

# DIRECT PATH

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*"Your own Self-Realization is the greatest service you  
can render the world."*

*Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi*



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

# Direct Path

VOLUME XXIII ISSUE 3

AUGUST - OCTOBER, 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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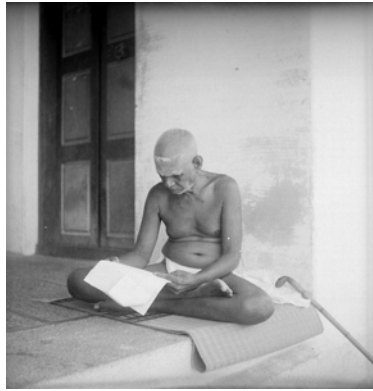
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# Simplicity in Bhagavan's Life and Teachings

*Advait Shrivastav*



**T**hough India has been replete with spiritual giants since time immemorial, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi stands out for the simplicity of his teachings. Being simple yet profound, Bhagavan's lucid teachings resonate with everyone. They enlighten everyone irrespective of their background and the path they follow, be it a billionaire or a tea-seller; a bhakti yogi, a karma yogi, or a jnana yogi. The rare combination of simplicity and profundity in his teachings continues to attract people from far and wide.

Bhagavan was one of those few saints who belonged to no sect and prescribed no rituals or austerities. His method leading to Self-realization was treading the simple and direct paths of Self-investigation and Self-surrender,

both of which neither require going to the Himalayan caves or forests, nor taking renunciation. All he wanted from seekers was to enquire "Who am I?" To whom do the myriad thoughts occur?

These days there are many sensational terms that go under the domain of "spirituality". From past life regression to aura cleansing, people sell their so-called spirituality under different names, oblivious to the Truth. Bhagavan refrained from confusing the seeker with occult terminologies such as netherworld, astral world, etc., and always stuck to the truth of Self, which could be experienced first-hand.

In his book, "A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi", Sadhu Arunachala (Major A.W. Chadwick) writes: 'During one conversation with

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Bhagavan I remarked that I tried to shake off the body. Bhagavan replied that a man discards his clothes and remains naked and free, but the Self is unlimited and not confined in any way to the body, so how can the body be shaken off? Where can the Self leave it? The Self is all-embracing. Wherever it is, is the Self. The ultimate Truth is so simple, it is nothing more than being in one's own natural original state. However, it is a great wonder that to teach such a simple truth a number of religions should be necessary, and that so many disputes should go on between them as to which is the God-ordained teaching. What a pity! Just be one's Self, that's all.

'I remarked that people did not want simplicity. "Exactly," replied Bhagavan, "they want something elaborate and mysterious; that is why so many religions have come into existence. For example, the Christian will not be satisfied unless he is taught that God is somewhere hidden away in Heaven and cannot be reached without the help of the Church. Christ alone really knew Him and it is Christ alone who can guide us to Him. But if they are told the simple truth, 'The Kingdom of God is within you,' they are not satisfied and read some complicated and far-fetched meaning into it. It is only those who are mature that

can understand the matter in its naked simplicity.'"

The above account leaves no doubt about how simple Bhagavan's definition of spirituality was. Bhagavan rarely used spiritual jargon while answering questions, thereby not complicating the spiritual path for a seeker; instead, he simplified abstruse philosophical lessons for the benefit of all and sundry. His teachings simplify the path to Self-realization so that even a schoolboy can understand them. After all, his teachings can be contained on a single white board, using a black marker and a duster! On the infinite and eternal white board of the Self, the marker of ego keeps scribbling all its whims and inclinations. One has to erase all these scribbles using the duster of Self-enquiry. Only then can one see the infinite and eternal white board shine luminously.

Without travelling around the country or going overseas, in fact, never moving away from Tiruvannamalai once he had reached there, Bhagavan attracted seekers like a powerful spiritual magnet, irrespective of their social status. He has left behind a precedent for seekers — be simple, destroy the ego, and be eternally happy. Though being simple is not so simple, Bhagavan's lifestyle presents a perfect example. There are

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many recorded incidents of him doing work as an ordinary person - stitching leaf-plates, dressing vegetables, cooking, reading proofs received from the press, looking into newspapers and books, suggesting lines of reply to letters received, etc. – nothing being above or below his station.

One particular incident is recorded by Lakshmi Ranganadham in “Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi”. She writes: “I came to Bhagavan through my brother Narayana Rao. I stayed in Tiruvannamalai with my mother, and used to visit the Ashram. Chin-naswami was then doing the Ashram cooking all alone. I was asked to assist

him in the kitchen. One day while I was grinding rice for the next day’s *iddlies*, suddenly Bhagavan came there and asked, “Why are you doing it all alone?” Then he also sat with me and completed the grinding. Even now my hairs stand on end when I think of it!”

Through his actions and teachings, Bhagavan sent out a clear message that spirituality and spiritual life are very simple; we needlessly make them complex. As Arthur Osborne said, “Bhagavan simplified the whole Vedanta and brought it to the smallest letter in the English alphabet, “I”. ■  
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A rich variety of online satsangs were held by the Kendra recently. A Bhajan satsang was presented by Aditya and Arunima Pathak; Michael James, a regular speaker, shed light on abstruse philosophical concepts; and Swami Prakarshananda graced the screens of the devotees by delivering enlightening words. Recordings of all the events are available on the Kendra’s YouTube channel.

Important events (from Bhagavan’s time) falling in this current issue (Aug-Oct 2021) are as follows:

- Punarvasu Day: 7<sup>th</sup> August
- Janmashtami: 30<sup>th</sup> August
- Bhagavan’s Advent Day: 1<sup>st</sup> September
- Vijayadashmi: 15<sup>th</sup> October

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# The Lever and the Fulcrum

## *The Neuroanatomy of the Strategic Mind (Part-II)*

*Michael Highburger*



**B**efore picking up from the last issue on the preponderance of the strategic mind in the digital era, we should remind ourselves of the extraordinary historical circumstances we find ourselves in. Experts tell us that the predominance of the strategic mind came about over many centuries of civilization's development. If human activity is trending towards greater complexity and connectivity, we note the unprecedented changes in recent centuries, e.g. world-wide urbanization beginning in the early 19th century, industrialization, automation and mechanization enabled by the steam engine beginning in the mid-19th century, the subsequent development of the combustion engine and the advent

of communication technologies in the late 19th century, the movement toward a globalised economy in the mid-20th century and the arrival of the silicon chip, digitization and high-speed communications in the late 20th century.

The theme of far-reaching change came into sharper focus during the COVID lockdown when we found ourselves face to face with yet another bifurcation point in humanity's historical unfolding. The lockdown underscored the presence of a movement that is sweeping us ever more dramatically into the future. When we at last transition into the post-COVID era, hyper-digitalization almost guarantees that we will never return to the former way of doing business.



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If the corporate office setting began to fade from the public landscape during the COVID lock down, experts tell us that this is to be the trend for the foreseeable future, i.e. toward working online from home, doing boardrooms virtually, and serving on planning and think-tank committees by video conference. Zoom symposiums supported by A.I. will be the ‘office’ of the post-COVID era as the public sphere continues its inexorable decline—month by month—ever more virtual, ever more remote, ever more technological. Historians argue that the sea change humanity underwent over the last few hundred years will pale in comparison to what we are about to go through—are already going through.

This is the context from which to continue from the first segment of this two-part article on the increasing inclination toward the strategic mind. Born of the above mentioned historical conditions, we seem to be caught up in changes as immense in scope as any generation has ever had to face. Whether we recoil in the face of such change or revel in it, the world as we know it is passing away—and at high-speed. Change is stressful, so we will need some of Bhagavan’s practicality: conditions are as they are; our job is to intelligently assess the nature of

the storm and put our resources to work in navigating it. The key will be making sure we keep the big view in sight, that is, the clarity, vision, and understanding of Bhagavan’s teaching, which is relevant in any historical circumstance.

### **Attentional Wandering**

In the first segment, we borrowed language from neuropsychology to better understand what direction our response to the increasing dominance of the strategic mind may need to take. We ended the segment alluding to neuropsychological studies surrounding the effects of intensive device use, among them, a finding that intensive device use stimulates left-hemispheric denotative consciousness and atrophies right hemispheric intuitive awareness. Neuropsychological language becomes relevant here as a whole set of issues surrounding changes to the internal environment of the mind and brain come to the fore, not least of all attentional deficits. Closer to home are studies that suggest that *attentional wandering* is correlated with cardio-vascular disease, depression, and anxiety—three epidemics of the 21st century.

This study echoes a line from *Talks* when Bhagavan was asked what the measure of progress in the spiritual life was, to which he responded: ‘the

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absence of thoughts in the mind' (*Talks* §618). What Bhagavan seems to be describing here is a healthy right-hemispheric global function, free from attentional wandering. If cardio-vascular disease is the number one medical cause of death, and if depression and anxiety are rampant in the contemporary world, we will do well to take Bhagavan's suggestion and find ways to train attention and recover a healthy balance between strategic and global awareness functions.

The Harvard neuropsychologist Richie Davidson did a study at his lab at the University of Wisconsin, Madison involving hundreds of subjects—among them, some Tibetan monks—and found that attentional wandering was widespread but that seasoned meditators were relatively free of it. He also showed in related studies that attention is trainable, which should come as no surprise to *sadhakas* and Ramana devotees. But even Ramana devotees may be shocked to discover how unruly their minds are in the hyper-digital era.<sup>1</sup>

One of the tests used by Dr Davidson was monitoring subjects' breath for 30 minutes and having them press an electronic button at every ninth breath. Here was a simple measure of the subject's ability to remain focused

on the breath-counting for an extended period. Those with meditation experience performed quite well while others did not. This is a test any of us can perform at home, though even meditators may be surprised how difficult it can be, especially following periods of intensive device use.

Unlike members of Bhagavan's generation, most of us in the hyper-digital age would not be able to successfully perform this simple exercise but would find thoughts intruding already by the second or third breath. We may even lose count before reaching the fifth breath. It can be frustrating, even bruising, to discover that we have no real way of regulating our minds. If on the other hand, we are able to perform this exercise for extended periods without undue intrusion by thoughts or losing our count, then we are probably enjoying a healthy balance between the strategic and global awareness functions and are not using our devices compulsively. But why do digital technologies aggravate attentional wandering?

Among other things, intensive device use may cause elevated cortisol levels in the blood. Cortisol is a stress hormone that arouses alertness under stressful conditions when the adrenal glands are activated to ensure

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Richie Davidson in a public talk at Upaya Zen Center.

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maximal response in an emergency. Attentional wandering is just one of its effects. What do elevated cortisol levels in the blood feel like? It is that jittery feeling we get when panic or stress sets in. It can also occur after prolonged device use.

The New York neuropsychologist, George Bonano spent the last 35 years of his career studying stress and anxiety disorders and found that, from a purely neurological point of view, anxiety is nothing other than fluctuating attention. Effective treatment, he says, boils down to stabilized attention.

Bhagavan, being of the pre-digital era, didn't have to contend with devotees suffering chronic anxiety or stress disorders endemic to the digital age. But he did know about attentional wandering and flitting attention and offered his own antidotes.

When in distress, people sometimes resort to intoxicants which seem to give temporary relief. But intoxicants compound suffering long-term by necessitating repeated use and invariably result in a diminished sense of personal power and self-worth. Religious traditions have, therefore, always warned against their use. Digital engagement as compensation for the isolation brought on by COVID lockdowns, for example, gives temporary relief but

simultaneously compounds the feeling of isolation by compartmentalising our attention within the strategic mind. Such anxiety calls for compassion and a wholesome response (e.g. regular meditation practice). The art is looking at the impulse to device use and working with it patiently, recognising the vast scope of challenges we face in the contemporary era. The insecurity and apprehension brought about by rapid change calls for empathy rather than censure. If an addiction acquired over long years cannot be overcome all at once, habituation to heavy device use likewise requires handling it with patient care over an extended period.

### **Purification of the Mind**

Creating space within the mind as it pertains to attentional wandering, Bhagavan tells us, hinges on purification of the mind which ultimately means reducing thoughts in the mind and seeing the non-self nature of the strategic mind. It means abandoning thought as a refuge. But how do we do this practically? Bhagavan's principle method was *vichara*, i.e. inquiring into the nature of the strategic mind. We investigate the longing to take refuge in thought. Upon discovering through inquiry that the strategic mind is not our home, apprehension increases due to not finding anything substantial or lasting to take hold of. The intensity of

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this fear is the cause of further clinging to the strategic mind as home, hence a recurring cycle. The transition from thinking to global attention depends on detaching from concepts and allowing our attention to pitch its tent in *field awareness* which has no centre but contains and imbues the whole. Overstimulation of the strategic mind can be detected in our inability to tolerate paradox, our inability to appreciate the nuance that undergirds reality at every level.

### The Uncreated Light

If the Self is the uncreated light that illumines all things, the strategic mind's light is not its own but is borrowed from the Self. Compartmentalized, dissociated and disconnected, the strategic mind imagines it can stand apart from the Self, that it can know the Self as an object. But there is no such privileged place of reference. Just as we saw in the first segment that there is no place for Archimedes to set his fulcrum except on the very earth he proposes to move, the Self cannot be a mere object in the universe (nor in any *model* of the universe), but is rather the *container* of the universe. Nothing lies outside It, not even the knower. The strategic mind's modelling of the Self through system-thinking is born of a

methodological blind spot. It names, theorises, and speculates about the Self but cannot inhabit the Self. The strategic mind only knows the Self as a representation, and imagines that its representation is the thing-in-itself.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it confuses the map with the territory. Because the strategic mind's representations are *all it knows*, it assumes they are *all there is*. In classical language, this is called *maya*, namely, taking the world of representations (appearances) as reality. The strategic mind or the thinking mind (*manas*) is one of the sense faculties (*indriyas*), a *tool* of consciousness. But it is not pure consciousness itself. The trouble begins when the tool mistakes itself for the source. Bhagavan's inquiry is designed to expose this confusion and reveal the strategic mind's tool-nature. Inquiry confirms what Bhagavan always said about the ego, that it is insubstantial. But it is not enough to know this *theoretically*, Bhagavan tells us. He wants us to know it *experientially*: 'When the mind comes to the end of its resources and stands baffled before the unanswerable question, then a higher power takes charge of the mind and the Self stands revealed.'<sup>3</sup>

Once seeing directly that representations are not the absolute, we begin to

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2 *The thing-in-itself (Kant's Ding an sich) are objects as they are.*

3 'The Bhagavan I Know', Voruganti Krishnayya, Ramana Smrti, p. 182.

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bridge the gap between representational consciousness and global awareness.

### **Searching Where It Cannot Be Found**

The reader may recall an oft-quoted story of Nasruddin, when one late night, his neighbour found him on his knees under the streetlamp in front of his house frantically searching for a key. When asked where he had dropped it, the Mullah said, ‘I dropped it inside the house, but it is very dark in there; out here there is more light.’

We laugh at this story, but it underscores the fool’s errand we are on in our spiritual search in this age of compulsive thinking. To be sure, the realm of the strategic mind is bright, lucid, clear, and tangible whereas the path that leads to the Beyond is hidden from view, cloaked in darkness. Confining our search to the realm of the strategic mind, however, is looking for Bhagavan where he cannot be found. In traditional language, identification with the strategic mind (or with the body, the personality, our achievements or anything else) is called egoism. In former times, it was viewed as evil—a demon or a devil. But Bhagavan did not see it that way. When he saw narcissistic delusion manifesting in a devotee, rather than rebuke, he exhibited patience and compassion. He knew that rather than delusion be-

ing a demon or a devil, our egoism is more a wound, born of ignorance. He did not condemn ego unduly because he understood intuitively that judgement and condemnation only drive the narcissistic impulse deeper into the unconscious, thereby increasing its destructiveness. For him, ego was not something to be killed—after all, he said, the ego is non-existent—but something to be *seen through*.

It was thus natural for Bhagavan to treat all people equally. He knew that each of us is equally disadvantaged by our confusion, but simultaneously endowed with the same perfect inheritance. He knew that none were inherently more equipped spiritually than any other because spiritual progress centres on overcoming this singular misconception. Social status or higher learning are no guarantees and in fact, to the extent we are identified with our social standing or our learning, we are trapped in identification with the strategic mind.

### **Bhagavan’s Re-emerging Silence**

Now it should be said that vichara is an operation that begins in the strategic mind. How ironic. But even Bhagavan likened the ego to the stick used to stir the funeral pyre, which will itself eventually be consigned to the flames. Inquiring into it reveals its true nature as a mere servant and not as king, restoring

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the balance needed to open a pathway to the Self. Of course, exposing the strategic mind with mere words and ideas does not count as inquiry, and cannot on its own deliver us from its snares. Whatever we say *about* the strategic mind is merely conceptual, born of its realm, nothing more than one more piece of knowledge in its repertoire. In other words, seeing the strategic mind's trick is not the same as being free from identification with it. Herein lies the limitation of any spirituality of words: words originate in the strategic mind. How can words take us beyond words? Bhagavan himself insists that we should not look for our freedom in words:

*There is no need for endless reading. One should know one's Self with one's own eye of wisdom. The Self is within the five sheaths; but books are outside them. Since the Self has to be inquired into by discarding the five sheaths, it is futile to search for it in books. There will come a time when one will have to forget all that one has learned.*<sup>4</sup>

In the hyper-digitalised era where Silence has lost its 'voice', our only hope is that in recognising the problem (even if through words and ideas), we might be inspired to make incremental adjustments in the way we conduct our lives and slowly carve out a space for

Silence to re-emerge. The intention on its own is already a small victory. After all, we are not trying to get the strategic mind or the digital world to go away, but to bring ourselves into a harmonious relationship with them.

The compulsion towards obsessive thinking is very strong. To overcome it, we repeatedly endeavour to shift our attention away from thinking, a thousand or more times on the meditation cushion. If we fail over and again, we steadfastly redouble our efforts each time. We practise patience in the face of perpetual failure and the consequent discouragement, and trust that someday, some way, our capacity for attention free of compulsive thinking will slowly develop. If such practice is uncomplicated, it is nevertheless very challenging, given the strength of the mind's habit-forces. Each time we stumble, we pick ourselves up again. Being free of the compulsion to think is what Bhagavan called Silence, not the absence of spoken words (*material silence*) but the absence of compulsive thoughts, words and chatter in the mind (*inner silence*).

### **Conclusion**

We recognise that digital devices are here to stay and are an integral part of 21st-century living. But we guard

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<sup>4</sup> *Who Am I?* § 23.

<sup>5</sup> *2 Corinthians* 5:7.

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against device addiction and use our devices in a balanced manner. If the mind is insistent during the appointed times of digital rest, we take it as a sign that we need to intensify active training of attention through meditation, recitation, puja, pilgrimage, walks in nature and digital fasting. We may also need to ensure that our socialising is more grounded in face-to-face interactions rather than exclusively virtual ones, at least as much as possible given Covid restrictions.

In the 20th century, it was said that the thirty centimetres separating the head from the heart is the journey of a lifetime; in the 21st century, the age of neuroscience, we say that the eight centimetres separating the left hemisphere from the right is the journey of a lifetime.

This is the journey Bhagavan is

calling us to, namely, the short distance from the conceptual mind to the intuitive mind. The journey means giving up the impulse to compulsive thinking and the certainty thinking seems to confer on us. In exchange, we access a deeper knowing of the Heart that does not lend itself to words. From denotative thinking to intuition, from object awareness to global awareness, from theoretical knowledge to Self-Knowledge, from concept to insight, from the worldly to the sacred, from the mundane to the transcendent, from the head to the Heart, from ego to Self, we learn *to walk by faith and not by sight*.<sup>5</sup> We learn to trust in the unseen, to be free of involuntary words, ideas, concepts and thoughts in order, at long last, to take rest in Bhagavan's Silence. ■

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### Talk 168

It was mentioned to Sri Bhagavan that a Self-realised being needs no food, etc.

M.: You understand according to your state only.

### Talk 179

Before leaving at 3-30 p.m., Mrs. Dodwell raised a second question, asking what is meant by *neti-neti*.

M.: There is now wrong identification of the Self with the body, senses, etc. You proceed to discard these, and this is *neti*. This can be done only by holding to the one which cannot be discarded. That is *iti* alone.

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# The Silence of Music

Marie Elangovan



Painting by Rajeswari Bhimana

**B**hagavan Ramana instructed those who came to him with queries regarding their spiritual quest. Although he advocated self-enquiry, he never excluded anyone based on their vocations or life paths because, in his words, ‘...freedom from bondage is our real nature. It is not to be freshly acquired. All that is necessary is to get rid of the false notion that we are bound.’<sup>1</sup>

It is commonly accepted that the quality of an accomplished musician is to become one with the music. This kind of self-negation is believed to be the mark of a truly evolved musician, for whom there is no difference between inspiration and the music created. But is it possible to attain

liberation through the practice of music? What role can music play in our spiritual development?

Personal experiences and a yearning to realise the ultimate can be expressed through music. Music has the potential to become a bridge between sensory experiences and the spiritual world, awakening us to the spiritual journey. Swami Vivekananda said: ‘Music is the highest form of art and for those who understand it, the highest form of worship’.<sup>2</sup>

The etymology of the Sanskrit word swara, ‘swa’ meaning ‘self’ and ‘ra’ meaning ‘to throw light upon’, brings to the fore the process of an artist who goes deep within to bring the essence of the Self to the surface.

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6 P19, *Be As You Are, The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Penguin UK ed. 1991

7 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 5, Epistles – First series*



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A musician can reach out and touch others to their core only when the music flows from within.

Like the spiritual guru, the music guru teaches the disciple to turn attention within and to stay there. A fundamental part of musical training is to learn to tune the tanpura and other instruments, the underlying precondition being to silence the mind. The musician needs to first learn to direct attention to the sound of silence. Silence is the starting point of any musical experience for both musicians and listeners. Drawing an analogy with painting, we could say: 'Silence is the canvas; the voice and instruments are the brushes and paints; the melody that springs from within are the strokes that bring colours to life'. Sound originates from the unmanifest, the imperturbable and unchangeable silence.

According to Joseph Campbell, the most profound aspect of AUM is not the sound but the silence that surrounds it. In his book, 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces', he writes: 'The silence surrounding the syllable is the unknown. The syllable itself is God as creator-preserver-destroyer but the silence is God Eternal, absolutely uninvolved in all the openings-and-closings of the round'. The vibration of the sound Aum manifests in the form of seven notes or saptaswaras

through the combination of the life force or vital breath (Prana) with fire (Anala). The seven notes sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni are derived from the vibrational energy of the sound AUM. It is said that Narada appeared as a sanyasi before Thyagaraja and gifted him with the Swararnava (ocean of knowledge). This concept is elaborated in a shloka which can be translated as: 'In the centre of the body is the prana (vital breath), in the centre of prana is dhvani (sound), in the centre of dhvani is the nada (musical sound) and in the centre of nada is Sadasiva, the supreme Lord'. In India, the art of music is called 'nadopasana', i.e. the worship of the Supreme through musical sound.

The musician, Tansen of the Mughal emperor Akbar's court, was very talented and there are several legends about him. It is said that when he sang raga Malhar, clouds would get heavy with rain and when he sang raga Deepak, earthen lamps would spontaneously begin to glow with light. One day, Akbar expressed his desire to meet Tansen's guru and hear him sing. Tansen said: 'My guru, Swami Haridas, will not come to your court. He isn't employed by you like I am. He lives in a hut in the jungle and sings only when he feels like.' Akbar said, 'If he won't come, I will go to meet

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him.’ When Akbar and Tansen reached Swami Haridas’s home, he found him sitting outside in silence, his musical instruments beside him. When Swami Haridas began to sing, Akbar was transported to a state of spiritual bliss. Akbar asked Tansen: ‘Why don’t you sing as well as Haridas does?’ Tansen folded his hands and replied, ‘Between Guru Haridas and me there is a vast difference. I sing for my king while he sings for the Lord of the universe. He is a musician of a much higher court.’ It is said that Akbar became silent on hearing these words.

Saint Thyagaraja also refused to acknowledge any man as his Lord, reserving that title for God alone. It is said that in 1802, King Sarabhoji, hearing of Thyagaraja’s musical prowess, invited him to sing in his court. In those days, musicians sang praises of the kings while performing at courts for which they received royal gifts of gold and land. Thyagaraja refused the invitation saying that he was already singing in the court of his Lord Rama and would not sing for any mortal.

Rabindranath Tagore claimed that music is the purest form of art, many seer-poets seeking to express the universe in terms of music. Tagore was sure that the singer has everything within him. The notes come from his very life, not from materials gathered

from outside.

When a musician surrenders to divine vibrations, it brings a deep sense of peace, expressed in the saying, ‘Shruti Mata, Laya Pita’. This means that ‘Shruti or the primordial musical tonality is mother for a musician; and rhythm, associated with Lord Nataraja’s damaru which beats the pulse of creation, is father’. When the music produced is aligned with shruti, it quietens the minds of listeners who experience the unspoken language of the divine. The greatest musicians are the ones who are able to align themselves completely with the shruti, as their music acquires a higher dimension. It becomes effortless and flows like nectar. The first and foremost connection for a musician is with silence, then with shruti and finally in exploring alap (improvisation segment), swaras, lyrics, laya (rhythm) and bhava. Art is a sacred ritual in India, and the spiritualization of music leads to the dissipation of fears and inhibitions in the performer. As a result, the performer presents art in an unselfconscious way, becoming one with the artistic creation. Technique and presentation are transcended to achieve this oneness.

The rishis of ancient India knew that sound waves affect natural forces, so created mantras to be recited to

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maintain order and harmony in the universe. Chanting mantras is also believed to help develop mental powers and take one to a higher level of consciousness. Hence, mantras are recited for the purpose of purification and spiritual enlightenment. The Vedas were the earliest written documents in which syllables were vocalized, and melody with rhythm added to them. The science of music was elaborated in the Gandharva Veda, one of the Upavedas. In the Vedanta-sutra 4.22, it is written, 'By sound vibration one becomes liberated'. Vedantic literature has parts elucidating the use of sound as a spiritual tool. These assert that the entire cosmic creation began with a sound: 'By His utterance came the universe' (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.2.4).

Born of the Vedas, Narada knew true music. He made it clear to mankind that the unattainable Lord lived not in Vaikuntha, nor in the Sun, nor did he belong to the ones doing acts of penance. The Lord could be found wherever His devotees sang with devotion, for He loved music. While music might not be a direct path to liberation, it can help in purification and in removing the veil that prevents us from experiencing our true blissful

Self. Bhagavan said: 'The fact is that you are ignorant of your blissful state. Ignorance supervenes and draws a veil over the pure Bliss'.<sup>3</sup>

In an online post (for which the source could not be established), when addressing the query of a musician wanting to know if liberation can be obtained by the practice of music alone, Bhagavan is reported to have said: 'Thyagaraja and others did not attain moksha through their songs but from the ecstasy that sprang forth from within as a result of their realisation of the ultimate. Their songs were just an expression of their blissful state.'

Who other than Bhagavan could illuminate devotees in such a direct and profound way, revealing the stillness of the Self which not even music can enter? The practice of Indian classical music reminds us that while cultivating the sublime, we should work towards attaining moksha, the ultimate goal of human existence. Just like the gopikas who left their homes on hearing Krishna's flute, music teaches us that we need to find our way home, where we belong, to realise the Self and be liberated. ■

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# Flight of Freedom

*Neera Kashyap*



*Mughal miniature painting: Radha and Krishna sheltering from the rain.*

Is the heart the hollow of a tree where  
the rain of love both wets and protects?

Is it our love that radiates to others?

Unlimited, unbound.

It draws one to rest in the heart cave,  
to contemplate life below a tree in full flower  
to gather it all under an umbrella?

Emboldened by the rain our women go forth -  
rain fills their pots, drenches them, fills their hearts.  
Beneath the bower, Kamadhenu bends head and heart.

It is the peacock that roosts on the tree, luxuriant  
with foliage, turns its head to the  
sky to hearken to thunder and rain,  
as birds fly into a swirl of cloud and lightning,  
free of fear.

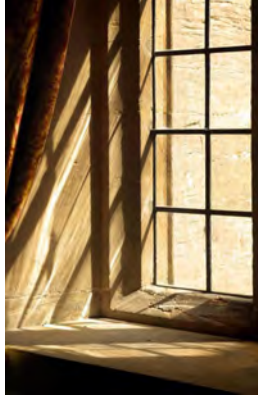
*--First published in Quiver Review, April 2021.■*

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# Prisoners of Destiny

*Bharati Mirchandani*



**B**uddha told a grieving mother that he would bring her son back to life if she brought him mustard seeds from a house which had seen no death. He could have said instead: a house where none has been in forced confinement! After all, he'd felt trapped within the role of royalty; he too had needed to escape. With the pandemic, people all over the globe have experienced being socially and physically distanced from everything familiar, be it people, surroundings or activities. Further, we have also felt, either directly or second hand, the trauma of being totally alone while unwell; with none to comfort, help, clean or feed; even deprived of direct eye contact! Those needing intensive care in hospitals were denied access

to both darkness and silence, being plunged into unrelenting bluish-white light, with gadgets beeping, whirring or panting amidst a cacophony of humanoids (dressed like space travelers) making muffled sounds through layers of masks. So ubiquitous is the experience of confinement that we each need to face what that means.

Pandemic isolation is not like being in jail, but the differences are small compared to the similarities. The fear of being attacked by other inmates or brutalized by wardens is replaced by the diffused fear of being attacked by an invisible viral enemy that no stone wall or iron bar can keep out. Psychologists who study the effects of isolation list depression and suicidal thoughts, delusions and

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paranoia, nightmares and insomnia, substance abuse and a long term lowering of a personal sense of agency as outfalls. This feeling of hopelessness and diminished self-esteem leads to long-term withdrawal, which is totally unlike the dynamic and creative monastic isolation of self inquiry.

We can say we are all prisoners of our own prarabdha. True, prarabdha may be of our own making, but we no longer remember those past actions that led us to this place. We feel trapped by the unknown, and full of fear, with imagined horrors adding to whatever is happening.

Another kind of imprisonment is of the organs within a body in imbalance. I share a rather personal example: My mother had a minor nasal surgery under general anaesthesia. She did not recover, yet she was discharged. Medical follow-up over the next six months could not establish why her health was visibly deteriorating. By the time the cause was identified, (an infection of the pericardium, the outer covering of the heart) the heart was hugely swollen, taking up the space required for the lungs to pump air the body needs to function. The rib cage had become just that, a cage!

With medication, the pericardium heals and lungs resume their function. But though the swelling subsides, it also hardens, and the scarred tissue becomes a tight shell, constraining the heart muscles.<sup>9</sup>

There have been instances of spiritual awakening occurring to people while they were physically in jail. Sri Aurobindo was a politically sensitive young man, freshly returned to India after education in England. He became active in the country's freedom movement, and was soon imprisoned on suspicion of involvement in a bombing case. In *Tales of Prison Life*<sup>10</sup>, he writes, "I was not one inclined to remain without activity but it is also equally true that I have spent long hours in solitary musings. Hence, it was difficult to reconcile myself to such a weakened state of the mind where just a few days of solitude had left me so agitated. There is a saying that he who can bear solitude must either be a god or a brute; it is beyond the capability of mere mortals to be thus... the present experience made me realize the essential truth in it." He decided that he would change his personality a 180 degrees. Days of intense prayer followed and a total

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<sup>9</sup> We were lucky this second imprisonment was stalled by other means.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.sriarobindoinstitute.org/saioc/Sri\\_Aurobindo/alipore\\_bomb\\_case/tales\\_of\\_prison\\_life\\_v2#mental-agony](http://www.sriarobindoinstitute.org/saioc/Sri_Aurobindo/alipore_bomb_case/tales_of_prison_life_v2#mental-agony)

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transformation occurred.

To quote his own words: “I was so terrified of losing my mental balance that I ...called upon God with intensity and prayed fervently for Him to protect me from such a fate. Immediately, a great peace descended upon my mind and heart. A cooling sensation spread over my entire body. The restless mind became relaxed and joyful. I experienced a state of indescribable bliss. I felt as if I was lying on the lap of the World-Mother just as a child does, with a sense of complete security and utter ease. From that very moment, my suffering in prison evaporated.”

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years imprisoned. He said later<sup>1</sup>, “I found solitary confinement the most forbidding aspect of prison life. There was no end and no beginning; there is only one’s own mind, which can begin to play tricks.”

“It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man’s freedom is a prisoner

of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness.

“When I walked out of prison that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.”

Vinoba Bhave, Mahatma Gandhi, Jay Prakash Narayan—all were spiritual giants who were imprisoned, often under harsh conditions. Their spiritual sadhana in jails has been documented. There are many curious stories of the saint Neem Karoli Baba’s time in jail. Much like the invisible virus, the walls and bars could not contain him. He was often seen wandering outside and cordially cooperate with being locked up again!

A lesser-known example is of Michael Clegg, jailed in 1992 in Florida, USA for manufacturing Ecstasy, an

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<sup>11</sup> BBC 2013 report

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illegal drug. While in prison, he realised that a lifetime of spiritual searching had brought him no closer to the elusive state he was seeking, so he gave up trying. In surrender, he was overwhelmed with relief and bliss.<sup>12</sup> This event of deliverance deepened over the next few years as layers of preconditioning peeled away, like the leaves of an onion, to reveal the 'Eternal Pearl of Consciousness'.

Ramana Maharshi never went to jail. Nor did his behaviour ever indicate that he felt confined by his body-mind frame. His early years were particularly marked by total indifference, even neglect, of his body. When young Venkataraman arrived at Arunachala on 1 September 1896, three days after leaving his home in Madurai, where he had left a note saying that he was going 'in search of my Father, and in obedience to his command...' he alighted the train and joyfully headed straight into the magnificent Sri Arunachaleswar temple. The gates of the three high compound walls were open, as though in welcome. All the doors, including the one leading to the sanctum sanctorum were open. Very strangely, no one was present at the sanctum. Venkataraman stood before the murti and declared, 'Father, I have come.' He was home! He never left

Arunachala again.

For many months he remained within the temple precincts. Lost in meditation, urchins would often heckle him. Seshadari Swamigal, among others, would chase them away and occasionally put some food into his mouth. Venkataraman then moved to an underground vault called patala lingam which was a dark, dank tiny room with a lingam. For a while the urchins did not see him there, but many insects and rodents did. The unmoving young teenager remained lost in bliss. At an age when exuberance of energy makes lads restless, he sat without moving, without eating, for days on end.

Some pious people decided that instead of doing abhishekam to the usual stone idol, they would do it to this person who appeared to be a living god. They did not realise that as they lifted him, chunks of his skin and flesh tore off, as he had been stuck to the floor due to the congealing of blood and other body discharges. Sri V S Sundaram, Maharshi's grand-nephew, told me that the scars never disappeared. He had to learn to walk again. The long stick he always carried was not merely an aid; without it, he could not even stand. Venkataraman had been about 6'2", I was told, but sheer neglect of the body during those early

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*12 From the cover blurb, Onions to Pearls, by Satyam Nadeen, New F\*r\*e\*dom Press*



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years made him many inches shorter. There certainly was no attachment to the body, so there was no bondage on that front.

Ramana had reached home. Home should be the opposite of prison. Yet A. Devaraja Mudaliar's records<sup>2</sup> show that Bhagavan longed to be away from the ashram that grew around him. "I wanted to run away from all this crowd and live somewhere unknown, freely as I liked." Three times he tried to escape, and all three attempts failed.

When someone remarked that Sri Ramana did not approve of many

things happening at the ashram, then why did he, who had neither ties nor desires, remain here?<sup>3</sup> Bhagavan responded, "What can I do? If I go off to the forest and try to hide, what will happen? They will soon find me out. Then someone will put up a hut in front of me and another person at the back, and it will not be long before huts will have sprung up on either side. Where can I go? I will always be a prisoner."

And we shall ever be prisoners of his love. ■

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13 Day by Day with Bhagavan, P275-276

14 Sadhu Arumachala: Reminiscences, p90

### Talk 179

Mr. Frydman had asked Swami Ramdas something, to which he replied that there would be no more births for himself. The engineer had pointed out there should be no anxiety regarding rebirth. There will be the same Rama, the same Ramdas, the same search for Rama and the same bliss of realisation. What objection could be there for the repetition of this Rama-Lila? Ramdas had admitted that there could be no objection, that it would be an enjoyment and a game. The engineer further said that Ramdas added that Ramdas had found Rama merged in Him and happy in that union. They are the same, still there was Ramdas, there was Rama, there was the union, there was the Bliss. That is eternal. Saying it, he asked what Sri Bhagavan would say to it.

M.: It is all as true as the present events.

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# Tales from Arunachala: Part-1

*Swagat Patnaik*



[I begin this series of articles assuming there will be an ever-increasing number of visits to Arunachala. I hope to chronicle the experiences and events of each visit to the beloved mountain.]

Ever since my first visit to Arunachala in 2019, I had been longing to go back to the mountain for a longer stay. The relatively slow-paced rustic quality of the place, pious nature of the people, and the flow of the gentle breeze carrying the touch of the sacred mountain calms the soul. In these quiet moments, one wonders what is it that pulls us here? What nudges us to momentarily give up some of our countless desires in order to seek refuge in Arunachala?

The last year (2020) had been especially tough for me. The dread of the Covid pandemic along with the

pressures of working from home had inflamed a longing for a retreat of some kind. After a few months of discussions with a friend, we decided to visit Tiruvannamalai in December of that year, when the pandemic had let a little. We also decided to travel from Bangalore on my friend's bike as that would be an adventurous change from our lockdown routines. Thus, with limited gear and some excitement, we started our journey. Our bike ride was quite uneventful, though we did take some unintended detours. We had planned to share the driving, but I soon realized that I was no longer accustomed to highway traffic. So I mostly sat on the backseat, mentally complaining about the uncomfortable ride, watching the passing countryside, and anticipating being in the presence of Arunachala.

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Interestingly, my friend did not share my excitement about visiting Arunachala. Even though I had shared some heartfelt comments about the greatness of the place, the holy mountain did not invoke much interest in him. He was mainly interested in the adventure of the bike ride and in visiting a new place with some company. About four hours into our journey, it was evening and we were getting close to Tiruvannamalai. The air had become considerably cooler and we could smell whiffs of fresh rain. Further, owing to our physical proximity to the sacred reverberation of Arunachala, we grew more silent. I was using the GPS map application, yet found myself staring at the nearby mountains, hoping to spot Arunachala. Gradually I noticed that I found it hard to chatter mundanely, as a quietude had begun to descend on me. All I could think of was how I had been away from Arunachala for such a long while, and it was only due to Grace that I was returning to its extraordinary presence.

It was late evening when we reached Arunachala and checked into our hotel. I could feel the grand presence of the mountain but could only see its outline from my window, as that night was particularly dark. Even then, I did not share my thrill of being this close to Arunachala with my friend, as I did

not wish to annoy him with my enthusiasm. After a little rest, I freshened up and went to call my friend for dinner. I discovered that he was asleep and when I woke him, he said, in an oddly surprised tone, that there indeed was something mystical about the place. He said he had felt this as soon as his head hit the pillow. It was one of the first times that he consciously felt a palpable sense of peace due to the environment. This was quite a revelation for him, and for the rest of the evening, he had an unusually pleasant demeanor.

The next day we started the *pradakshina* in the afternoon with a plan to visit the main temple on our way back. As taught by a monk on my last visit, we started the walk after paying obeisance at the Manakula Vinayakar Temple near Sri Ramanashramam. Furthermore, in order to be able to give *dana* during the *pradakshina*, we had collected a lot of loose change. Each time we came across someone in need, we would give some coins and carry on. This slowed us down, but also allowed us to interact with many people as we walked. We halted at all the *Asta Lingams*, paid our respects, rested for a while in the coolness of the temples, and then moved ahead. Of all the lingams, our visit to Niruthi Lingam was the most peculiar. The priest there was

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tall, dark and completely covered with ash. It was a little unnerving to be in his presence. His eyes were bloodshot, and he didn't speak. After going into the sanctum, he made the devotees stand in a formation, performed an *arti* to the lingam, and gave us blessings individually. He kept his hand on our heads, closed his eyes and seemed to chant *mantras* mentally. The experience was rather puzzling and we both felt a strange silence within. We came out of the sanctum a little dazed, sat for a while in the shade before continuing with the pradakshina.

While walking at our gentle pace I tried memorizing some of the landmarks of the pradakshina route. By this time my friend had become good at identifying people in need, and was enthusiastically giving them *dana*. This continued till we reached Arunachaleswar temple, where our interest in others diminished. We were both overwhelmed by the atmosphere and the grandeur of the gopurams. We became calm and absorbed the moon-like coolness of the place. The many *murtis*, the marvelous granite carvings, and the sheer vastness of the place left us in awe. We queued up for our turn for *darshan* of Shiva followed by the *darshan* of Parvati. The bustle of devotees and the architectural splendour near the sanctum made us feel a curious

anticipation, much like the excitement of children playing hide and seek with their mother. This anticipation culminated in great devotional joy during the darshan. The lit lamps in the otherwise dark sanctum, arrested our attention and invoked a sense of bliss. It was only when pushed by the rush of people that our sense of joyous withdrawal diminished, and we left the sanctum.

We noticed we had forgotten about the challenges of dealing with the pandemic and the lockdown. Such was the fire of Arunachala that, in an instant, it burnt our worries and uncertainties. We blissfully sat near the exit gate eating *prasadam* and thinking of our good fortune. Thus, with happy hearts and full stomachs, we completed the rest of our pradakshina. Interestingly, this pradakshina was all the more inspiring for me as I could also experience Arunachala through my friend's fresh perspective. It reminded me of the many difficulties one faces in beginning one's journey of surrender and inquiry. That day, I felt overwhelmed by the courage of seekers who abandon comforts and conditionings to take their initial steps. I hope Arunachala keeps inspiring us all to take these crucial steps every day to deepen our surrender and inquiry in following Bhagavan's teachings. ■

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# Murder Mystery

*Sharada Bhanu*



There is always a reason  
For the endless continuity  
Of suffering. For birth after birth  
And the fear- not of death,  
But dying.  
In the woods  
In the dark woods  
Long ago, there was a murder  
And a strange  
Erasure.  
The survivor  
Has lost all memory  
Of this event. S/he thinks  
she is now a body  
with a name and a frame,  
one among many.  
So starts a game  
Of Let's Pretend.

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The bizarre puzzles  
That follow, the corpses  
And killings  
That need to be solved;  
All are mere  
Re-presentations  
Of the first loss;  
They exist as diversions  
To pass time. The survivor  
Should not remember.  
S/he pretends  
To try, of course;  
The suffering is real  
Or at least  
As real as anything else.  
So s/he prays  
And meditates  
And thinks  
And lashes herself  
And cries.  
S/he goes back to the wood  
The dark wood  
Looks for the lost One,  
The hidden...

And runs away  
In terror.  
The ego prefers pain  
To dying, and  
Is smart enough  
To fail again  
And again.  
S/he must not  
*Cannot*  
Remember.  
If s/he remembered  
The body would be  
Disowned  
The Self  
Re-cognised  
All seeming others  
Would vanish  
The ancient murder would be  
Undone  
And  
The game would  
End. ■

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### **Talk 167**

A man was worried because he could not succeed in concentrating the mind.

M.: Is it not only One even now? It always remains One only. Diversity lies in your imagination only. Unitary Being need not be acquired.

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# Tenets of Vishishtadvaita

*Shiromani Vijay*



**H**induism has three main philosophies: Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita – propounded by the three acharyas: Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhavacharya respectively. All three philosophies are based on the Vedas, especially on the later sections which have the Upanishads. All three acharyas were Vaishnava – meaning that their Supreme chosen god was Maha Vishnu or Sriman Narayana. The aim of all three philosophies is that jivatma should attain paramatma. The differences lie in the means to reach this supreme goal, and also in the interpretations of paramatma and jivatama.

## **Different Interpretations of the Scriptures**

The different interpretations by

these spiritual masters are mainly expressed in their commentaries on the prasthanatraya, the three texts of knowledge leading to realisation: Upanishads, Brahmasutra and Bhagavad Gita. The three philosophies emerge from the same source, yet differ widely. This apparent paradox is because the Upanishads contain three categories of texts describing the relationship between Jivatma and Paramatma. Shankara based his Advaita on abhedasruti, Ramanuja extolled Vishishtadvaita based on ghatakasruti, and Madhva based Dvaita on bhedasruti.

Madhva, who expounded the dvaita philosophy of absolute dualism, holds that paramatma and the jivatma are different entities. There are several

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such passages in the Vedas. The most popular example is: ‘Two birds with similar qualities, reside in the same tree. One of them, Jivatma, eats the fruit, the results of his karma; whereas the other, Iswara or Brahman, shines without eating the fruit.’ (Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1-2).

Sankara based his Advaita philosophy of absolute non-dualism on the abhedasruti– abheda meaning non-different. According to Sankara, there is no difference between paramatma and jivatma. It is only our ignorance which stops us from realizing this. This philosophy is based on the interpretation of passages like “Aham Brahmasmi – I am Brahman” (Brihadaranyakaupanishad 4.10), “Sarvamkalvidam brahma – All this is Brahman” (Chandogya upanishad.3.14.1), “Neha nanastikin-chana – There are no different things” (Katha Upanishad 2.4.11).

Ramanuja based Visishtadvaita or modified non-dualism on the ghatakasruti – ghataka, meaning intermediary. This considers Iswara to be soul or antaryami – one who controls from inside – the jivatma and matter.

### **Visishtadvaita**

A brief explanation of the principles and spiritual traditions of the Vishishtadvaita school follows:

Ramanujacharya in his magnum

opus, Sri Bhashyam, a commentary on the Brahmasutras has elucidated the Vishishtadvaita philosophy. “Vishishtadvaita” means “Not Two - in a special way” or “Only one – in a special way”. The epistemology of Vishishtadvaita is based on pratyakshapramana or knowledge based on perceptions; on knowledge based on anumapramana or inference; and on knowledge based on shabdapramana or the Vedas. Followers of Visishtadvaita argue that while Advaita Philosophy is totally based on Uttara Mimamsa (starting from “Athatho brahma jignasa”), Vishishtadvaita is based on both poorva and uttaramimamsa of the Vedas from “athatho dharma jignasa” which also lays emphasis on Bhagavad kankaryam – service to the Lord.

### **Tattvatraya– The Three Fundamental Truths**

All followers of Vedanta subscribe to the view “*Tattva gnanatmuktih*”, that is, knowledge of the tattvas – fundamental truths or principles – is essential for attaining salvation. Every spiritual person who is desirous of moksha should, therefore, acquire a knowledge of the tattvas. The ontology is based on three principles known as tattvatraya.

1. Chit - sentient beings
2. Achit - non-sentient matter



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3. Ishvara - The Lord controlling both chit and achit

Let us try to understand how Visishtadvaita looks at these principles.

**Chit** refers to individual souls, also referred to as *jiva*. The essential nature of the individual soul is that it is distinct from the body, the sense-organs, the mind, the breath and the intellect. It has an inherent sense of awareness, is blissful and eternal. It is of the size of an atom, unmanifest to the senses, non-comprehensible in the sense that it cannot be thought of like matter, is without parts and is immutable. It is the substratum of knowledge and is directed and supported by the Lord to whom it is subservient.

There are innumerable souls which are divided into three categories;

–Ever-free *nityasuris* who remain infinite at all times like Garuda or Hanuman.

–*Baddhas* or bound souls who are not infinite at any time like the *jivas* in *samsara*. Some of the *baddhas* are desirous of liberation – hence are *mumukshus*.

–*Muktas* or released souls who get liberation from the bondage of *samsara* and attain *paramapada* or *vaikunta*, the abode of the Supreme Being, *Sriman Narayana*.

**Achit** refers to insentient matter in

different forms. It is subject to changes in form, though is eternal as substance. It is of three kinds–

**Prakriti** or *Misratattvam*– this is the root cause of primordial matter. It is an admixture of the *trigunas*, namely *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. **Prakriti**, through its contact with the bound soul, creates erroneous knowledge and conceals bliss. **Prakriti** is called *maya*, for it is the cause of a wonderful variety of creations.

**Shuddhatattvam**, as the name suggests, is free from *rajas* and *tamas*. It is a wonderful substance that cannot be perceived by *jivas* in *samsara*, but is visible only to *Nityas*, *Muktas* and *Ishwara*. *Vaikunta* is made of *shuddhatattvam*.

**Kala**, or time, does not have any qualities or *gunas*. It is eternal or *nitya* and all pervasive, *vibhu*. Change can take place only due to **Kala**.

**Ishwara** is the Lord that controls both *chit* and *achit*, and His essential nature is *satyam*, *gnanam*, *anandam* and *ananatam* – reality, knowledge, bliss and infiniteness. He is without blemish. These attributes define His *svarupa* or essential nature. There are six qualities associated with His nature: knowledge, strength, lordship, valour, energy and splendour, which makes Him the Supreme Being or

Bhagavan. He is endowed with all the auspicious qualities. He is bahuvyapi, the in-dweller or antaryami of all beings and all beings dwell in him. The incarnations of Bhagavan are all real. Ishvara is referred to interchangeably as Supreme Lord, Paramatma, Brahman, Bhagavan.

Chit and achit are the body of paramatma. There is an intimate connection between chit, achit and paramatma. Their relationship is inseparable, like one cannot separate the whiteness from a white cloth, unlike an earring, which can be separated from the person wearing it.



*Statue of Equality in Hyderabad*

### **The Five Concepts**

“Praapyasya Brahmano roopam,  
Praaptuscha pratyagatmaAna:

Praapyupyam phalam chaiva tathA  
Praapti virodhi cha  
Vadanti sakala Veda: setihaaAsa  
Puranaka:” (Haarita Samhita)

The above verse explains that the ultimate object of all scriptures is to clarify the true nature of the following five concepts –

1) *Brahman* – The nature and attributes of the glorious Lord, Supreme Being or Brahman

2) *Jiva*– The characteristics and qualities of the individual soul - chit, jiva or pratyagatma

3) *Upaya*– The means the jiva must adopt to attain liberation from its shackles

4) *Phalam*– The nature of bliss that awaits the jivatma upon its deliverance

5) *Virodhi*– The apparently insurmountable hurdles that trip up the individual soul at every step towards emancipation

How does Vishishtadvaita define the true nature or the swarooma of these aforementioned concepts?

The Upaya (means or methods) has five categories:

Karma yoga – Engaging in sacrifice, charity, penance, meditation, study of the shastras, acquiring control of the senses and realizing one’s Self.

Gnana yoga – Using knowledge ac-

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quired through karma yoga, meditating upon Bhagavan Srīman Narayana who is seated in one's own heart, and being in an attitude of constant contemplation/penance towards Him.

Bhakti yoga – Eliminating with the help of such jnana, which leads to blissful experiences, one's accumulated virtues and vices.

Prapatti – Surrender to Bhagavan which is very enjoyable, easy to follow, and which brings immediate results. If it is achieved once, all subsequent actions will be service to Bhagavan. This is most suitable to those who are incapable of engaging in karma, gnana, or bhakti yoga.

Acharya abhimana – For those who are incapable of engaging in any of the above upaya, the most merciful acharya, spiritual master, voluntarily takes care of his obedient sishya, disciple, teaching him the essential principles and guiding him to Paramacharya Sri Ramanuja, who will can uplift us from this material world out of his great compassion.

Prapatti (or surrender) is the very core of Vishishtadvaita and it has six limbs:

Anukulyasya sankalpa– Accepting those things that are favourable for devotion to God

Pratikulyasya varjanam– Rejecting those things that are adverse to sur-

render to God

Raksisyatiti visvasa– Considering God to be one's protector in all circumstances

Goptrtve varanam– Accepting God as one's maintainer

Atma-niksepa– Surrendering everything in God's service

Karpanya– Cultivating a humble attitude

Phalam refers to the goals or purushartha to be attained by following the upayas:

Purushartha refers to the four goals of human life: sense enjoyment (kama), economic development (artha), righteousness (dharma), and liberation (moksha)

According to Vishishtadvaita, there is the fifth and the most important phalam which is Bhagavad kainkaryam. A liberated person gets this highest phalam when he reaches Sri Vaikuntam, and as a mukta he renders eternal service to Srīman Narayana.

[Virodhi \(hurdles\)](#) – the obstacles that block us from attaining our goal are enumerated:

Svarupavirodhi– Mistaking the body for Atma, considering oneself to be independent of Ishvara and serving someone other than Bhagavan as superior.

Parathvavirodhi – considering

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someone other than Bhagavan as supreme, considering the incarnations of [Bhagavan](#) to be ordinary humans, considering Bhagavan's worshipful vigraham to be lacking in ability/power.

Purusharthavirodhi – having desire for goals other than serving [Bhagavan](#), having personal preferences in serving [Bhagavan](#) instead of following his will.

Upayavirodhi – considering other upayams not mentioned above as great, considering surrender to be too simple for attaining the desired results, considering supreme service too great to be acquired.

Prapthivirodhi – That which stops us from attaining the goal immediately – the relationship with the current body, our vices –kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, matsarya and other negative qualities.

### **Life-style of a Vaishnava:**

After acquiring knowledge of these five concepts, one should follow a worthy life-style – earning within the limits of varnasramam and vaishnava ideals, offering all such earnings to Bhagavan and Bhagavathas, consuming/accepting only as much as required to maintain the body, and serving one's acharya who has enlightened the disciple with great dedication. One should be humble in front

of Bhagavan, thinking about His greatness; humble before the acharya with awareness of his wisdom; and use discretion when with samsaris, remaining totally surrendered and without material desires. One should have deep craving to achieve the goal, faith in the means, detachment towards one's body, and mindfulness of the hurdles.

### **Relationship between God and man**

In Vishishtadvaita, the relationship with Bhagavan holds the key to liberation. To guide the mumukshus, acharyas have described the nine relationships we need to have with the Supreme Being to progress in our path towards liberation. It is only with the Supreme Being that we can have all nine relationships simultaneously.

1. Pitru-putra or visheshana-visheshyasambandha

The relationship is akin to that between father and the son – one of cause and effect. It is also referred to as the relationship between an object and its attribute. This is an eternal and inseparable relationship, illustrated by the relationship between a rose and its perfume.

2. Rakshaka-rakshyasambandha

The relationship between the independent omnipotent saviour and the completely passive, vulnerable saved.

3. Shesha-sheshisambandha

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This is a very important relationship between the owner and the owned. The jiva belongs to Ishvara and exists for His purpose alone like the relationship between Rama and Lakshmana.

#### 4. Bhartru-bharyasambandha

The relationship between the supporter and the supported. This is like the bond between a chaste husband and wife - irrevocable and permanent.

#### 5. Jñātru-jñeyasambandha

The relationship between the knower and the object of knowledge. The essential nature of the jiva is knowledge or consciousness. The jiva therefore can “know” itself, its Lord and the relationship between them. It can also rationally assess its relationship to the external material world. The knowledge of the jiva attains its fulfilment only when it is directed at knowing its true objective – the Supreme Being with all His attributes.

#### 6. Sva-svamisambandha

The relationship between property and the proprietor. All the faculties that one possesses belong to the Supreme Lord. Therefore, jiva has to renounce all idea of possession in regard to one’s ego and actions.

#### 7. Sharira-sharirisambandha

The relationship of the self with the body. Just as the body is pervaded by

the individual self, jiva, the universe and all selves are pervaded by the Supreme Being.

#### 8. Adhara-adheyasambandha

This is an important relationship between the supporter and the supported. The Lord creates the universe and then enters into it, supports it and governs it. The sustainer is eternal, therefore the universe and the selves are also eternal.

#### 9. Bhoktru-bhogyasambandha

The relationship between the enjoyer and the enjoyed, or the experiencer and the experienced. Srīman Narayana, the Supreme Being receives the service rendered by the jiva, who exists purely for the pleasure of the Lord. The Lord experiences the universe through the jiva.

Deep contemplation on these nine types of relationships clarifies the essential position of the jiva vis-a-vis the Supreme Being. It also makes one realise that the Saviour’s desire to liberate each and every jiva is greater than the jiva’s desire to be liberated!

In Vishishtadvaita both the philosophy and spiritual practices are intertwined for a continuous and wonderful relationship with God.

[This article is based on a talk by  
Shri Velakudi Krishnan] ■

[e-mail: shiromani.vijay@yahoo.co.in]

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# Father's Funeral

*Geetha Ravichandran*



As the pot was struck  
and the ashes strewn,  
the waves frolicked and  
the frothing ocean welcomed  
the end of another earth- born  
bone- weary being.

The sun shone mercilessly-  
unconcerned and the burning sand  
scalded our bare soles.

The horizon rolled away and sunk  
into the blue beyond of unknown depths.

It takes time to say goodbye,  
but it seemed that on that morning  
mourning was banished on the beach.

As the waves lapped our feet  
and the wind blew our faces dry  
right there besides us-  
fluttering on its fragile wings,  
was a startling golden, butterfly. ■

*[e-mail: ravichandran.geetha@gmail.com]*

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## Q & A with Michael James

*Documented by Advait Shrivastav*



**O**n 13th June 2021, Michael James, a London based seeker, answered questions from the devotees of Ramana Kendra Delhi; giving enlightening insights on abstruse philosophical concepts. Below is the summary of what transpired in this profound discourse.

Q. While crying due to an insurmountable longing for God, I wonder who is it that's crying. Is it the ego?

A. Yes, it is the ego. We have this longing only because we rise as ego and feel separate from God, who is nothing but our real nature — Satchitananda. Ego makes us think of ourselves as a finite entity which is a form composed of five sheaths limited to time and space and thus, we can't experience the infinite happiness which is our real nature. As ego, we are dis-

satisfied because anything less than infinite happiness (our real nature) can't satisfy us. We seek satisfaction in material things but ultimately we understand that no matter how much we accumulate the objects of our desire (wealth, fame, sex pleasures, etc.), we are still dissatisfied and we begin to search happiness beyond finite things. Because of the perpetual dissatisfaction, which is the very nature of ego, we always long for the infinite happiness that we actually are. Our idea of what is infinite is what we call God which is our own real nature. So long as we take God to be other than ourselves, our love for Him is divided between ourselves and God. Our love becomes perfect only when we experience God as ourselves, for which we need to know what we actually

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are, for which we need to investigate ourselves which entails surrendering ourselves. Treading the paths of self-investigation and self-surrender taught by Bhagavan is the only way to surmount this insurmountable longing for God.

Q. I try to read Vishnu Sahasranama and Ramcharitmanas with awareness but few minutes into it, my thoughts are somewhere else and am able to recite only because I remember the lines. While reciting, my awareness should be on what — meaning of what I am reciting or the words or my Self?

A. Pure awareness, which is our real nature, is always present. The problem lies in us being aware of things other than ourselves. If we know something by heart, we go on reciting it mechanically even though our mind wanders here and there but there is very little use in this type of recitation. While reciting any sacred texts, we want to attend to the words but more efficacious is to attend to their meaning and better than both is to attend to our Self. The ultimate import of these sacred texts is God, who is nothing other than ourselves. Thus, attending to ourselves is the best of all.

Q. It's not possible to remain absolutely quiet all the time since one talks with people about various

issues, watches serials, social media and news. Nevertheless, swadhyay, dhyaan, and japa are also done simultaneously. Should we completely shut out worldly talk or can we divide our time and do both?

A. The less our mind dwells on worldly things, the better. According to Bhagavan, it is not appropriate to let one's mind dwell excessively on worldly matters. Thus, our aim should be to minimize the extent to which we think about worldly matters. If we have a great enthusiasm to gossip, it is the result of our *vishaya-vasnas*. Since we do certain actions because it is necessary to do them in order to experience our *prarabdha*, we cannot avoid those actions. Yet, best of all is to keep our attention dwelling on ourselves because whatever action our mind, speech, and body are engaged in; the awareness "I am" is present as a constant background. So long as our attention slips away from ourselves, it is better to keep it dwelling on things like *swadhyay*, *dhyaan*, and *japa* than to dwell on worldly things.

Q. In "Be As You Are", Bhagavan says that after leaving the body, the soul is born immediately and keeps going back and forth. If this is the case, what happens to the concept of *swarg*, *narak*, various *lokas*, rituals of



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13 days, etc?

A. I searched “Be as You Are” but couldn’t find where Bhagavan said such a thing. The basic teaching of Bhagavan is that whichever state (swarg, narak, and the lokas) one experiences, it is just a dream and the dreamer is the ego. When the dream on earth comes to an end, either we dream another dream immediately or we subside into a state like sleep and dream later. If we do good karmas, we will experience a pleasant dream, which is called swarg; if we do only bad karmas, we experience an unpleasant dream, which is called narak. The 13 days and annual rituals are good for the doer.

Q. Amidst troublesome events, should we have an underlying feeling that things are right while practicing surrender? How would I know if I were doing this right? I’m troubled by the thought that I cannot be in states of surrender and suffering simultaneously, but that’s where I seem to be.”

A. Yes, absolutely. That’s what is surrender all about. We should accept all the troubles that we face in life since they are Bhagavan’s will and are for our own good. If we have a strong conviction that whatever is happening

is according to his will, we will then accept it as his will. In order to surrender our ego, we have to surrender our will to the will of Bhagavan. Bhagavan is infinite love and thus, he is our own real nature. Since he sees us as himself, he loves us as himself. If at all Bhagavan wants anything, he wants us to surrender our ego and remain as we actually are. The means to surrender our ego is to turn our attention back from vishaya-vasnas and grasp ourselves. According to Bhagavan, being firmly established in oneself is giving oneself to God. The extent to which we attend “I Am”, we subside and merge back into “I Am”; which is how surrender is brought about. The measure of how well we are surrendering is in how unperturbed we are by both pleasant and unpleasant things and maintain equanimity by clinging fast to “I Am”. If we are suffering, it means we aren’t surrendering and have likes and dislikes, rising as ego. Bhagavan had the most painful cancer but he bore it with perfect equanimity because he had no ego. The whole purpose of our life is to surrender to God’s will. ■

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

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# Kendra Bulletin

June – July 2021



## 27th June

Arunima and Aditya Pathak presented an evening of devotional songs as an online satsang. The brother-sister duo has been associated with the Kendra since childhood, volunteering their services for several of the Kendra's multimedia and social media projects. Together, they have also been involved in recording music for meditation, and believe in the inherent healing power of music in our lives.

In their bhajan concert, Aditya and Arunima presented some of their old favourite compositions, besides some new ones. The compositions for these songs have been originally written, composed and sung mostly by well-known writers, composers and singers. The duo sang alternatively, creating a feeling of balance and harmony, each

expressing devotion through their individual expressions. The entire presentation was soothing and had a meditative quality.



Aditya began with the rendition of 'Var De Veena Vaadini'. Penned by members of the Sri Aurobindo Society, the lyrics invoked the blessings of Ma Saraswati. Variations in the singing of the words 'Jaya Ma' created the feeling of voices coming together to make a universal call to the Mother for her

Divine grace. Arunima's rendition of 'Din Jae Din Aae' followed, a song popularized by Lata Mangeshkar. Completely immersed in devotion, Arunima's mellifluous voice was an expression of gratitude to the Lord present in her daily life. Aditya's rendition of 'Jai Radha Madhav' was a prayer to Lord Krishna worshipped as the embodiment of compassion. Arunima's 'Guru Maat Pitaa' was a hymn to the greatness of the Guru considered as friend, mother and father, and as one who shows the path to liberation.

Aditya continued with 'Sarveshwari Jagadishwari' which extolls the various facets of the divine feminine energy as being the source of all that prevails. A calming piece in these times of instability and fears was 'Prarthana Suniye Shri Bhagavan' in which Arunima prayed to the Lord to heal the world. Each song exploring different themes, the bhajan, 'Mann Re Tu Kaahe Na Dheer Dhare' sung by Aditya was based on a philosophical poem in which the poet reflects on the temporary nature of the material world. Following this Aditya sang 'Mere Mann Ke Andh Tamas Mein Jyotirmayi'. This soulful bhajan was a prayer to the Divine Mother to bestow divine light and remove ignorance. Arunima's bhajan, 'Itni Shakti Hu-

mein Dena Data' implored the Lord to bless us with courage, patience and compassion. Aditya's rendering of 'Mera Jeevan Teri Sharan' penned by the members of Sri Aurobindo Society reflected a devotee's intense longing to take refuge at the Mother's feet. Aditya concluded with 'Achyutam Keshavam' which teaches through beautiful poetry, how Lord Krishna's devotees should pray to Him in complete devotion, as exemplified by Meera, Yashoda, the gopikas and Shabari.

--Marie Elangovan

### 11<sup>th</sup> July



In a Q & A session conducted by Michael James, the arati during the live telecast reflected the amber flame on the head

and heart regions of Bhagavan's portrait - an apt symbol for the satsang, when Bhagavan's radiance illumines the hearts and minds of those on the path. Bhagavan taught the same truth for 54 years, and James is happy to explain his words over and over again in the hope that we realize the truth for ourselves.

The first 5 questions related to Self-

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investigation. James explained that repeating 'I-I-I' can serve a purpose only in the early stages of a seeker's journey. Such a person would find focusing on the subject, the Self, too abstract because the mind is accustomed to seeking objects, to clasping distinguishing features. Repeating 'I-I-I' should lead to investigating 'What arises in the body as 'I'?' Here, by 'body' Bhagavan means not the physical organ but Heart, a metaphor for describing the source of what we are, our real nature. The thought of 'I' is only ego. The body arises only after the thought 'I' arises, so it clearly cannot arise from the body. James further cited Ulladu Narpadu #29: without saying 'I' by mouth (or mind), with mind subsided, investigate where the 'I' rises; that alone is jnana marg. Attend only to the Self without thought.

The second question related to the practice of 'Who am I?' and how to concentrate on Self. James pointed out that the English translation wrongly puts the emphasis on 'Who' whereas the Tamil 'Nan Yar?' literally is 'I—who?', the emphasis being on I, the Self. Rather than concentrate, it is better to just attend to the Self. Awareness of Self exists even when body and mind fall away in deep sleep; so too with practice we gradually develop interest in the pure subject, and sat

vasanas spontaneously replace vishayavasanas. Like learning to cycle, practice makes it easier and then enjoyable. We each have to investigate and find our own way home.

Vishayavasanas get their strength only from ourselves over crores of lifetimes of looking outward. The ego for its very existence needs to grasp objects. Nan Yar #14 says one must persist in holding on to the pure Self to resolve the residual impressions that come from (what can be called) beginningless time. Repeated practice leads to vairagya and then to bhakti.

The third question: Is it true that with atmavichara questions cease to arise? James explained that the world does not exist outside our perception of it. Vishayavasanas cause the world to appear much like a film's images on a cinema screen. A few questions may arise motivated by sat vasanas, such as What am I? What causes the 'I' to arise? And though words are also vishaya, by constant attention to Self, less space is left for thoughts, questions correspondingly decreasing till a complete 180° turn occurs, and there is no more lingering awareness of other things.

The next two questions related to meditating on Bhagavan's face, his luminous eyes and smile as possibilities leading to experiencing ecstasy and

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bliss. James pointed out that Ulladu-Narpadu #20 clearly says that even seeing God is only a mental image. One needs to pay attention only to that which sees and that is the 'I' that ever shines as Bhagavan within the heart. That is the real swarupa, and that is also Ramana darshanam. Anything that appears and disappears is not real. The only reality is the 'I-am'. Is the ecstasy caused by meditating on Bhagavan's face purifying? Yes, but the ecstasy has to be investigated deeper.

The next question addressed was the ease or difficulty of the path of surrender. Surrender is as difficult as our unwillingness to let go, said James. Bhakti is the key to surrender. It also helps to remember that our prarabdha is not just a random chain of events, but especially selected by Bhagavan from the huge stockpile of sanchita to make us experience only that which is most conducive to our development in this life. So, we should refrain from feeling likes and dislikes, accepting even the most unpleasant things as His will. The deeper we go into attending to the Self, the easier it is to surrender. Surrender, after all, is nothing other than being firmly established in the Self (Nan Yar #26).

This led to the next few questions relating to karma. Bhagavan had writ-

ten in his note to his mother that what is ordained will happen, no matter how hard we try to prevent it; and what is not to happen will not occur no matter how hard we try, so the best option is to remain silent. So we should not bother about vishayavasanas, as heeding those cause agamya karma. As long as we rise as ego, we have a sense of doership, identify with our actions and add to the already huge pile of sanchita (Ulladu Narpadu #38). Actions lead to fruits of actions. However, there is a direct way to liberation – investigate the doer. By dropping doership, all three types of karma fall away. Bhagavan will take care of whatever actions need to be done.

--Bharati Mirchandani

## 25th July



Swami Prakarshanandaji, Acharya, Chinmaya Mission, Delhi began the satsang by bowing to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and singing glories of the Lord's names.

Swamiji explained that the seeker needs to tackle the biggest hurdle on the path of spiritual knowledge – Mind. For this it is necessary to focus on two aspects, namely: clarity

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of subject, which comes with right reflection; and purity of mind, which comes with complete devotion and selfless service.

Clarity comes when one reflects (mananam) on the knowledge gained after listening intently to the scriptures (shravanam), thereby gaining a correct understanding of our goal. But since the mind is deluded due to past samskaras causing it to have accumulated many presumptions, this understanding is not easily reached.

Swamiji explained this delusion by giving the example of Arjuna from the Mahabharata. Before the fighting began, when the armies were arrayed on either side of the Kurukshetra battlefield, Arjuna displayed the mental weakness of attachment. He requested Sri Krishna to take his chariot to the middle of the battlefield so he could see those in the opposite side who were likely to be killed by his superlative skill with weapons. Similarly, in any difficult situation we must closely watch the instrument of our mind. The central point of sadhana is to be witness to the functioning of the mind. Right thinking fine-tunes the instrument by clearing doubts so that the knowledge-seeking process proceeds smoothly, without obstruction.

The problem with Arjuna's mind was 'Kripanata' or 'Karpanya Do-

sha' (mental delusion due to wrong thinking). When in battle, he should not have allowed doubts to cloud his dharma of being a warrior. Due to delusion, his power of discrimination got curtailed. Discrimination grows and sharpens by practicing nitya-anityaviveka or discrimination between the real and unreal. Only when this becomes very firm, subtle and sharp does the mind understand Reality as it is. Initially, this understanding of the permanence of Brahman and the transience of the world may only be intellectual (parokshagyan); but this understanding is necessary till one has a direct experience of Reality (pratyakshagyan), and thereafter abiding permanently.

|| Nitya vastuekamBrahm tad-vy-atiriktamsarvatraanityamiti || (Tattva Bodha, verse 2)

(Meaning: There is only One that is permanent, changeless, which remains same in all periods of time, and that is Brahman. Apart from Brahman everything else is ephemeral, temporary.)

Matraasparshastukaunteyasheetoshnasukhdukhdhaal

Agamapayinoanityastanstitikshasvabharatal (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, verse14)

In the above shloka, Sri Krishna explains to Arjuna the difference

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between the ephemeral and the permanent, and how one must act in this world of duality, accepting both pleasing and unpleasing experiences with balance and equipoise. The union of sense organs with sense objects creates experiences – good or bad, joyful or sorrowful. Since this union lasts for a very short time, it is temporary (anitya). So how can experience which is the result of union of two temporary things be permanent?! By applying viveka one sees, deeply and logically, that it is the deluded mind which mistakes this temporary experience to be permanent, labelling persons and objects with names and forms, and getting attached to them through this conditioning.

In order to get rid of delusion and invoke the power of discrimination, one needs to develop tolerance (tiksha) or the power of accepting all situations with a balanced mind. This mind now understands the ‘anityatvam’ (transience/impermanence)

of the world as ‘mithya’. Mithya in Vedantic terminology is defined as something which does not have an independent existence, but appears to be real to the ignorant mind.

The reality is that there is only one Truth, an Absolute Reality which expresses itself in different forms. Due to our wrong understanding and conditioning, we get attached to names and forms as persons and objects. This implies that Self (satya) is the substratum of the whole universe and names and forms are unreal appearances (asatya). In other words, there is no existence of this non-existence, and to the Real there is no non-existence. One who knows both these aspects sees the unreal as unreal with no independent existence of its own. Real always IS, and exists independently without any support because it is itself the substratum of everything. It is Self-effulgent, It is Consciousness Itself and the real goal of human existence.

–Rashmi Vyas

#### **Talk 184**

M.: To imagine Muladhara at the bottom, the Heart at the centre, or the head at the top or over all these, is all wrong. In one word, to think is not your real nature.

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## 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](mailto:editor.dp@rkdelhi.org) with the subject line: 'Letters to the Editor'

Dear Editor,

Nice to read DP issue of May-July 2021. I really appreciate Advait Shrivastav's article 'The Healing Power of Bhagavan's Teachings'. I agree that many of our worldly approaches to healing ourselves are quite superficial. The panacea to life's suffering can only be found through total surrender. Among other articles I particularly liked was Christopher Quilkey's beautifully written article giving us a larger perspective on our current pandemic. I am sure the magazine will keep connecting with the readers and will reach new heights.

*Swagat Patnaik* (Former Editor of Direct Path)

Dear Advait,

I thoroughly enjoyed this issue. Let me congratulate you on your editorial. It showed amazing spiritual maturity. So few people are free of the desire to punish. I liked your poem which interrogated ideas of up/down; progress/regress and suggested the cyclical nature of all such movement. Chris has written a wistful and haunting piece which evokes a tenderness and deep compassion for our mother planet. I found Highburger's article useful. Bharati's article, so refreshing and original, reminded me of the way some Bhakti poets use (rather than suppress) the sexual instinct by redirecting it towards the divine.

*Sharada Bhanu*

Dear Advait,

Thank you very much for the last edition of Direct Path. It was very rich reading. And the article based on the book *The Master and his Emissary* and



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the Left and Right brain was a rare find. I have seen this book and it's fairly large, so I appreciated that it was condensed a bit and with some images that made it useful, relevant and easy to absorb.

*Lindsey O'Rourke*

Advait,

Thank you for sending me this issue of Direct Path. It looks very good. I also went through my own article and am very grateful that you so carefully retained the italics. The layout looks great as well.

*Michael Highburger*

Dear Advait,

It is a terrific issue. Congratulations.

*Christopher Quilkey*

### **Talk 163**

Dr. Henry Hand, an American of about seventy, asked "What is ego?"

M.: Ego being internal and not external to you it must be clear to yourself.

D.: What is its definition?

M.: The definition also must proceed from the ego. The ego must define itself.

D.: What is soul?

M.: Find the ego, the soul is found.

D.: Are they then the same?

M.: Soul can be without the ego; but the ego cannot be without the soul. They are like bubble and the ocean.

D.: That clarifies the matter. What is Atman?

M.: Atman and soul are the same.

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



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*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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***50. Om daksina bhimukhaya nama***

One facing south.

***51. Om svaraje nama***

Autonomous, self-luminous one.

***52. Om maharsaye nama***

Great seer who has realized the Truth supreme and reveals it to others.

