall she will take couple of mouthfuls and again wait for the opportunity to run into the fields. The next day she will take a few more

mouthfuls and with succeeding days she will be weaned away from the tendency to run out. And a day will come when even if it is let free, it will not stray into neighbouring fields. I hope Bhagavan guides us all through our various struggles and helps us keep our sadhana wholesome. ■

[e-mail: editor.dp@rkdelhi.org]

### Talk 11

“Can destiny (*karma*) ever come to an end?”

*M.:* The *karmas* carry the seeds of their own destruction in themselves.

### Talk 13

Mrs. M. A. Piggot, an English lady, who had read “Search in Secret India”, came to see the Maharshi. The services of a disciple as interpreter were provided. There were many visitors at the time in the hall, including some ladies with their infants. The place resounded with noise. At length silence prevailed. Suddenly Maharshi, who seemed to be looking at infinite space, was heard to say softly, “Monkey”! A little baby was then discovered in the doorway (unobserved by the mother who was seated on the other side of the door) with a large monkey standing on his hind legs, who with both hands was fondling the child not hurting it in the slightest, both being at peace with each other in Maharshi's presence. When Maharshi's voice was heard the monkey jumped away adroitly and disappeared. The incident greatly impressed the lady.

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# What does it mean to be a sthitaprajna?

*Kushal Shah*



**E**nlightenment, Moksha, Nirvana, and Liberation are some of the commonly used terms used to define the goal of the spiritual processes. Although these terms are very well-known and often inspire people to seriously take up spiritual practices. But the usage of these terms causes many impediments towards reaching the final goal. Quite often the usage of these terms creates a negative attitude towards the material/physical world. Many serious seekers of Moksha often look down upon the physical world as impure and wish to spend most of their time in seeking the pure consciousness. These terms also create friction between the so-called spiritual seekers and the so-called materialists. The former often consider the latter to be ignorant and selfish, while the

latter consider the former to be lazy bums who do not wish to contribute to society. This divide between spiritual seekers and materialists seems to be a much later development in Indian history since epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata do not provide any evidence for the same. In both Ramayana and Mahabharata, the main protagonists, Rama and Krishna, are both spiritually enlightened and kings.

Thus, for cutting through some of these paradoxical aspects of their personality it is important to understand the original term used for describing enlightened beings. In verse 2.55 of Bhagavad Gita, Krishna provides a precise term to describe people who have struck the perfect balance between spiritualism and materialism. He strongly urges Arjuna to seek this

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state of being:

प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्पार्थ मनोगतान् ।  
आत्मन्येवात्मा तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥

O Pārtha, when a man gives up all varieties of desire for sense gratification, which arise from mental modifications, and when his mind finds satisfaction in the self alone, then he is said to be of steady intellect (*Sthitaprajna*).

What does it mean to be a *Sthitaprajna* and is it different from enlightenment, moksha, or liberation? The most important difference which I believe is that a *Sthitaprajna* considers himself very much active in the worldly sense and has no desire whatsoever for becoming a recluse. A *Sthitaprajna* neither shies away from the world nor does get entangled with its ever-changing form. A *Sthitaprajna* is a perfect Karma Yogi who does his/her duty without getting attached to its results. Since as the verse above says, a *Sthitaprajna* is established in steady intellect, s/he is also a perfect *Jnani*. But then the question arises, is this state really achievable or is it a mere fantasy? Was Krishna merely fooling Arjuna by painting him imaginary fantasies, or was Krishna leading Arjuna towards a practical and achievable goal that would ultimately resolve his miseries? Interestingly, it is not just

Krishna, but Patanjali too who talks of such a state. The difference is only in terminology, while the essence remains the same. Patanjali calls this the state of Yoga, and defines it in verse I.2 of his Yoga Sutras:

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥

The state of Yoga is achieved when there is a cessation of modifications of the mind.

What exactly are these modifications of the mind? In verse I.6 of Yoga Sutras, Patanjali states that there are five kinds of modifications of the mind and these are the right knowledge, error, imagination, sleep, and memory. The usual reaction upon hearing this that these modifications seem quite natural. Is it really possible for the human being to function without them? We may reluctantly consider giving up an error or maybe even imagination to some extent, but how can we give up on the right knowledge, sleep, and memory? Do hold on any further thoughts, the idea is not as bizarre as it may seem at first sight.

Do you remember the first time you learned to ride a bicycle? If that is too long back and your memory of that experience has faded, you could also try remembering the first time you learned to ride a two-wheeler or a car? Initially, it must have required

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a lot of effort with a lot of conscious learnings and errors. Then over time, as you repeated the process, it became an integral part of yourself and became effortless. And as time went on, you could listen to music, chat with friends, and even enjoy the scenery outside while still driving your vehicle. How did this happen? Without getting into too many details, essentially, your mind figured out many abstract laws for driving the vehicle and keeps using them to automatically do the job without you needing to put in any conscious effort. Till the mind can figure out these abstract laws, a lot of effort is required.

A similar process happens with all other things in life too. When a person first starts trading stocks or learning to write a computer program, initially it is very effortful with every small detail being paid too much conscious attention. But as the person keeps doing this, again and again, the mind figures out the abstract laws of the process and is then able to do a large chunk of the job automatically. So essentially, the role that the right knowledge, error, imagination, memory, and even sleep to some extent play is to help us in figuring out the abstract rules and laws required to do our job at hand. Areas of life where we can figure out these abstract laws become effortless,

and other areas where we are not able to figure out these abstract laws lead to stress. The state of *Sthitaprajna* is essentially one completely free of stress and completely effortless in all domains of life (not to be confused with laziness). And according to the above argument, one can achieve this state only when one has figured out all the abstract laws by which this universe operates. Makes sense? So now, of course, the next question is, how is it even possible to figure out all the abstract laws of the universe?

It is important to understand that a good driver who has figured out these abstract laws of driving is not really aware of the mathematics and concepts of mechanics which define the movement of the vehicle. These laws which have been figured out by the human mind are too complex to be understood with current scientific terms.

The process of figuring out abstract laws of any process requires practice and time. Hence, it obviously follows that figuring out all the abstract laws of the universe in all domains in our life would require infinite time simply because of infinite possibilities. And this implies that achieving the state of being a *Sthitaprajna* in a finite lifetime is clearly impossible! However, what if, at a fundamental level, there are

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only a small finite number of laws that govern the universe? Then our problem can be solved since it is surely possible to learn a finite number of laws in a finite amount of time! The good news is that the Bhagavad Gita clearly talks of such a finite set of abstract laws at the fundamental level, and if we can do the required practice, we can also achieve this state of being a *Sthitaprajna* in a finite lifetime. What are these laws?

One such fundamental law relevant to our problem is stated in verse 2.14 of the Bhagavad Gita:

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुः  
खदाः ।  
आगमापायिनोऽिनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व  
भारत ॥

O son of Kunti, the contact between the senses and the sense objects gives rise to perceptions of pleasure and pain. These are temporary, appearing, and disappearing, and so one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.

The word *Sthitaprajna* can be loosely be translated into English as equanimous. And we lose our equanimity because our mind is too easily affected by the joys of pleasure and the sorrows of pain. What Krishna says is that both these are perceptions of the mind are created when our

senses come in contact with various sensory objects. The important point is that these perceptions are temporary and last for a short time. Hence, it is important for the mind to not be disturbed by them. Pleasure will always be followed by pain, and pain by pleasure. It is not that a *Sthitaprajna* has defective sensory organs and so cannot experience these vagaries of the mind. In fact, a *Sthitaprajna* is usually a lot more sensitive and better functioning when compared to an ordinary people! As long as the *Sthitaprajna* lives in mortal flesh, s/he is surely subject to these experiences, but his/her mind is no longer disturbed by it. For example, when we are kids, we perhaps get disturbed by few marks we lose and get overjoyed by few marks we gain in the exams, but when we grow up, we realize how childish that behavior was! Similarly, life's experiences will always bring pleasure and pain at different points of time. What matters is whether we get carried away by these experiences or go through them maturely. A *Sthitaprajna* is not a boring or an insensitive person. On the contrary, a *Sthitaprajna* is the one who experiences life to its fullest extent without getting caught up in life's vagaries. Sounds attractive, right? So now, how do we reach this state? The goal is Yoga and the path is also Yoga.

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As stated by many of our Yogis since ancient times, Yoga is primarily a process of recollection of our basic nature, Sat-Chit-Ananda. There is nothing extra to add on to ourselves, but only to remove the layers of ignorance that we have gathered over many cycles of birth and death. And the way to remove these layers is just to repeatedly remind ourselves of what Krishna says in verse 2.14 stated above. All these perceptions of pleasure and pain are temporary and ephemeral, and the true Self just silently observes this

changing world of names and forms without getting attached to it. The deeper this realization seeps within our mind, the closer we will be to the goal of Yoga. As Ramana Maharshi also says, "*Pain and pleasure alternate with each other. One must suffer or enjoy them patiently without being carried away by them. Always try to hold on to the Self. He who is indifferent to pain or pleasure can alone be happy.*" ■

[e-mail: [atmabodha@gmail.com](mailto:atmabodha@gmail.com)]

### Talk 44

Mr. Ekanath Rao, an Engineer, asked Sri Bhagavan if solitude is necessary for vichara.

*M.:* There is solitude everywhere. The individual is solitary always. His business is to find it out within, and not seek it without.

*D.:* The work-a-day world is distracting.

*M.:* Do not allow yourself to be distracted. Enquire for whom there is distraction. It will not afflict you after a little practice.

*D.:* Even the attempt is impossible.

*M.:* Make it and it will be found not so difficult.

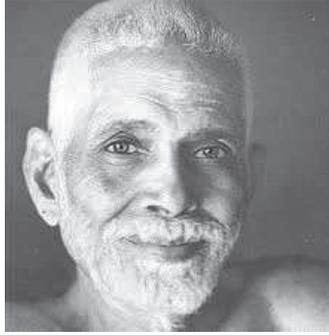
*D.:* But the answer does not come for the search inward.

*M.:* The enquirer is the answer and no other answer can come. What comes afresh cannot be true. What always is, is true.

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# How is karma destroyed only by self-investigation?

Michael James



A new friend recently wrote to me asking, ‘When we do meditation on I or *atma-vichara* will all the previous karma be destroyed? How is that?’ The following is what I replied to him:

What is karma? Karma means action, and it is classified into three categories: *āgāmya*, *sañcita* and *prārabdha*. *Āgāmya* means fresh action that we do of our own free will, and such action bears fruit, which we must later experience. *Sañcita* is the store of all the fruits of our past karmas that we have not yet experienced, and *prārabdha* is that portion of our *sañcita* that has been selected for us to experience in this lifetime.

For whom is all this karma? Who is it who does *āgāmya*, and who then

experiences the resulting *prārabdha*? It is only ourself as this ego. In sleep we do not rise as this ego, so we then do not do any karma or experience any fruit. But as soon as we (this ego) wake from sleep or begin to dream, we start doing karma and experiencing the fruit of our past karmas. Therefore, there is no karma without our ego, so our ego is the root and foundation of all karma.

However much we may try to cut a tree, so long as its root survives it will continue sprouting again and again. Likewise, so long as our ego, the root of all karma, survives, we cannot destroy our karma. The only way to destroy karma is to destroy our ego.

What is this ego? Is it real? This ego is what we now seem to be, but it is not what we really are. It is like an illusory

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snake. What seems to be a snake is actually only a rope. So long as we mistake the rope to be a snake, we do not see any rope but only a snake. But if we look at the snake very carefully, we will see that it is actually just a rope, and then we will no longer mistake it to be a snake.

Likewise, what now seems to be this ego is actually only myself. So long as we mistake myself to be this ego, we do not see myself as we really are but instead see myself only as this ego. But if we look at this ego very carefully, we will see that it is actually just the infinite self-awareness that we really are, and then we will no longer mistake myself to be this ego.

Looking at myself or my ego very carefully is what is called *ātma-vicāra* or self-investigation. Since we are not really this ego, if we persevere in investigating myself (observing my ego very carefully) until we see what we really are, this illusion called 'ego' will cease to exist, and when it ceases to exist all its karma will also cease to exist.

Therefore, investigating myself or meditating on 'I', my ego, is the one infallible means to destroy all karma. Indeed, it is the only means by which we can destroy it, because it is the only means by which we can destroy the illusion that we are this finite thing called 'ego'.

Since everything that we experience is the fruit of our past karmas, and since the root of all karma and its fruit is only our own ego, this simple path of self-investigation taught to us by Bhagavan Ramana is the solution to all the problems we face and all the problems we could ever face. Indeed according to him it is the solution to all the problems of the world, because the world and its problems seem to exist only in the view of our ego (just as any world or problems that we see in a dream seem to exist only in the view of our dreaming mind), so when our ego is destroyed by self-investigation, this world and all its problems will also cease to exist, and what will then remain is what alone is real, namely myself, the one infinite and blissful space of pure self-awareness. ■

*[e-mail: michael@happinessofbeing.com]*

[Michael James has been a devotee of Ramana Maharshi since 1976. He has written and translated several books on Ramana Maharshi and his teachings.

Do visit his website (<https://www.happinessofbeing.com/>) where he shares his very comprehensive articles on the various aspects of Bhagavan's teachings. We thank him for giving us his permission to use this article from his website.]

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# Sundarar

*Sharada Bhanu*



Sundarar: One or Two?  
*(“A bond slave? ME? You crazy  
loon:”*

*“Madman....hmm; just sing it in  
tune”)*

You are utterly other  
Even when here;  
Companion and friend  
World without end  
And my own dear self.  
*Just a song, a song  
Come give me a song  
Madman and master  
Was I your bond slave?  
So you said; forging documents  
And swearing tall tales.  
You took me from one wife to  
Find me two.*

*Just a song, for your life  
Sing and go free  
just a song, for a wife  
one, two, three....*

You can't leave me alone  
So help me fool my girlfriend;  
Exit from the icon  
And blend  
into a bush.

*I'll help you lie, dear slave  
You're mine right or wrong;  
When you cry, my knave,  
Just sing me a song  
Eyes open, I'm blind  
Madly I run  
Seeking the One.  
Eyes shut I find  
You, in my own*

---

Still mind.

*A song my friend*

*Your sight, for a song*

*I'll make you amends*

*Be with me for a song*

One, is well

Two, is pain

As ever, at last -

Single and sane.

*"You **have** to love me;*

*now take me, do"*

*"You were made to love Me,*

*just sing it too"*

One of the four most important Nayanmars, Sundarar whose hagiography is recorded in the Periapuranam. He has by any standards, a lively life. He is an attendant of Shiva in Kailasa and reverently hands him the poison *halhala* which Shiva according to legend drinks to save the world, becoming in the process Neelakanta, the blue-throated. Sundarar sees two attendants of Parvati and is overcome momentarily by a desire which the two girls also reciprocate. Their two numbers symbolizes a fall from single-minded devotion to duality. All are granted a human birth to live out their desires and learn to transcend them. Sundarar, in anguish at this sentence, makes the lord promise he will not let him forget his true identity and that he

will reclaim him as his own.

Born to a devout *shaivite* couple, he is about to marry when Shiva appears as an old man, flourishes a document, swearing that he has been pledged long ago by the young man's grandfather and the young man is his bonds slave. Sundarar loudly abuses his tormentor as a madman. When the village panchayat is unable to disprove the veracity of the document, the old man leads Sundarar and the whole crowd to his 'home' the temple and vanishes. Sundarar recognizes the play of the lord, remembers the knowledge of his past life and is now commanded to sing the Lord's praise. When at a loss for words, Shiva asks him to start with the epithet he had bestowed, the word "madman". Even abuse from this devotee is delightful to the lord. And the abusive epithet is the key that releases a storm of passionate poetry.

Sundarar moves on, wooing and marrying first and then the second of the two reborn heavenly maidens, passing from crisis to crisis with Shiva at each moment miraculously granting gold and grain, satisfying multiple desires and solving problems. The devotee's bhakti elicits indulgent tenderness from the Lord. Sundarar throws the gold he receives from Shiva into one temple tank and by the Lord's grace, draws it out of another, miles away. When Sundarar is courting his

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second wife and his first wife is furious, Shiva has to be the go-between to negotiate forgiveness. At one point this devotee insists that Shiva should cease to inhabit the icon in the temple and get into a bush, so Sundarar can safely swear a false oath in the temple to Sangiliyar, the second maiden. This is not an excusable (from a masculine point of view) piece of dishonesty in the Aham tradition, leading to a mere lover's quarrel and reconciliation. This is crass spiritual blindness, in imagining the lord can be limited to his idol and is not everywhere. Sundarar, if that is actually possible, may have managed to ask for a boon that the lord cannot grant – he cannot empty space of himself. Not surprisingly Sundarar loses his sight for this lie and recovers it slowly, after much suffering, singing his way out of avidya.

The traditional explanation offered in accounts of Sundarar's career is that Shiva ordained his birth so that the lord may hear his songs. That incredible light of consciousness, within which everyone lives and which creates and sustains this magical universe. It is unnoticed and ignored; if dimly perceived, complained to, badgered, and abused. Why does it select some, detach them from their limited relationships, and small human concerns and open their eyes to its own immensity? How can its glory ever be

said? Is its loneliness mitigated even by pitifully limited songs of praise? Or is it just that it guides some to praise which expands the singer and hearer's awareness into infinity?

Doubled even in death and flamboyant to the last, Sundarar is supposed to have ridden into Kailasa on a white elephant sent to pick him up and accompanied by a king, friend, and companion devotee, who could not bear to be separated from him. The irregular entry of the latter is not permitted and Sundarar walks into the divine presence alone, but at his request. Yes, the lord grants. And there is hope for all of us who follow.

The Nayanmars, early innovators in bhakti, had discovered the power of singing the poetry of adoration and its transformative influence over the beliefs, and personalities of individuals and whole communities. *Alaala* (*Halhala*, poison) Sundarar as he is called in Tamil, shares one of Shiva's names (the handsome one) and just as Shiva transforms poison into an ornament, Sundarar welds abuse into praise. He emancipates himself from being a slave to desire through affirming his enduring identity as the lord's servant. However, a reader surveying this devotee's life may wonder just who is the madman, and who is the bonds slave. ■

[e-mail: [sharadabhanu@gmail.com](mailto:sharadabhanu@gmail.com)]

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# Enforced distancing

*Tuktuk Ghosh*



**T**he world is in the throes of an unprecedented pandemic. We are given to understand that the underlying problem may never go away, and we must learn to live with it. For months lockdowns have become the order of the day, being the only known manner of staying safe and staving off the onslaught of the potentially lethal virus. An essential ingredient of the lockdown has been the advisory of social distancing, a concept rather alien to many and difficult to enforce. It is likely to become the new normal, even if the lockdowns are gradually eased.

Being diametrically opposed to our conventional habits, the challenge in its enforcement is understandable. Many a time it is quite simply impractical and difficult to even attempt.

However, while it will take some reconfiguring of behavior patterns, the long-term impacts are bound to be enduring. It may perhaps prove to be an uncharted route to deepened awareness about oneself.

It is interesting at this juncture to juxtapose the concept of ‘enforced social distancing’, with the variant of ‘voluntary social distancing’ which comes without much struggle, and almost naturally to many adepts and spiritual aspirants. It remains one of the more familiar strategies, easy to adapt, as well as adopt in order to scale great heights of enhanced consciousness in the tumble of present-day exigencies. It may take the form of a structured retreat, a meditative session, or withdrawal into one’s deep recesses. Of course,

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it typically has definite time bands and only the highly evolved seekers opt for spontaneous unspooling into this mode of augmented spirituality for extended periods.

Though it may appear somewhat incongruous at the first impression. But it is useful to acquire this enhanced perspective for better resolution of contesting doubts that may be vexing many minds trying to cope with these challenging times which are completely beyond the regular routine.

A few verses of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Upadesa Saram* come to mind to help understand it in a nuanced manner, what distancing in reality encapsulates, effectively shorn of the generally acknowledged duality of being enforced or truly voluntary. These are likely to be edifying for ordinary people grappling with crises of different hues such as the one referenced above and also for those struggling on the path of self-realization.

“Vigrahendriya-prana-dhi-tamah  
Naham-eka- sat-taj-jadam hyasat”  
(Verse 22)

It means that the body, the mind, prana, intellect, and ignorance are not the true ‘I’ because they are insentient and unreal. Anything that a person

cognizes can only be reckoned as an object and can never be the subject that the person is. The person cognizes his body, mind, prana, intellect, and ignorance. Hence, they cannot be he/she. The true ‘I’, as outlined below is alone real.

“Idam-aham-padabhikhyam-an-  
vaham

Ahami linakepyalaya-sattaya”  
(Verse 21)

Self-enquiry consists of withdrawing the mind from its preoccupations and directing it to the key question, “Who am ‘I’?”. To facilitate this process of refined enquiry it is necessary to be aware of what is to be located in the term ‘I’. If a proper awareness is lacking or inadequate, it runs a risk of being inappropriately identified with attributes such as the physical body, one’s name, gender, lineage, educational and professional achievements, societal recognition.

A sense of true being emerges only from a singular and uniquely concerted effort of distancing from assigned identities thereby lending itself to an exalted endeavor to be one with the Supreme.

“Sattva-bhasika cit-kva-vetara  
Sattya hi cic-cittaya hyaham”  
(Verse 23)

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It may be pertinent to postulate that it is not possible for a distinct and separate Consciousness to illuminate the Being. The valid stance would accordingly be that what exists as Being is itself Consciousness. Logically, therefore, what exists as Consciousness is itself the true 'I'.

“Isa-jivayor-vesa-dhi-bhida  
Sat-svabhavato vastu kevalam”  
(Verse 24)

*Isvara*, one's personal God, and the individual *Jiva* can and often feel

rather distant from each other. This is particularly so in terms of perceived, experienced bodily form and expanse of the mind. In both these respects, the individual is characterized by finiteness, while *Isvara* is infinite.

It bears reiteration that it is through this sharp, dedicated focus that the unquestioned acceptance of distance eventually flakes away. The unreality of what are, in fact, superimpositions, becomes immanent as a concomitant. ■

[e-mail: [tghoshk@gmail.com](mailto:tghoshk@gmail.com)]

### Talk 38

When one of the present attendants came the first time to Bhagavan, he asked: “What is the way for liberation?” Maharshi replied: “The way already taken leads to liberation.”

### Talk 44

Mr. Ekanath Rao, an Engineer, asked Sri Bhagavan if solitude is necessary for vichara.

*M.:* There is solitude everywhere. The individual is solitary always. His business is to find it out within, and not seek it without.

*D.:* The work-a-day world is distracting.

*M.:* Do not allow yourself to be distracted. Enquire for whom there is distraction. It will not afflict you after a little practice.

*D.:* Even the attempt is impossible.

*M.:* Make it and it will be found not so difficult.

*D.:* But the answer does not come for the search inward.

*M.:* The enquirer is the answer and no other answer can come. What comes afresh cannot be true. What always is, is true.

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# The old man

*Advait Shrivastav*



The mansion I built  
Quakes destroyed with no guilt  
The money I had  
Has gone in hands: Good and Bad  
My lady rests in garlands  
And my sons work in foreign lands  
All; that I considered mine  
Is now six, which earlier was nine

The big questions of life  
Keep coming to my mind  
“I am not this, I am not that  
This is temporary and so is that”  
The river of pleasure  
The torrent of agony  
The wave of thought  
All dissolve in the eternal sea

I venture to find  
My life's purpose and goal  
I sit with my eyes closed  
And begin to discover my eternal soul ■

*[e-mail: shrivastavadvait99@gmail.com]*

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# Light in the time of darkness

Geetha Ravichandran



*‘I am an old man and have known many troubles, but most of them never happened.’*

After my father passed away, while leafing through one of his notebooks, I found that he had neatly copied out this quote from Mark Twain. It was a sort of revelation because, it seemed to us, the members of his family, that he took his quota of sufferings greatly to heart.

At present, going through lockdown 3.0, we find suffering and fears-all around us. Will it ever be possible to say, sometime in the future, that these troubles never happened? Or are we edging closer to an apocalyptic situation, like the way it has been portrayed in the movies? While it is difficult to peer into the future, it is worth considering what this situation is all about.

It is indeed surprising how the taste for exotic meats in a certain part of China has resulted in the whole world washing its hands and masking its smiles. All of mankind is paying a hefty price for the transgressions of a few. Till recently we prided ourselves on being mobile and connected, now this has proved to be a bane. Every human being is now seen as a possible carrier of the deadly virus, with the potential of being infected and infecting others. Isolation and social distancing are touted as the new virtues. What does this new normal mean to most of us?

From what we are going through, we have come to realize that this is *‘the best of times and the worst of*

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*times*'. Nature is rebooting itself. Without the intruding noise of traffic, bird song reverberates in our homes. The skies are clearer and distant peaks becoming visible. Dolphins are whistling closer to our shores. Many of us are learning to make do with bare essentials, working with our hands and sharing our resources generously with others. The consumerist culture to which most of us had signed up, has had to beat a retreat. At the same time, there is a pervading sense of utter helplessness. People have lost jobs. The economy is in the doldrums. Long lines of migrant workers trudging home with their meager belongings, without knowing where their next meal is coming from, is a telling commentary on the widespread distress. It is remarkable how hundreds and thousands of our countrymen hid their imploding problems from our eyes, toiled to build dreams in which they would never partake even remotely and yet barely had anything to subsist on. Till Covid 19 threw up the images on our screens, we had no idea of the magnitude of the problems faced by the laborers in our vicinity. The hostility faced by medicos, even as they risk their own safety to battle the virus, is completely unacceptable. The fact that the health care system is overburdened and access may not

be available to all those who need it, has jolted societies, across the globe. The ban on travel and commuting has increased our anxiety for the safety and well-being of loved ones who are indifferent places. And beyond everything; to be confronted with the vulnerability of our own existence, to have to address the immanence of death has forced us to acknowledge it will never be business as usual.

Without a doubt, it is time for introspection. The fear around us is palpable. Every one of us shares this preoccupation with keeping disease and death outside the doorstep. There are primers on how to do this, reaching us every day through social media posts. We are flooded with information as to what is the best way to protect ourselves and dodge this disease. In the culture we live in, we had over the past, gained the firm belief that it is possible to push the event of death to a distant future. The advances in medical science and public health care systems have at present, increased human life expectancy to around 80 years. Unless we have had the experience of a fatal illness amongst family or friends, death has not been an overwhelming factor in many of our lives, as it has emerged in the present scenario.

At the same time, we are also

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witnessing the heroism of ordinary people. Doctor's workdays are at a stretch without a break, exposing themselves to possible danger, to treat patients. Sanitation workers step out of the safety of their homes to maintain a clean and safe environment. There are policemen out in the streets without rest and sleep, implementing lockdown laws. And there are people reaching out to stranded workers with food and supplies to alleviate their situation. The courage, commitment, and generosity displayed by every such person is worthy of praise and deserves our gratitude. It also brings us to realize that our fate is closely linked with that of our fellowmen and in the end, it is a little compassion that makes all the difference. To show compassion, we need to look beyond our constricting fears and understand that we are bound by a common destiny. We are only nourished by the act of giving, it is food for the soul. It is only when we are thus engaged, that we can ward off doomsday fears. William Shakespeare in one of his sonnets has said-

*Buy terms divine in selling hours  
of dross;*

*Within be fed, without be rich no  
more.*

*So shalt thou feed on Death, that*

*feeds on men,*

*And, Death once dead, there's no  
more dying then. (Sonnet 146)*

Sri Ramana Bhagavan has confronted this fear of death as if taking a bull by its horns. The story of his self-realization, as he seized this fear, is too well known to be repeated here. It was with the same directness that he addressed the fears of the devotees who approached him "*The birth of the ego is called the birth of the person. There is no other kind of birth. Whatever is born is bound to die. Kill the ego: there is no fear of recurring death for what is once dead. The Self remains even after the death of the ego. That is Bliss — that is immortality.*" (Talk 251). It is on these words, that fear belongs to the ego, which is itself unsubstantial — that one needs to contemplate. When the fragility of human existence stares us in the face, to understand our true nature and the nature of the circumstances that beset us is the challenge we must rise to.

What is the way forward, is the question that now engages our minds. Researchers and scientists are probably inching closer to a vaccine and medications to treat this virus. But one indelible lesson is that we have been made aware of an intricate web of interconnectedness that binds the

human race. Maybe, I am quoting the Chaos theory of Edward Lorenz out of its original context. But this statement is so relevant for our times. “*A butterfly fluttering its wings in Brazil, can set off a tornado in Texas*”. Tenuous, though the link seems, it is playing out before our very eyes. Another quote from a paper published by Lorenz in 1972 is worth pondering in the present circumstances. “*If a flap of a butterfly’s wings can be instrumental in generating a tornado, it can equally well be instrumental in preventing a tornado*”. Thus, our positive efforts and actions however small or insignificant they may appear can make a real impact on the world around us. Many devotees who met Sri Ramana Maharishi during his lifetime were troubled by the disasters that plagued the world, whether it was war, epidemic, or famine. Maharishi steadfastly directed them to look inwards to see the reality of both themselves and the world. When a devotee petulantly wanted

to know why Mahatmas do not help, Maharishi replied, “*How do you know that they do not help? Public speeches, physical activity and material help are all not outweighed by the silence of Mahatmas. They accomplish more than others.*” (Talk 272)

The world has survived through many crises in the past. The present crisis affords an opportunity, like no other to fathom our suffering and reach the core reality within us. The abiding and tranquil presence of Maharishi is from where we can draw our solace and strength in these bewildering times. It would be appropriate to recall the words of Ramana Bhagavan, as he prayed to Arunachala to cure his mother Azhagammal of her illness-

*Enfold my mother in Thy Light  
and make her one  
with Thee. What need then for  
cremation? ■*

[e-mail: [ravichandran.geetha@gmail.com](mailto:ravichandran.geetha@gmail.com)]

## Talk 111

A Telugu gentleman asked about *Brahma bhavana*.

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

He asked about inspired action.

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

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# Coming home to Bhagavan

Anupama Shukla



Those eyes are responsible for my predicament. What predicament — I hear you ask. Well the fact of my very being, my soul held captive by Bhagavan — without chains, handcuffs, or any other visible tie.

My first memory of Bhagavan's photograph is from sometime in childhood. I did not ask any adult around who he was — but something within me knew that I wouldn't forget that face. In the subsequent years, the name Ramana Maharshi was heard in passing. I heard the tale of a sage who lived in a cave on a hill in solitude; immersed in such complete oneness that even wild animals were drawn to him. I knew the sage must be someone extraordinary hence a lingering fascination continued.

The photograph resurfaced at intervals during adulthood and those eyes continued to have a mesmerizing effect but work and married life expanded to occupy the days. Life went on.

In 2003, I was posted to Chennai. One day a lady inspector working with me asked for casual leave for a day. In response to my inquiry, she said she was going to do *girivalam* of Arunachala. Hearing the name, something stirred deep within, almost as if I had once known the place. Curiosity stirred within me but I was soon submerged in some mundane task.

Over the next few years, I found myself wondering if and when I would meet my Guru. This pre-occupation was puzzling as I had never thought along these lines before. However,

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all of a sudden this aspect assumed crucial importance to me. I posed this question to astrologers but I got vague replies almost as if nothing like this featured in my natal chart, leaving me disheartened. Days passed.

In 2007, I was working under a new boss — an honest, kind-hearted, and soft-spoken man. The Vellore office and consequently the Tiruvannamalai office fell in his overall jurisdiction. In the course of a conversation, he mentioned Ramanasramam. Once again I let it pass without expressing either interest or curiosity. On my next visit to his chamber, I noticed ‘the photo’ under the glass placed over his office table. I tore my eyes away from it, discussed official matters, and left. It was as if to delve deeper would mean taking a risk.

But they say the link with the Guru survives through lifetimes and soon after, on a visit to the famous bookstore ‘Landmark’, it happened. My eyes fell upon a book with the familiar face, I picked it up. The title read ‘My Life and Quest’ by Arthur Osborne. To date, I have no rational explanation as to why on that particular day I picked the book up. Reaching home, I sat down and began to read and that was it.

The book cast a spell on me and

I was hooked. With the one-pointed zeal of a woman possessed I then hunted around for any piece of literature that had a mention of Bhagavan or Arunachala. The next few months passed in trying to assuage my now insatiable hunger and I trawled the internet, devouring material available online.

In December 2008 my husband and I were able to make our first trip to Ramansramam. Walking towards the Ashram office, I gazed at the Hill oddly overcome by emotion and close to tears. Everything (including the feel of the gravel we walked on) seemed familiar though I had never been here before. The pull of Arunachala and the Ashram was undeniable and we spent a blissful two days soaking in the atmosphere.

That first visit started off the chain of trips to Tiruvannamalai and each time it felt like coming home. On every visit, we would happily spend hours in the bookshop looking eagerly for any new publications that would give us a taste of the life and times of Bhagavan. I found myself most drawn to the stories and anecdotes narrated by the devotees, particularly those that spoke of the kitchen activities. My imagination conjured up scenes playing out in the wee hours of early

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morning when all the kitchen helpers would have exclusive access to Bhagavan. Oh! how I envied them and wished I could have been there. And then, one day when I was sitting on the cement steps gazing at the Hill, a young man who helped serve food in the dining hall came up to me and out of the blue asked if I would like to help chop the vegetables for the next meal. Joyous delirium is probably the closest I can come to describe the hours that followed as I sat on the kitchen floor topping and tailing beans. Bhagavan, in His infinite graciousness, had re-

sponded to my innermost desire.

Years have passed since that day but the memories are as fresh as ever. With our transfer from Chennai, our visits to the Ashram have dwindled but the subliminal connect to Arunachala and Bhagavan remains as strong. When Bhagavan finally led me to my Guru in bodily form, I knew I had reached home as sitting before him all I could hear in my mind was ‘Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala.’ ■  
[e-mail: [anupamadshukla@gmail.com](mailto:anupamadshukla@gmail.com)]

### Talk 50

Sri Bhagavan read out, from the *Prabuddha Bharata*, Kabir’s saying that all know that the drop merges into the ocean but few know that the ocean merges into the drop. This is *para bhakti*, said he.

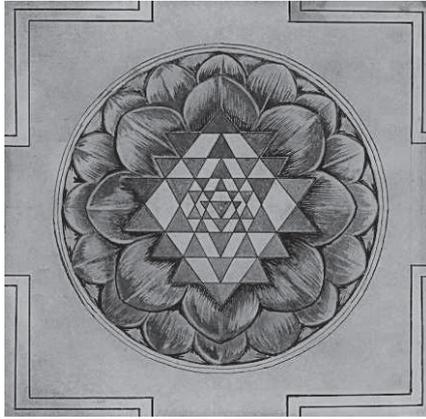
### Talk 70

Sri Raju Sastrigal asked Sri Bhagavan about *nada*, *bindu* and *kala*. *M.*: They are in Vedanta terminology *prana*, *mana*, *buddhi* (the life-current, mind and intellect). In the Tantras *nada* is said to be subtle sound with *tejas* - light - in it. This light is said to be the body of Siva. When it develops and sound is submerged, it becomes *bindu*. To be full of light (*tejomaya*) is the aim. *Kala* is a part of the *bindu*.

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# Buck stops here

*Dr. Sanjay Raghav*



**M**y coming to Bhagavan's feet was not a mere coincidence but was divine play to help me to reach my heart, the seat of Bhagavan.

I was born in a family where spiritual practices were part of a daily routine. However, an intense yearning to know or experience God came to me during my college days. I read various spiritual texts and followed various paths and sects. All these efforts lead to mental purification and some blissful experiences. In July 2015 in a couple of days, people from different walks of life met and advised me to look through Bhagavan's teachings and visit Ramana Ashram. This led me to read and learn a lot of information about him available on the internet.

Finally, an opportunity came to attend a neurology conference in Chennai in January 2016. On this trip, I visited Ramana Ashram for the first time. The most striking thing to me as I entered the Ashram was a 400-year-old Iluppai tree. This tree is blessed to have seen Shri Bhagavan and is a silent witness to everything in Ashram even today. This realization filled me with reverence for this divine tree. Another thing that caught my attention was Sri Chakra Yantra in the sanctum sanctorum of the Matrubhuteshwara temple at Sri Ramanasramam. It is worshipped regularly since installation by Sri Bhagavan in 1949. Mother's temple and Sri Chakra Yantra is symbolic of Shakti which is a divinely feminine consort of Shiva. Next, I

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was also mesmerised by the chanting of 'Ramana Sadguru' by a devotee who was distributing the prasada in the compound in front of well. This left me chanting it even after coming back from Ashram.

On my next visit to Thiruvannamalai was on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2016, I started *Giripradakshina* at around 4.30 am. It was still dark when I started at a constant but slow pace. Probably thirty minutes after I started walking, suddenly my head turned to my right towards Arunachala hill. I was amazed to see that whole of the hill took the form of Lord Shiva with the crescent moon on his head. I bowed in reverence and it made me feel joyous and blessed.

Walking on the hill has also been an amazing experience. I went up to the top of the hill where a fire is lit at the Deepam festival. It was not a planned trip up to the top. I went behind the Ramana Ashram to visit Skanda Ashram early morning but when I reached there, I found it to be closed. I thought of waiting there it to be opened and asked a local person what else I can visit. She suggested me to climb the hill. I was a bit apprehensive seeing so many monkeys around and no proper path. However, she pointed to arrows painted on the boulders and rocks. It

must have taken me a couple of hours to reach up to the top but it was worth the effort. At the summit, it was an amazing experience of divine energy embracing oneself from all directions. I met a French devotee who was staying there from last three months and was climbing up to the top every day. He himself was amazed by his ability to climb as he was not much into athletics. Just before the summit, I met a young man who was sitting in a small shack where he used to visit everyday. He offered me tea in a coconut shell. Probably his guru used to live there but now he has moved to Puducherry.

Visiting Skanda Ashram, Virupaksha Cave, Arunachala temple, sitting in the meditation hall, or just being there, you can feel Bhagavan's presence everywhere. Once you go there you are caught in eternal bond with Arunachala which brings you back again and again.

My next visit to Thiruvannamalai was in July 2017 when I came to Ashram with my wife and two sons. While we were at the Delhi airport, I sprained my back and had excruciating pain. It stayed with me during my travel up to Tiruvannamalai. We were there for 2 nights and I planned *Giripradakshina* early morning. I had no clue how I would do it as I was not

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even able to walk straight. I got up at 4 am and to my surprise, there was no pain. It was all Bhagavan's grace. I believe when a seeker gets ripe with various practices and sadhanas he comes to Shri Bhagavan for the final assault to his ego. Buck stops here!

Overall, my life has been transformed, and many things have started happening on their own even without my efforts while I was trying to be in self-abidance. Both materialistic and divine help came with his grace. In my own experience when the sense of doership is gone with complete surrender life unfolds in the best possible way with least effort.

Many people think that unless you find a living master you cannot be in self-abidance. I would like to repeat what Shri Sadhu Om said, that only Master is living while rest are dead! Bhagavan told his devotees umpteen times to that he is not the body so even if he leaves the body he is not going anywhere. I think he is now helping more intensely and widely than while he was in his body form. His grace is ever-flowing to all of us. We need to fine-tune ourselves to his frequency. We need to develop worthiness to receive his grace.

All his help comes to your doorstep even without asking. He knows

what is best for us and so complete surrender to him is the best recourse. It takes away our worries as well. In due course of time, Bhagavan has sent his ardent advanced devotees who have helped me on my spiritual path in one way or the other. All this is possible due to the grace of Bhagavan. I received books, Mountain Path, pictures, audiobooks, and guidance from various people from time to time which helped me in my practice of Self Inquiry.

In January 2018 I attended Ramana Jayanti function in Sydney which was a good opportunity to meet other Bhagavan devotees in Australia. With the help of Sydney Centre and blessings from Ramana Ashram, we started Bhagavan Satsang's in Melbourne from 2019. Almost every day I meet or talk to seekers of truth with whom I can share Bhagavan's teachings with unconditional love. This ocean of bliss is infinite and as you dive in, the joy of bliss gets deeper and deeper.

A tree is known by its fruit and this is very true about Bhagavan's devotees who are fruits of the tree called Ramana. I came across many of them in self-abidance with whom you can feel the presence of Bhagavan. In Self abidance, everyone is part of

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us. All seekers of truth are dearest to Bhagavan and we can help each other to get established in Self by discussing and applying teachings of Bhagavan in our daily life. This community slowly grows around us as an extended family, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

A visit to Ashram and Arunachala speeds up our spiritual progress. The most important thing is paying attention to the feeling of awareness which is an unchanging witness as part of sadhana. We should do regular contemplation in solitude and

then following it throughout the day. Few other things which can help are sattvic food, spending time in nature, a stone from Arunachala hill and Bhagavan's picture as a constant companion as it's all his ever-flowing grace.

In lotus feet of my guru, Shri Bhagavan.

Om Namo Bhagwate  
Shri Ramanaye.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih. ■

[e-mail: [drsanjayraghav@gmail.com](mailto:drsanjayraghav@gmail.com)]

### Talk 115

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

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

### Talk 124

Another impatient questioner elaborated long premises and finished asking why some children die a premature death. He required the answer not to satisfy the grown-up ones who look on, but the babies who are the victims.

*M.:* Let the victims ask. Why do you ask and desire the answer from the standpoint of the child?

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# Darkness in the time of light

Bharati Mirchandani



**D**arkness is fascinating. It evades examination; hold a light to it and it vanishes. By comparison, light is harsh and violent, it gobbles darkness; while darkness is meek and humble, hovering at our feet shielding itself from light. It only assumes whatever shape and size allowed to it by light.

And when the sun sets, darkness gently lays itself over the earth and lets us rest. Darkness is vital to dreaming and creativity. Imagination easily dominates logic in the night. Much of our mental noise gets hushed, and we get attuned to subtler sounds and sensations. Saint John of the Cross tells of his experience of tuning in to

this subtle grace<sup>1</sup>

*“...in darkness and concealment,  
my house being now all stilled.  
On that glad night,  
in secret, for no one saw me,  
nor did I look at anything,  
with no other light or guide  
than the one that burned in my  
heart.*

*This guided me  
more surely than the light of  
noon...”*

Ah, the sheer grace of darkness that can open one’s inner eye! This is similar to when Sri Ramakrishna<sup>2</sup> asked Ma Kali why she was black.

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1 St John of the Cross Translators: Kieran Kavanaugh & Otilio Rodriguez

2 Kathamritam – The gospel of Shri Ramakrishna, by M.

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She replied that she was not black, but clear. Like a lake is not black, the sky is not blue, only distance makes them look dark. Darkness when explored dissolves. Darkness, like Kali, represents infinity.

The mantra says, “*Tamaso maa jyotirgamaya*”<sup>3</sup>. This is translated as, lead me from darkness to light, and promptly by implication, darkness becomes something to avoid. It signifies evil, ignorance, fear, sorrow, and suffering. The Sanskrit word *tamas* roughly translates as darkness. It includes qualities of denseness, dullness, inertia, and lethargy. But if we examine these traits they often unravel to reveal the light that has always been present, like stars, hidden, blocked, covered.

The darkness of mind in sleep often brings out brilliant ideas, poems, inventions, and simple solutions to overwhelming problems. This indicates that it is important to understand the roles played by waking, dream, and deep sleep. Traditionally these three states have been represented by A-U-M discussed in the Mandukya Upanishad. Here A-U-M depicts *vaishvanara*, *taijas*, and *susupti* as the three states of existence con-

stantly in flux. These three broadly correspond to *tamas*, *rajas*, and *satva* respectively.

Even at the atomic level, the play of these three *gunas* causes the elements to evolve in a rhythmic and predictable pattern like the periodic table. The *satvik* impulse causes energy frequency in an atom to increase, pulling in more electrons (increasing electric charge, or becoming rajasic). This attracts a proton into the nucleus, thereby increasing the atomic weight. Now the atom stays stable (or static, tamasic), till again a *satvik* impulse to evolve causes rajasic activity, and the three states are repeated. Each time, the atom evolves to become a different element<sup>4</sup>.

This cycle of energy in flux seems to apply to everything we know in the cosmos and certainly is hinted at in the mythologies of creation found in varied cultures. Day and night are only a small part of these cycles which are of course the easiest to perceive. For some years I remained acutely aware of subtle variations of energy during the diurnal cycles. For example, I noticed particularly during the hours of darkness one could quite accurately estimate the correct time

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3 The Brhadāranyaka Upanishad

4 The Search for the Elements, by Isaac Asimov

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by tuning into these subtle changes. There must be texts that validate my experience, but I have not chanced on them yet.

Until a person makes the quantum leap to the *trigunatit* state where one is beyond the three states, as Bhagavan did, each being goes through the endless cycles of these three *gunas*. This can even be seen in the Ramana devotees at Tiruvannamalai. They sit in blissful meditation for hours. And when the *satvic guna* shifts toward inertia or lethargy, up they get and do *giri pradakshina*. Fourteen kilometers of walking on gravel and pebbles heals the physical body through acupressure to the soles of feet; mental and psychological healing occurs through devotion to Arunachala filling the heart and channeling rajasic forces toward inner work. This constantly spinning pradakshina of *gunas* takes us slowly, surely, towards the fourth state, *turiya*, that is a leap to liberation from all *gunas*; moksha.

‘The Uses of Sorrow’ by Mary Oliver beautifully captures this idea of using darkness for evolution:

*(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)  
Someone I loved once gave me  
a box full of darkness.*

*It took me years to understand  
that this, too, was a gift.*

Much of the meaning of this short poem is carried by the title. While the subtitle indicates the state where the logical mind lies in a temporary suspension. And the gift that took ‘years to understand’ is not spelled out, as our hearts intuitively know that which remains beyond words.

Chhaganlal V Yogi was at a low point in his life, feeling disillusioned with everything when he made his first visit to meet the great sage at Tiruvannamalai. His words<sup>5</sup>, “The sun was setting like a sad farewell, spreading a darkness over both the hill and my heart. The gloom deepened until the neighbourhood disappeared into the blackness of the night... My mind, which was deeply tormented, felt that the psychic atmosphere in the hall was stuffy and choking...”. This was before Ramana Maharshi gave him a copy of Upadesha Saram in Gujarati and told him to read aloud. “All the time I was chanting I could feel Sri Bhagavan keenly observing me. It seemed that the light of his eyes was suffusing my consciousness, even without my being conscious of it. His silent gaze brought about a subtle but

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5 <http://greatmaster.info/ramanamaharshi/aneccotesramana/aneccoteramana1/>

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definite transformation in me. The darkness, which a few minutes before had seemed heavy and unbearable, gradually lightened and melted into a glow of well-being. My erstwhile sadness completely disappeared, leaving in my heart an inexplicable emotion of joy.”

Swami Prabuddhananda just a few months ago at the Ramana Kendra, Delhi, said, “Every statement that is made by one who is not self-realized is invalid. That is obvious, because it comes from a state of ignorance, of darkness.” This little essay comes from darkness and offers darkness.

May you look at it deeply, closely, and watch its mystery unravel. May the inner light that is always present within everything shine through. Then we will truly understand Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj’s words<sup>6</sup>. “In reality there is only the source, dark in itself, making everything shine. Unperceived, it causes perception. Unfelt, it causes feelings. Unthinkable, it causes thought. Non-being, it gives birth to being. It is an immovable background of motion. Once you are there, you are at home everywhere.” ■

*[e-mail: 2manavi@gmail.com]*

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5 I Am That – Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, translated by Maurice Frydman

## Talk 15

A question was asked about the Upanishadic passage, “The Supreme Spirit is subtler than the subtlest and larger than the largest.”

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

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# Kendra bulletin

*Summaries of satsangs and events - March 2020 to April 2020*



## March 8th

**J**.Jayaraman (J.J), a long-time resident of Raman ashram, got straight to Ramana's basic principle that energy is by itself present and at hand, so we don't need to waste time seeking and directing it for use. Instead, we need to focus only on seeking its source.

We wastefully try to capture sensations instead of remaining in the here and now, thus opening the way for memory. Memory is proof that attention has been hijacked and taken elsewhere. The knower is aware of this hijacking and can consciously bring attention back.

The five senses pull our attention to appearances (nama-rupa), causing feelings (the nine rasas) to arise. The knower of appearances is also aware of the constant, mysterious and silent presence in the form of breath over which images form. The need therefore, is to hold onto pre-image breath. The knower also knows that when the breath stops the sense of being the knower is annihilated.

JJ held that repeatedly reading Bhagavan's description of his death experience provides important guidance. First, the fear of death is felt, so breathing stops. Then words - spoken and mental - are silenced, so that even the word 'I' cannot escape. Only on reaching the no-thought stage, real inquiry begins: what remains alive when body and mind are dead?

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Each time we experience a moment of *nirvikalpa samadhi* (when free of any thought vibration), we feel more joy and that joy propels us to remain increasingly thought-free.

--Bharati Mirchandani

### April 20th

Owing to the lockdown due to COVID 19, yet anxious that Bhagavan's Aradhana be commemorated, Kendra Secretary Anurag Sundar made a brave effort to see that a simple function be relayed to devotees in their homes via Zoom. After several rounds of coordination through messages, the ceremony came alive on our screens at precisely 8.10 pm. Senior devotee and classical singer, Jayanthi Aiyer sang the 108 verses of Bhagavan's composition, Aksharamanalai followed by the fulsome verses of *Varga Swayam Prakasham*. Midway, the camera focused on the shrine's large photo of Bhagavan, his benevolent expression filling our screens. A simple white garland interspersed with rose petals decorated his frame, purple flowers placed before him as offering. The light of the two *panchdeeps* danced on either side of Bhagavan's sombre photo frame. At the end, the Kendra's manager, Shri G.V.Narayanan performed the daily puja – the *arti* mantra followed by *pushpamsamarpan* from the Rig Veda, ending with the hymn, *Na Karmana*. Throughout the puja, Jayanthi chanted Arunachala Siva, Bhagavan's refrain resonating till the end.

--Neera Kashyap

### Talk 37

“What is Karma?” asked someone.

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

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## Talk 142

*Mr. Prakasa Rao from Bezwada:* Does not illusion become inoperative even before identity with Brahman results (*Brahmakaravritti*)? Or does it persist even afterwards?

*M.:* Illusion will not persist after *vasanas* are annihilated. In the interval between the knowledge of the identity and annihilation of *vasanas*, there will be illusion.

*D.:* How can the world influence a man even after identity with Brahman?

*M.:* First do it and see. You can then raise this question, if necessary.

*D.:* Can we know it in the same way as we know our identity?

*M.:* Are you different from the mind? How do you expect it to be known?

*D.:* Can the full scope of the *Chitta* (*Chittavilasa*) be known?

*M.:* Oh! Is this the identity of Brahman? Ignorance vanishing, the residue reveals itself. It is experience, not in the category of knowledge.

## Talk 159

Mr. Cohen desired to know if trance is a *sine qua non* for Self-Realisation.

*M.:* You are always in the Self - now, in trance, in deep sleep, in Realisation. If you lose hold of the Self and identify yourself with the body or the mind, these states appear to overtake you, and it also looks like a blank in trance, etc.; where as you are the Self and ever-present.

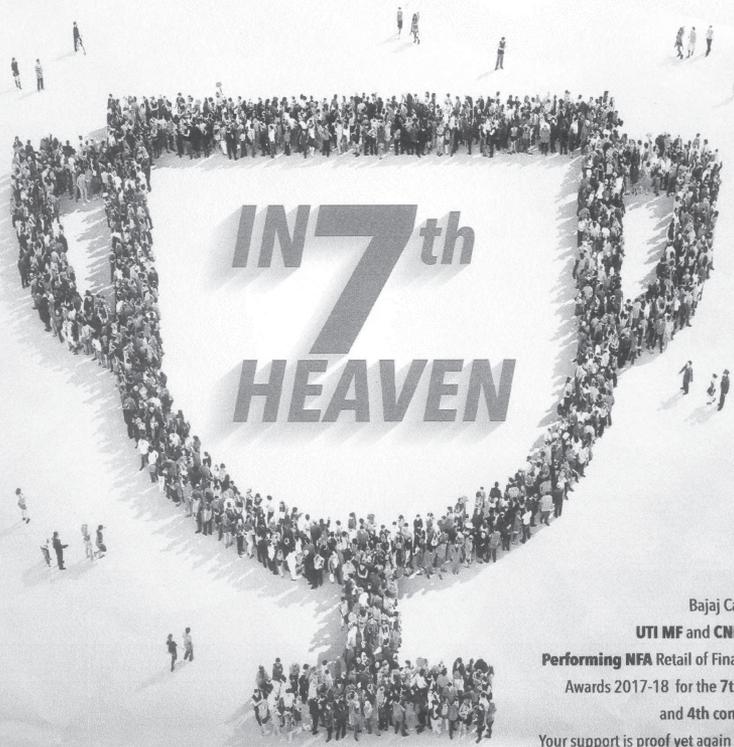
*D.:* Sri Aurobindo says that the Light which resides in the head must be brought down to the heart below.

*M.:* Is not the Self already in the Heart? How can the all-pervading Self be taken from one place to another?

*D.:* Is a karma yogi or a *bhakta* too subject to trance?

*M.:* When you concentrate on one point you merge in it, and this merging is called trance. The other features disappear and the Self alone remains over. The *karmi* or *bhakta* also must experience the same.

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

*Ramana Maharshi {Upadesa Saram (2)}*

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its source, consciousness. This is Self-abidance.”**

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