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The Ramana Way

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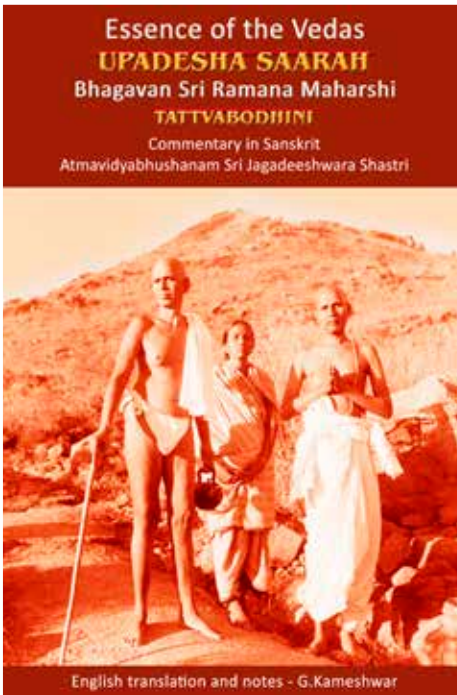
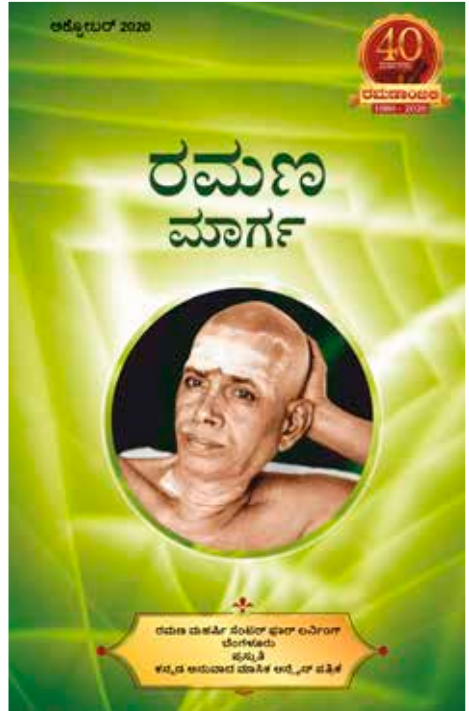
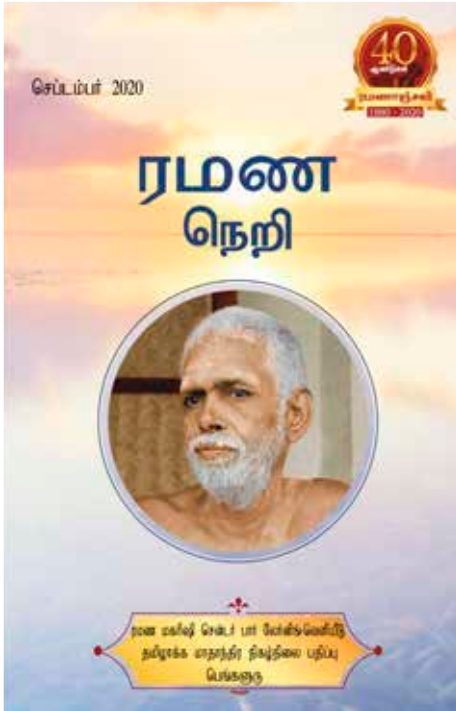
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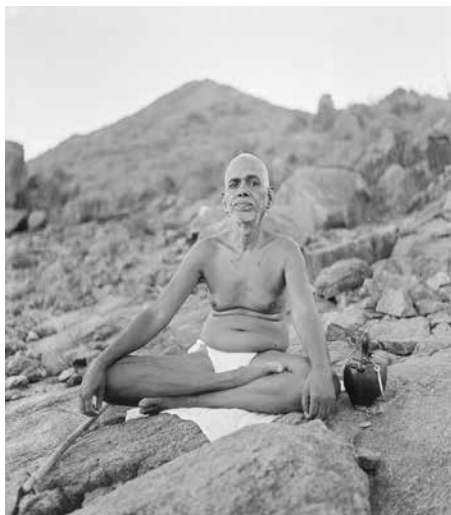


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THE RAMANA WAY

A Monthly Journal since 1981



Celebrating 'The Ramana Way' - 40 years

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Brotherhood based on equality
is the supreme goal to be attained
by human society

- Ramana Gita X, 10

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If one were to stop talking, people would notice. They would wonder why we are silent. We may have to give reasons or take cover under some vows. But if one were to stop thinking, no one would notice, because no one else would know.

If we were to stop walking or eating or climbing stairs, people would notice and seek explanations. Not so if we were to stop thinking. Because thinking is something absolutely personal and private. No one else has access to our thoughts.

If one were to hold one's breath for too long, people would notice. They may even take one to be dead and bury or cremate us. In fact, Ramana says that in God's scheme the breath is kept alive when one is asleep lest people mistake us to be dead. If we were to stop thinking, would people take us to be idiots? This is the question that Paul Brunton asks and the Master assures that on the other hand that it is when thinking stops that our nature as intelligence truly reveals itself.

Often we have to give explanations to someone or the other about any change or absence of change in our pattern of activities, including why we have become aggressive or stopped being aggressive, why we laugh and why we cry, or why we don't laugh or don't cry, why we are afraid or why we are not afraid, why we are fat or why we are thin, why we want to go on a holiday or never want to go on a holiday, why we want to go somewhere or why we don't want to go somewhere else, why this and why that. If we but observe our lives, we may find that a major part of it goes in explaining things. So much so that we may very well end up giving reasons to ourselves too about all that we do.

Who is interested in knowing what we are thinking about? The whole world is interested and seeks to control, in one way or the other, our manifest behaviour. But no one has a clue as to what we are thinking about unless we ourselves seek to reveal it. Hence, no one can control our thoughts unless we allow their behaviour

to influence our thoughts. No matter how bound we are by people and circumstances externally, internally we are absolutely free. This is what Ramana emphasizes and cajoles us to utilize this area of absolute freedom, to conquer and rule a territory that is solely ours, our mind.

Yet, just as no one can bind our minds, no one other than us can free us from our mental shackles either. We are solely responsible for what we store or carry in our minds. We can keep our minds littered, in an utter mess. If we make a mess of our room or our house, it is possible for someone else to come and clean it. But not so our thoughts. It is we who need to tidy up within. But then again, cleaning our cupboard or room or home needs time and physical energy. Cleaning the mind can happen in a jiffy. All we need to do is to stop thinking and the mind is absolutely clean that very moment. No thoughts, no clutter, no mess within.

If I have to give away something physically, I may need someone who is ready to take it. Even to throw away things I need a proper place. Often, we have to pay to get rubbish or rubble cleared from our homes. Not so in the mind. When I discard a thought, I don't have to find any person who will receive it or any place I can put it away. The moment I am not thinking a thought, it is simply gone, leaving no trace, no residue.

Since we have sole proprietary rights over our thoughts, we have the freedom to remain bound by them or to be free of them as well. We often tend to think that thoughts have power over us. But how can it be so when they are not apart from us at all in the first place?

We think there is a whole world 'in' our mind. That world seems as real if not more so than the world outside. In this 'mind world' there are people and objects and emotions and reactions all whirling around at top speed, says Ramana, in the spin-wheel of Time. And we are ever busy interacting with these inner people and interacting with our own emotions as well. But who are all these 'people' in our mind? Is there anyone 'in' there other than ourselves?

When there is no one in my mind other than me, why am I so concerned about my thoughts? Why don't I simply put them away? When there is no one at all in there, other than I, why am I so totally occupied in talking to myself 24/7?

I concede that there are thoughts in my mind. I accept that there are thoughts in my mind all the time except when I am sound asleep. From the moment of my waking, throughout my waking hours and continuing into my dreams, there are thoughts. I live with my thoughts all the time. Why do I do so? Am I very happy with my thoughts? Do they give me immense joy? Truth is, sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. There are times when my thoughts get very difficult to the point of being annoying or even painful. It is at these times that I want to do something about my thoughts. I want to get rid of 'unwanted' thoughts. Rest of the time, I am quite comfortable with the incessant chatter. Perhaps I am just used to background noise and even fail to notice it most of the time, like those living near an airport or a railway track fail to notice the sounds of aircrafts or trains that are constantly on the move. Or like we do not notice the ticking of the clock in our room unless there is a point when we want total silence to record a speech.

I do not go into the question of whether the state of silence, of freedom from the noise pollution of thoughts, would be a far better experience for me than the present condition of the continuous hum and often cacophony and discord of thoughts. We are very attentive to whether there is more or less traffic on a particular route to our chosen destination day in and day out. We carefully avoid the routes that are said to have a traffic congestion. However, it matters little to us whether there is congestion in the mind. Would we be able to move to our mental destination with greater speed, agility and clarity if we avoid this congestion? We pay little or no attention to this option.

We are careful about every penny that we expend. Those who are astute businessmen are also very conscious of the time they give to any event or experience in life. I have heard a businessman declare, and perhaps rightly so, 'Time is money, sir, time is money!' Every moment of the day is well planned and

executed. What of our thoughts? Is it alright to expend energy indiscreetly on thoughts all the twenty four hours? Is there a value for our thoughts or are they worthless? If there is value, should we not expend thought energy with discretion? If there is no value, why should we waste our time and energy on that which is worthless? Drinking a glass of water will slake our thirst. Eating will satiate our hunger. Thinking about water or food will do neither. Don't we have to think about how to procure the water or the food? It is believed by some that such thoughts are 'functional thoughts', thoughts that are necessary for our daily functioning. Let us, for the time being, presume that this is the case. If that is so, we must be extremely vigilant to know which is a functional thought and which is not. We need to permit into our mind space only the former and firmly disallow entry to the latter.

This raises three issues. The first is that we cannot completely avoid non-functional thoughts, because it is only after a thought has arisen that we can decide whether it is needed or not needed. This means, we actually allow our house to be used as thoroughfare, but once some unwanted elements get in, then we see to it that they are sent out. Is this a desirable situation? The second issue is the degree of discrimination. Are we fully capable of knowing what is an unwanted thought or a meddlesome thought at the very moment when it enters? Is it possible that a seemingly good thought can become disruptive at a later point of time, like a seemingly good person changes into a bad person? In that case, how do we prevent unwanted thoughts from entering our mind space or are we okay with entertaining them until they become a problem? Further, what if a 'good' thought keeps 'bad' company? That is to say, a thought is good, but when that thought comes, it could be accompanied by other thoughts that may or may not be good. What do we do to prevent this problem?

The third issue is the question of control. Do we have complete control over our thoughts? Are we capable of dispelling every thought the moment we know that it is a nuisance or a waste? Yes, we do not store garbage in our homes. Are we capable of throwing away the garbage in our minds? There is only one of two possibilities, either we can control our thoughts or we cannot.

We may claim that we can sometimes control our thoughts, or that we can control some of our thoughts but not others. Such a proposition would tantamount to saying that we are not in control. If there is even one thought that we are incapable of sending out from our mind, then that thought can stay and rule our lives. Where is control?

If we have no real control over our thoughts then what is the option available to us? If the enemy is more powerful than us, then the only way is to opt for truce. We must make peace with our thoughts. We must accept that they will come and go as they please so we should cease to be bothered by them. 'Good' thoughts may come and 'bad' thoughts may come, 'pleasant' thoughts may come and 'unpleasant' thoughts may come, but I will simply embrace all of them. 'O thought, have you come? Well and good. O thought, are going? Well and good. Next thought, have you come? Well and good. Are you leaving too? Well and good.' If there is total acceptance, then the demarcation between 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong' thought would cease. All the thoughts, each thought would be seen merely as a thought. The energy expended in policing thoughts would be saved. The rule of the game is that there should be no taking sides with any of the thoughts, no like or dislike, no holding on or rejecting. Because holding on and rejecting would be the exercise of control on our part. It should be total surrender.

However, one question still arises. If we are to let our thoughts be, why should we remain aware of them at all? When they are doing their own work like robots, all the same, none good or bad, why should we be monitoring their entries and exits by keeping a watch on them? Why say they are 'mine'? How would they be mine? Why not let them carry on their work on their own, which they do in any case? Why not remain free to do what I can do, if there is anything I can do? Since my contribution and interference are both not required for the thoughts, what remains for me to do? Is there anything that I have to do, other than thinking? If I have no role to play as 'thinker', then what role at all do I have? Further, if I am not a thinker, would my very existence be at stake?

Ramana comes to our rescue and assures us, 'Thinking is not your nature'. And he adds, 'If you remain in your true nature, all that needs to get done through you will automatically get done'. Like the organs of the body carry on their assigned duties automatically without any specific instructions from us, the mind too, which is called a 'subtle body' would perform its functions in the manner required. Thoughts would rise of their own accord if and when required and subside too when their job is over. We can remain free of the need for any volition or action, abiding in the immeasurable power which is our true nature, that power, which alone is responsible for all that is manifest and which remains as the substratum when it consumes the manifest.

As Sri A.R.Natarajan writes, "While on the path, the greatest hurdle is really the fear of the loss of individuality if self-enquiry is pushed to its logical conclusion. This fear has been expressed by Paul Brunton and a host of others. What happens is that 'you would have really found yourself' for you cease to be the limited individual. You discover that you are the fullness of consciousness, that you are not a mere wave but the ocean itself in all its vastness, majesty and power."

Sarada Natarajan

WHO, THEN, AM I?¹

The ego is subtle. Often a presence hardly visible, so well does it camouflage itself in various identifications. Besides, these guises of the ego may be positive as well as negative. So much so that even an unselfish act may have only the ego as its basis. Despite knowing this we still tend to confuse 'ego' with the presence of pride, arrogance and other such obvious assertions of individuality. The term 'ego' is always used negatively, especially in 'Indian English'. As for instance in "He has a lot of ego", which may well be understood as "He has much pride", or 'He is very self-opinionated'. However, while pride, arrogance, etc., can be described in degrees, can the ego be quantified in this manner? Can it be stated about Sarada that 'She has a lot of Sarada'? Of course not. One can say, "She is Sarada" or 'She is not Sarada', but not a quantity of Sarada. Because Sarada is an entity.

The ego is an entity. The ego is not anger or disgust. The ego is not pride or humility. The ego is not selfishness or altruism. The ego is not hate or love. All these are tendencies of the ego at the given time, but they are not the ego. All these emotions and thoughts are what the ego identifies itself with from moment to moment. They are clothes in the infinite wardrobe of the ego. They are not the ego.

What then is the ego? We turn to a dictionary. We find an interesting definition, 'Ego is the conscious thinking subject'. Mind you, the ego may well be present even when one is 'Unconscious', as in deep sleep, or when one is in a faint, in coma etc. But, at these times the ego is quiescent, submerged, lulled, 'gone under' for the time being and we are surely not aware of its presence. Hence it is best to focus on that which one is conscious of. The ego is conscious of itself as a subject and hence of all else as objects. So, the crux of the definition is in the word 'subject'. That's it. The

1 These editorials have also been published in the book 'Wonderous Vigilance'

ego, as Bhagavan Ramana has clearly and repeatedly explained, is the subject. It is the line of separation, the boundary, the sense of individuality which marks out the feeling of 'I'-ness, the 'I'-thought.

It obviously follows that this sense of 'I'-ness may be associated with thoughts and may experience positive, negative and neutral emotions. For, the 'I'-thought is an identification. Identification, essentially with a form and thereafter with a name. Ego or the 'I'-thought is the belief, the idea 'I am so and so'. I am Sarada, I am Jagadish, I am Suma. I am a father, I am a sister. I am a good person. I am a wretch. I am a lover of truth, I dabble in hypocrisy. And so on and on.

Ego, 'I am so and so' – attaching the sense of self to an object. The object may be physical and concrete like a body. One certainly identifies with a body. It is the primary identification. The body in turn may be physical or mental (as in a dream). But the identification with it is obvious. This is ego. Although it is on account of being identified with a body or a form that all other identifications arise, the primary identification may not be directly evident at all times. Hence, for purposes of understanding, we may say that ego is any and every kind of identification. The identification may be social, like a relationship. Else the identification may be purely mental, as with a thought or ideal. How many and how deep are such identifications: 'I am a believer in truth', 'I am upright'. A person with such an identification may be attacked with the sharpest sword. His arm or leg may be cut into pieces. Yet, though writhing in pain, he may bear it without protest. There would be no inner anguish, no unbearable sense of loss. On the other hand, call him guilty of corruption, of untruth and underhand dealings, in short, of dishonesty. The man will be broken, his very identity questioned, shaken, bombarded. Yes, identifications with ideas are as strong if not stronger, it seems, than that with the body.

Every thought that points to the feeling 'This is I', is ego, it is identity, it is limitation. Because, every time one believes 'this is I', then one simultaneously believes that what is not this is not 'I'. This form and name are 'I', then other forms and names are not. These relationships are 'I', others are not. These qualities are 'I',

other qualities are not. One may identify with negative qualities or positive qualities. How often we have heard of the ego's subtle bonding which even declares 'I am a great devotee', or 'I am totally detached' or 'I am an adept at self-enquiry'. These identifications may well exist undiscerned, unknown to the very one who identifies with these subtle images. Such are the ego's associations through which it survives.

As Bhagavan states, it is born of forms, ego being a linkage with a form, however gross or subtle the form may be. It is rooted in forms, without a form, a subject, there is surely no ego. It ever feeds on forms. Having first attached itself to one form, an object, it transforms this into the subject through the power of identification. For instance, it identifies itself with a name. Then it begins to believe that name is the very Self and says 'I am Sarada'. It attaches itself to a form and then believes that the form is the Self and says 'I am a woman'. It identifies itself with an idea and then says that the idea is the Self, 'I am good'. Having thus identified itself completely with one object and made that 'object' the 'subject', then it constantly associates itself with other objects. 'I am Sarada', for instance, may lead to Dr. Sarada, a degree attached to the name, or Sarada Akka, a relationship. 'I am a woman' may lead to my taste in clothes, in jewelry, whatever is associated with or enhances the sense of my being a woman, my form. 'I am good' may lead to various concepts and judgements in turn. Thus, there is the primary identification leading to 'subjectivity' and the subsequent associations resulting in 'object orientation' or 'externalisation'. This may be at the physical or mental levels, may be obvious or most subtle, but the process of identification is common. The ego is identification. In fact, this sense of identification forms the continuous basis of all our waking and even dream experiences. For, unless we have a sense of individuality, we cannot perceive or experience the 'other' either, we cannot experience objects, things apart from us.

The subject implies an object. An object therefore implies a subject. We are continuously experiencing a world apart from us. This is because we constantly believe we are, and function as, limited subjects. Only this much is 'I', only this is 'I', the rest,

naturally, is not 'I', or is outside the 'I', hence it is experienced by the 'I'. It is obvious then, that this 'I' is at the centre of all experience since all experiences are for the 'I'. As Bhagavan states, there is really no world apart from the mind which is conscious of it, and no mind apart from the sense of 'I'. For the mind is merely a collection of thoughts and all these thoughts are individually, each connected with the sense of 'I'. Thought alone is experience, thought translates sensations and objects into experience by making them come alive with attention. And thought derives this conscious power from the 'I'. 'I' is the crux of the mind or, one may say that the 'I'-thought is itself the mind, says Bhagavan. All we must do now is to remain alert to this identification as and when it crops up. This vigil, this very alertness to its rising will make it subside, assures Bhagavan.

FROM DESTRUCTION TO BLOSSOMING

When we were younger and less literate, and with the fervour of the studious, looked up encyclopedias and anthologies, we would often come upon the word 'Anon' after a quote or a poem. And in the naivete of half-knowledge that believes itself complete, we were certain that 'Anon' is a poet and an author whose works were indeed voluminous, and obviously the most popular, being oft quoted. 'Anon' the abbreviation for 'anonymous', we later came to know, stands for an unknown entity. But by giving the name 'Anonymous' we have certainly established an entity, an identity. There is very much the presence of an ego, an identification, even in the 'unnamed' as soon as it is labelled. For the label itself becomes the name. The concept having arisen, with or without a name, an entity is born. The concept may even undergo numerous transformations, but so long as it keeps its essential nature of being a concept, it survives. So also with the ego.

The ego may be unnamed. Indeed, its very presence maybe unrecognised because it changes names and forms so often. Perhaps by virtue of this very malleability, this very changeability, it survives. It survives because, the subtler its presence, the less it is noticed. When one consciously strives to get rid of it or subdue it, then is the time that it assumes increasingly nebulous forms.

It grows subtler and subtler so that it becomes more and more difficult to be aware of its existence and hence to tackle it. It is probably for this reason that even serious seekers of truth often fall into its trap by identifying with something or the other.

Identification comes naturally to us. The frenzy of cricket was in the air, the World Cup matches being played. Everyone was rooting for their own country, keeping fingers crossed and hoping for the best. India won the quarter-final match and amidst great jubilation entered the semi-finals. Here we lost, most shamefully, in more ways than one. Even before the anguish had completely worn out, people were ready for the finals between Australia and Lanka. We were already fervently wishing that one or the other team should win for reasons of our own. We had heated arguments with those who favoured the team other than our favourites. We watched with bated breath, sitting at the edge of our seats, the final being played. Finally, those whose chosen team won rejoiced, the others sorrowed. Even when one's own country is not involved in the game one is unable to sit back and enjoy it for what it is. One is unable to see it unfold in its own beauty and cheer whosoever is playing better at the moment. One rushes to identify, to say 'I want this team to win, this is my favourite', thereby putting a bit of myself there. What difference would it really make to the lives of all those who identify with it in this manner? It is a distant event, distant from our lives, not really touching it, not really affecting or transforming it except for our identification.

If this identification is so strong, how much stronger would be our bonding with people, events, and ideas that make up the deeper matrix of our lives? Are we aware of even the more obvious identifications? Can we fight each and every identification as it arises? Are we alert to its rising? Can we see anger growing in us because someone else disagrees with our idea of what is right? Can we accept that it is merely our idea of correctness? Can we sense that in the divine scheme which is infinitely complex and inter-linked it is very difficult if not impossible to assert that we know anything at all, let alone what is right? Can we see the presence of identification, of ego, clouding so often, even our love for the Sadguru, our understanding of his path by saying 'I know'?

or, equally, 'I do not know'? Can we ever know him or the way in a complete manner until we are stabilised in the experience of truth? Or can we ever 'not know' that which is most dear? Are we tentative about our very understanding so that we are open to fresh insights and growth? Does not our holding on, which we call identification, slip in unknown to us through concepts, even if we have exposed it and made it flee from obvious areas like possessiveness of material things or relationships? Is it good enough if we deal with every attachment, every new form the ego assumes as and when it does so? Is it not necessary to try a more radical remedy?

We have accepted that the basic solution lies in understanding the nature of the ego. We have also seen that the ego is identification. There is, however, one more step to our understanding which alone would complete the picture. This aspect of the ego is specially and clearly explained by Bhagavan:

"The body is insentient, the Self is unborn,
Between the two, within the body, a third is born.
It is called by names like the 'I'-thought, the knot, bondage,
Subtle body, mind, samsara and jeeva."

Why is the understanding of the ego as a 'knot' so important? And how do we say that Bhagavan has explained it in special light? Is not the idea already implied when we have found that the ego is identification, the thought 'I am so-and-so'? Yes, the idea of the link is inherent here. Yet, one may not comprehend what is inherent unless it is brought to light and obviously stated. This is what Bhagavan does for us. So far, in thinking about the ego we have known that it is the experiencing of individuality, of subjectivity. We have also known that it associates itself with objects, continuously, constantly. Hence, we have decried it, denounced it as the creator of limitation. We have striven to be rid of it. We have paid little or no attention, however, to the source from which it derives the conscious power, the energy of awareness on which it superimposes the sense of individuality.

We have concentrated on the 'so-and-so' in the experience 'I am so-and-so'. We have said that the 'so-and-so' may be changing, is always changing, in fact, but there is no time when there seems to be an absence of 'so-and-so'. In all conscious experience there is some identification. There is always a 'so-and-so'. Yet, noting that this 'so-and-so' is missing in deep sleep, we have striven to question the validity of this 'so-and-so'. 'Am I only this?' We have asked ourselves time and again, sometimes in passing, sometimes habitually, and often even earnestly. In this manner we have been at war with identification. We have been at war with the ego. What we have failed to do is to look at the source of its strength and thus, simply supersede it, by-pass it, render it irrelevant. Bhagavan makes us aware of the nature of the ego as a link between matter and consciousness. Thus, he gives us the all-important clue that by holding on to the consciousness aspect we will ensure that the identification will wilt through sheer neglect. He changes the focus from avoidance to experience, from destruction to blossoming. He lights the miraculous path of source-awareness.

From the Founder's Pen: 1995-2000

Insights

1. THINKING WITHOUT THE MIND

Ramamurthy: Swamiji, I have read Paul Brunton's book, 'A Search in Secret India'. I was much impressed by the last chapter where it is said it is possible to be conscious without thinking. Can one think without the mind? Is it possible to gain that consciousness which is beyond thoughts?

Maharshi: Yes. There is only one consciousness which subsists in the waking, dream and sleep states. If it is known you will see that it is beyond thoughts.

R: Can one think without the mind?

M: Thoughts are only like other activities, not disturbing the Supreme consciousness.

- Talks 143, pp.49,50

We identify consciousness with thinking, with the mind. Intellectually therefore we find it impossible to accept the state in which there is consciousness but there are no thoughts. Or we find it hard to accept a conscious state which is free of thoughts. Therefore, we wrongly assume that the process of thinking - memory, reasoning, discrimination, determination can relate only to the mind. Hence the crucial question of vital import, 'Can we think without the mind?' Also, what is that consciousness which is beyond thoughts, which enables thinking without the mind? Putting it another way, what is it that vivifies the mind itself? Does intuition take over where thought ceases? In the answer to these questions lies the solution to the fear of that which is beyond the mind, the fear of the state when the mind is dead, when the mind is submerged in its source. It is necessary to tackle this fear to be free from its grip. Else, all effort at freedom from the mental world would come to a grinding halt after a particular stage.

1 These articles have appeared in Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning's publication 'The Hidden Power'.

Effort would taper off because of the unconscious but deep-rooted idea that we would be reduced to mere idiots, reduced to morons, reduced to indolence, be dead to all feelings. We fear that everything would be totally meaningless. All the affirmations about the wonder of that state, about its fullness, about its overflowing bliss would fall flat against this Frankenstein. One has to travel step by step uncovering certain basic facts, certain fundamentals on which Ramana has thrown such clear light.

What is this thing called the mind? Do we know it? Not really. Because there are thoughts, we assume that they have emanated from a source which we call the mind. But if we question, we must find that since mind and thoughts co-exist, that which we call the mind can relate only to waking and dream states. Thoughts are absent in deep sleep though we continue to exist. Consciousness continues in sleep. Otherwise we would not be able to recall the joy or repose of it on waking.

One may refer to Ramana's assurance to a French visitor, Mon. Georges Le Bot, "People are afraid that when the ego or mind is killed the result may be a mere blank and not happiness. What really happens is that the thinker, the object of thought and thinking, all merge in one source, which is consciousness, and this state is neither inert nor blank."

By questioning the break in the mind's functioning in sleep one would be sowing seeds of doubt about the validity of identifying consciousness with thoughts, with thinking, with the mind. Doubts as to whether there is a state beyond the mind, about a state of consciousness which includes sleep as well, would begin. One would start investigating if 'Self consciousness' is different from 'mind consciousness'.

If there be a state beyond the mind, how can one discover it? If mind is only fragmented consciousness, because it is non-existent in deep sleep, what is the fullness of consciousness? What is that consciousness which is comprehensive, covering deep sleep as well? For the replies to these queries, one has to look once again at the mind itself and be aware of its scope and limitation.

Hence, lest one should lose one's way, Ramana himself guides and shares his experience. Arising from the fact that the

mind disappears in sleep and reappears on waking he points out that one should search for the source of its origin. Such a search would take one to the spiritual heart which is at once the fullness of consciousness and the place from which the mind springs forth and into which it subsides. If attention is given to the feeling of individuality, to the core of the mind, and not to other thoughts then the mind consciously merges in its source. Then the mind gradually 'dies' to use Ramana's terminology.

Pausing here one has to be careful in understanding this concept, for it raises the bogey that all mental faculties, creativity and activity may end. All that it means is that the mind is restored to its pristine purity. That the mind is rid of its habitual accretions of debilitating, weak, negative and bad thoughts. As Ramana clarified in 1900 itself to one of his earliest devotees Gambhiram Seshier, "As without mind, there can be no experience, it is possible for the purified mind endowed with the extremely subtle mode to experience Self bliss". Ramana also makes it clear that in the thought free state "intuition, automatic action will develop".

When the river merges in the ocean it may no longer have its form or name but it is the vast ocean. Therefore, whenever limited consciousness, the mind, merges in the fullness of consciousness, the heart, it acquires greater strength of an uncontaminated, limitless consciousness. However, since we are too far gone in our false notion that thinking without a thinker is not possible, Ramana keeps injecting this truth time and again in his replies to the seekers. The point which he would keep hammering in is that the mind we take pride in, the ego ridden mind, is a weak one, its strength having been sapped by its inability to resist the intruding or torturing thoughts. In contrast, a pure mind, with which one functions, when the mind is merged in its source, is perfect and undistracted.

Another point he would emphasise is that what we call the mind is an impure reflection of the consciousness, and its power can be compared to the reflected light of the moon. Who would choose it? Who would opt for it when one can make full use of the sunlight? The pure mind uses the blazing light of the Self. Hence where does any question of losing oneself in a maze of inaction, indolence or lazy dalliance arise if the present divided

mind gives place to a unitary pure mind? It is time indeed that we de-hypnotize ourselves from the false thoughts and premises on which we have built the edifice of fears.

2. THE BEAUTY OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

We try to order our lives according to a plan. We have definite goals towards which we are working. True the goals themselves keep shifting with reference to achievements. Each day, our work schedules, our time for friends, for ourselves, are all clearly defined in our minds. The framework is there, and also the necessary details. In this pattern we also fit in meditation, fit in spiritual practices. Generally, each of these are water-tight compartments. Often one ends up with cuts into meditation time, for the demands of the world swallow everything.

One has to find out a way, should one not, to integrate spiritual practice with life, to make it an undercurrent. One cannot confine spiritual life to visits to ashrams, hermitages, to pilgrimages, to withdrawal, for these are necessarily short or occasional. Often circumstances may deny us the opportunities. Hence the need for combining "work and wisdom". The beauty of spiritual life, its flowering, has to be found out in life itself, in action, inaction, at work, at play, and when one is able to be by himself. Otherwise one's spiritual practices would yield only little fringe benefits, by way of detachment, a little peace of mind now and then, and so on. There will be no real transformation, no opening up of a new and all enveloping happiness. It is in this context that the teachings of Sri Ramana assume importance and significance.

Ramana would say that 'Meditation is systematic striving aimed at getting Self-knowledge'. Why? Because only the one who is Self-aware can experience and abide in a state of 'natural happiness'. By natural happiness one means non-mental happiness; happiness which is non-circumstantial; happiness which is unrelated to the ups and downs, to the ebb and flow of life. It is independent of life situations. One can readily see its contrast to what we now term happiness which is fluctuating, which is based on 'others'; on our relationships with people, to ideas and the like. Such happiness is necessarily brittle, fragile. Natural happiness is one's own, not given. It is inherent and has to be discovered by oneself.

Since Self-knowledge is necessary for experiencing natural happiness, one has to understand what Self-knowledge is. Ramana points out that this means awareness of the true import of the 'I', of individuality, of the subject. Presently we have never really gone into this question which is strange considering the fact that all our experiences are centred on the 'I'. All experiences are mine. The 'I' occupies a pivotal position because all thoughts revolve round it; the individual's attention sustains and nourishes them.

Notwithstanding this fact one seldom pays attention to this core 'I', and all the energies of the mind are directed towards objects resulting in the externalising of the mind. From this object orientation of the mind, one has to turn full circle to subject orientation. Once such a shift in focus takes place one will find out that many of one's assumptions and notions do not stand this test of scrutiny.

The first thing that one would find is the identification of one's body with the Self. We take ourselves to be the body. Self enquiry serves to question this notion, to corrode its hold and explode the myth. If self-enquiry is practised one's true identity would be automatically revealed. Ramana lays great emphasis on this point for, his own experience, termed the 'death experience', had enabled him to cut at the falsity of this notion which alone veils the knowledge about one's identity with the divine, "The idea that one is the body must be uprooted. A flower has to blossom before the bees can enter it. If the petals are closed, how can they enter? Similarly, if the false notion of individuality is not uprooted, how can Self-knowledge be attained?"

In this context Ramana would refer to 'sleep', when one has no awareness of the body with which he had identified himself in the waking state, or dream where a different identity is quite on the cards. These changes must make one doubt if the waking identity is one's true identity. Once the seeds of doubt have been sown, the first essential step would have been taken. This questioning should not be casual or intermittent. Every ounce of one's energy would have to be poured into self-enquiry and that too constantly. Otherwise, "one's tendency for action or inaction would gain an upper hand". Hence the need for spells of equilibrium through steady meditation. Innate happiness is experienced during such spells. Ramana emphasises

the need for an all-out effort, the need for a total involvement when he remarks, "Remember that your next breath might be the last and focus your entire attention on self-enquiry". For what is gained by such unceasing enquiry cannot be comprehended by the mind. When the particular identification ceases one's true identity with the fullness of consciousness is revealed. Then one abides in the state of natural happiness, one lives wholly in the present. Each moment brings out a new beauty, a new fullness.

While self-enquiry needs to have the pride of place, needs to be put on the pedestal, practitioners on the spiritual path are prone to stray away from it due to their predispositions and inclinations. Some have lofty notions of helping others, certainly laudable provided first things are attended to first. A conversation which a seeker had with Ramana would highlight this.

Seeker: When I see the suffering of the people of the world, I wish to do something according to my mite.

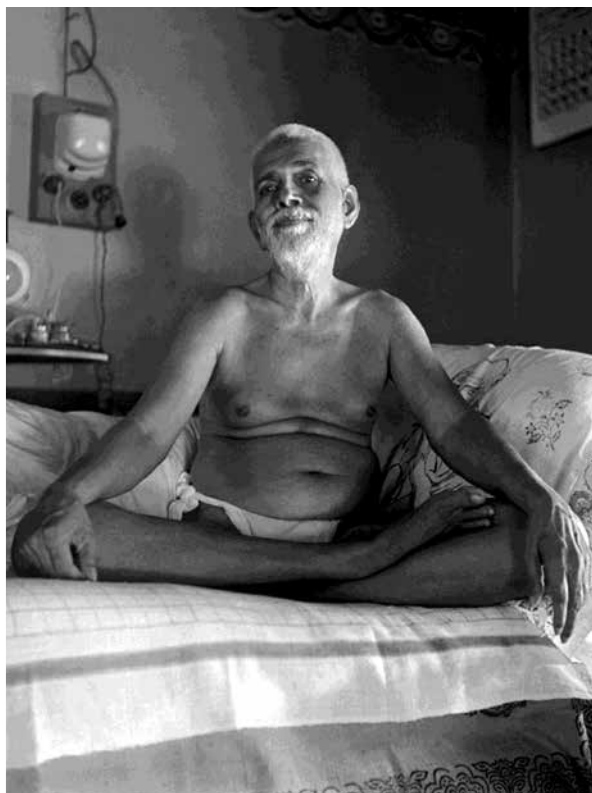
Ramana: How are you going to help others without knowing yourself? First of all, put your house in order. First try to know who you are in reality. Are you just the human body sitting before me now? Find out who you are before trying to help others.

What happens when Self-knowledge dawns through self-attention is that a wholly new perspective comes about. You are at peace with yourself, you are full of bliss. You radiate it all round. Without this natural bliss, ideas about helping others would be like a lame man boasting that he could easily put the enemies to flight if only someone could help him to his feet.

Ramana would always bring our attention back to the known, to that with which we are familiar. The mind is habituated to paying attention to the unknown. We concern ourselves with questions like predetermination, free-will, rebirth, the past, clairvoyance and the like. We have so many notions about God, about seeing Him, having visions of Him. Ramana would say, "Before knowing about God and His actions you have to know yourself first. Then you will know everything". Or, he would say, "We aspire to know about unknown things while the requirements for Self-knowledge are ready at hand". Why? Nothing is more intimate than the 'I' for one's entire life revolves round it.

Questions like the time of meditation, how much, how often, when, or postures, padmasana, sthiraasana, meditation with eyes open or closed have no doubt their value. But they will all fall into place when one seriously practises Self-attention. Meditation then ceases to be a fixed time affair. It is done whenever possible, as naturally as breathing. Posture loses its importance for self-enquiry might go on while travelling in a bus may be even hanging on to the rail, while watching T.V. sitting in a comfortable chair, while waking, while stretching on the bed. When the mind is turned inward, it does not matter if the eyes are closed or open. As Ramana would say, "If you are not looking out of the window does it matter if the window is open or closed?".

You discover that you are the fullness of consciousness, that you are not a mere wave but the ocean itself in all its vastness, majesty and power.



Talk 106 (Excerpt)

Swami Yogananda with four others arrived at 8.45 a.m. He looks big, but gentle and well-groomed. He has dark flowing hair, hanging over his shoulders. The group had lunch in the Asramam. Mr. C. R. Wright, his secretary, asked: How shall I realise God?

M.: God is an unknown entity. Moreover, He is external. Whereas, the Self is always with you and it is you. Why do you leave out what is intimate and go in for what is external?

D.: What is this Self again?

M.: The Self is known to everyone but not clearly. You always exist. The Be-ing is the Self. 'I am' is the name of God. Of all the definitions of God, none is indeed so well put as the Biblical statement "I AM THAT I AM" in EXODUS (Chap. 3). There are other statements, such as Brahmaivaham, Aham Brahmasmi and Soham. But none is so direct as the name JEHOVAH = I AM. The Absolute Being is what is - It is the Self. It is God. Knowing the Self, God is known. In fact, God is none other than the Self.

D.: Why are there good and evil?

M.: They are relative terms. There must be a subject to know the good and evil. That subject is the ego. Trace the source of the ego. It ends in the Self. The source of the ego is God. This definition of God is probably more concrete and better understood by you.

GUIDANCE RECEIVED: Irrespective of the circumstance, hold the "I". There can be no better way to deal with sorrow, problems or doubts than to hold the "I" - the light of God within. A witnessing nature where one knows the God transcending the relative "good" and "bad" helps one let go of thought and circumstance without commenting as "good" or "evil". This helps one be the Self indirectly. Now enquire "Who am I?" and directly be the Self, the real God.

Q: Why should I let go of the evil spiritual oppressor or terrible circumstance by saying it is neither "good" nor "bad"?

A: To stay empowered beyond good and bad is the best way to bless oneself and the oppressed (and the oppressor).

Q: You usually say that you learnt the art of "witnessing" without "good" and "bad" prior to taking up self-enquiry.

A: Yes. Somehow, it still left me with an ego which claimed "I am thought-free". However, self-enquiry cleared that error. Holding the "I" is the direct path.

Talk 106 (Excerpt)

D.: So it is (The source of the ego is God. This definition of God is probably more concrete and better understood by you). How to get Bliss?

M.: Bliss is not something to be got. On the other hand, you are always Bliss. This desire is born of the sense of incompleteness. To whom is this sense of incompleteness? Enquire. In deep sleep you were blissful: Now you are not so. What has interposed between that Bliss and this non-bliss? It is the ego. Seek its source and find you are Bliss.

There is nothing new to get. You have, on the other hand, to get rid of your ignorance which makes you think that you are other than Bliss. For whom is this ignorance? It is to the ego. Trace the source of the ego. Then the ego is lost and Bliss remains over. It is eternal. You are That, here and now.... That is the master key for solving all doubts. The doubts arise in the mind. The mind is born of the ego. The ego rises from the Self. Search the source of the ego and the Self is revealed. That alone remains. The universe is only expanded Self. It is not different from the Self.

***GUIDANCE RECEIVED:** Q: You mean to say that whenever I enquire, "For whom is this problem?" I put the problem at God's feet as God is the Source of my ego?*

A: Even better. You turn away from the limited and incomplete to the ever-present, limitless fullness - the Self.

Q: Why has God - the Source of my ego - given me such a complex problem?

A: For whom is this thought? Is God the Source of your ego alone? Has God, the Source, gone away? Who is bearing the complex problem? Hold the Source. Enquire, "Who am I?"

Q: Do I not concede victory to my opponents when I merely turn inward and hold the Source of my ego?

A: When this Source is the One Source of all individuals are not all victories and defeats only to that Source. Moreover, does it not become clear that there is no victory over "another ego" as that

"another ego" itself is an illusion. There is only one true victory - victory over the ego within.

Talk 106 (Excerpt)

D.: What is the best way of living?

M.: It differs accordingly as one is a Jnani or Ajnani. A Jnani does not find anything different or separate from the Self. All are in the Self. It is wrong to imagine that there is the world, that there is a body in it and that you dwell in the body. If the Truth is known, the universe and what is beyond it will be found to be only in the Self. The outlook differs according to the sight of the person. The sight is from the eye. The eye must be located somewhere. If you are seeing with the gross eyes you find others gross. If with subtle eyes (i.e., the mind) others appear subtle. If the eye becomes the Self, the Self being infinite, the eye is infinite. There is nothing else to see different from the Self.

He thanked Maharshi. He was told that the best way of thanking is to remain always as the Self.

GUIDANCE RECEIVED: Q: What is this Sahaja Samadhi or Natural Stillness of the ego even when the other instruments of body, breath, mind and intellect are functioning under automatic divine activity?

A: When I practiced stilling of the intellect or reason, the ego became still whether the body, breath or mind were functioning or not. However, as I had stilled the intellect, no dharma sadhana could be supported. When the ego is directly stilled under Bhagavan's guidance of "Who am I?", that naturally still "I" could support all dharma sadhanas performed with the intellect realising that that too is automatic divine activity. The "I" was naturally still as the "I-I" whether the body, breath, mind, intellect and sleep functioned or not.

Q: What is the use of such an "I-I" that does not give me any improvement in the sensory, breath, mental or intellectual worlds?

A: It is cause-less and use-less being.

Q: I see great intellectuals like Noam Chomsky do self-critical thinking on behalf of the US and humanity. I also practice self-enquiry.

A: The intellectual feels that the individual consciousness is manipulatable from outside by others. Self-enquiry is direct and absolute empowerment of the inner consciousness free from any influence from outside.

We are blessed to continue the new series of excerpts from Master Nome's book of the above name, generously shared by him and SAT (Society for Abidance in Truth) for the benefit of readers of 'The Ramana Way'.

- Editor

[This is a letter addressed to Swami Swanandashram, an illumined yogi and swami of the Sankara Order, with whom Nome was in correspondence for the previous several months. They had met many times during the spring of 1972. There was no contact until the revered Swami returned from India to visit the USA during 1976 and 1977. He also visited the USA again in 1978. The Swami had meditated for years at Gangotri, where the river Ganga starts in the Himalayas. Nome's response in this letter is to some questions asked by the Swami about Nome's life and history.]

May 10, 1977

Dear Swamiji,

Absolutely, neither you nor I exist as separate individual entities, but only as Existence, or Being itself, admitting neither of me nor mine nor you nor yours. The Self (Brahman) is alone the Reality, and verily I am That.

I was blessed to come across the teaching of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. It was about three years ago, while reading a small pamphlet of the Maharshi's teaching in which were found the words, "Self-Realization is Being, not being this or that, just Being," that I awakened to who I am.

There is no personal history to relate past this point, as Realization is the simple, non-conceptual understanding that there is no individual person, never has been, and never will be. Even the previous history is illusory—for whom is the history? I am the Self, having neither past nor future, neither bondage nor liberation, neither life nor death.

It is needless to expound my Realization to you, for not only do I exist as the Self, which is the sole-existent Reality, but

words and thoughts cannot express that which I am. I am formless, nonobjective Being, Consciousness, but not of any thing, and Bliss, but not an experience. I am devoid of all dualism, such as self and other, subject and object, and experiencer and experience. I am not now young nor shall I ever be old. I have never been born, and so I shall never die. There is no world in which any supposed individual entity could be born, live, or die. I am neither the body nor the mind nor the ego nor a thing or person of any sort. I alone am, and there is no “me” or individual. I am, no me. Self-Realization is Being, not being this or that, just Being. Therefore, Realization is effortless, ever present, and natural and is not any sort of state of mind, experience, or event that is objectively attained or needs to be maintained. It is Being-Consciousness-Bliss, which is who I am. In Self- Knowledge, Being and Knowing are one and the same. Realization is none other than who I am, and so I can never be different, separate, or other than what the words “Realization,” “Self,” “Brahman,” and “Jnana” signify.

Nor are there two selves, one to “realize,” attain, or come into union with the other. The one Self, attributeless and formless, is alone the Reality, and I am That.

Renouncing my home, family, name, fame, friends, worldly ambitions, etc. and embarking on the path of Self- inquiry at the age of seventeen, shortly before I met you, this path was followed into the nature of ultimate Reality.

[Editor’s note: Though the actual renunciation and clarity regarding the path are stated here to have occurred at age seventeen, sadhana in earnest commenced at age sixteen.]

True Knowledge, which is Self-Knowledge, alone destroys the illusory ignorance (superimposition or misidentifications) and the imagined bondage and reveals the eternal freedom and Bliss of the Self. Paths and techniques are based upon dualism, actions, and the belief in an individual practitioner, and so they cannot destroy ignorance because they are not in conflict with it. Only Self-Knowledge removes all misidentifications and yields Liberation by the Knowledge that there has never been any ignorance.

[Editor’s note: The reference to “paths and techniques” here was specific to certain physical, subtle, and mental practices already discussed by the Swami and Nome.]

In Reality, there are no separate individual, enlightened beings; nor are there unenlightened beings. There is only Absolute Being, the One without a second. The word, “jivanmukta” is a contradiction in terms, for a mukta (or mukti) does not admit of any assumed jiva (individual) whatsoever. Therefore, there is no one to be discriminated as realized or unrealized, because, in Reality, there is no individual or ego to be either, but only Absolute Being.

Realization is nothing but my Self. The Self is One, eternal, immutable, stainless, desireless, and is identical with Consciousness. I am not the body, senses, mind, intellect, or the ego. The Self, which I am, is the sole-existent Reality, and, verily, pure Bliss itself. It is the highest of the high, purest of the pure, transcendent over all dualism, and eternally free. I am That. I am not the result of any practice or path, for I am the eternal, ever-present, formless Reality. As Realization is none other than who I am, totally transcendent of time and space, I am not to be found in any experience or state of mind. Nor can Realization be an event.

When sought, the mind cannot be found. The Self alone is the One Reality, and, hence, the nature of the mind, like that of the supposed ego, is the nature of the Self. When thought is deeply examined, by discarding its assumed objectivity, it is known to be nothing other than Consciousness. That Consciousness is the Self. No concentration or control of thoughts is needed for Self-Realization. Through Self-inquiry, one simply discards all that is not the Self or superimposed and realizes that there exists nothing but the Absolute Consciousness, the Supreme Being, and I am That.

There has never been an assumed individual in ignorance, nor is there now one liberated. I alone am, and there is no “me.” There is no dissolution, no origination, none in bondage, none aspiring for Liberation, and none liberated. This is the Highest Truth. There is only Being, not being this or that, only Being. The Self alone exists. The Self alone is Real. That Self is my very Being. That is the final Truth, and That is Realization.

[Editor’s note: The third and fourth sentences of this paragraph are derived from verse 32 of part 2 of Gaudapada’s Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad. Nome frequently references this text and this verse in particular, now as then. Swami Swanandashram had previously sent this verse in Sanskrit to Nome in a letter, expressing that this verse was for him.]

I did not do anything, because I am not the doer. In Reality, I never do anything. There is no individual doer, and there is absolutely nothing ever done. I am neither the doer nor the enjoyer nor the reaper of the fruits of action. I am the Self, actionless and worldless.

Sincerely,
Nome

[Unfortunately, the letters written by the Swami to Nome have not been located and may be permanently lost. It is, though, possible to deduce some of what the Swami wrote by the nature of Nome's responses.]

May 23, 1977

Dear Swamiji,

In Reality, you and I are never apart, as there exists only the One Self. The Self is the sole-existent Reality, and its nature is Being-Consciousness-Bliss. Actually, there is no world, no bodies, no minds, no egos, no appearances, no play or dream, and no bondage of any sort. There is only Absolute Being, which is the Self. The Real ever is, and the unreal has never come to be.

Of course, you have permission to reproduce or print whatever you wish from the letters that have been sent to you. There are none in bondage and none liberated. The Self is neither taught nor learned. Knowing the Self is Being the Self. The Self is the ever-present Reality, utterly non-objective, beyond all dualisms, qualities, attributes, and experiences. Verily, I am That. Mukti is Being, not being this or that, just Being. It, or I, is totally nonobjective, and, so, it is neither given nor received. The Guru and the disciple are really only the Self, which is the sole-existent Reality, and I am That.

Ever Yours as That,
Nome

Shri Arunachala Ashtakam

G Kameshwar

**Eight Verses on Arunachala
Of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi**

G Kameshwar

Verse-8

*kaTalezhu mezhiliyAR pozhitaru neertAn
kaTanilai yaTaivarai taTaiceyi nillA
tuTaluyi runilezhu munaiyuRu varaiyi
luRupala vazhikaLi luzhalinu nillA
tiTaveLi yalaiyinu nilaiyilai puLLuk
kiTanila malatilai varuvazhi cellak
kaTanuyir varuvazhi cenRiTā vinpak
kaTalunai maruviTu maruNapU taranE*

Word split, and meaning:

kaTal ezhum ezhiliyAl: By the clouds that rose from the sea
pozhitarum neertAN: the waters that rained
kaTal nilai aTaivarai: till it reaches its abode, the sea
taTai ceyin nillAtu: Will not stop, even if obstructed
uTal uyir unil ezhum: body-life (jeeva) that rises from you
unai uRu varaiyil: till it reaches you
uRupala vazhikaLil: on many paths, over many births
uzhalinum nillAtu: though it whirls around, it will not stop
iTaveLi alaiyinum: though it wanders here and there in the vast sky
puLLukku nilaiyilai: a bird has not its abode
iTam nilam alatu ilai: other than the earth, it has no other place of rest

varuvazhi cellak kaTan: it is bound to go back the way it came
uyir varuvazhi cenRiTā: life (jeeva), when it goes back the way it came

inpakkaTal unai maruviTum: unites (in great affection) with you, who are an ocean of bliss

aruNa pUtarānE: O Aruna mountain!

Verse rendering:

The water

That rains down

From clouds

That rose from the sea

(Flows and)

Stops not, even if obstructed,

Until it reaches its abode,

The sea.

The body-life (jeeva)

That rises from you

(O Arunachala);

Though it whirls around

(suffering karma)

In many ways,

Many births;

Stops not

Till it reaches you;

Though roving around

In the sky so vast

The bird has no abode

There;

Other than the earth

It has no place of rest;

And is therefore bound

*To go back
The way it came.*

*(Likewise)
It is when the jeeva
Goes back
The way it came
That it merges with you (in love)
O Aruna Hill
Ocean of bliss!*

Prose rendering:

The water that rises up from the sea as clouds, pours down as rain and flows back towards the sea. Whatever the obstructions on the way, it stops not until it reaches its abode, the sea.

Likewise, the jeeva that arises from you (O Arunachala), finds no rest until it merges with you again; although, in the interim, it whirls around, suffering many experiences (of karma), across many births.

A bird which rises from the earth, wanders here and there in the vast sky; yet it finds no abode there. It has no place of rest other than the earth, and so it is bound to come back (from its wanderings).

Likewise, the jeeva too, finds its place of rest only when it goes back the way it came; whereupon, it merges with you (in love), O ocean of bliss, Aruna Hill!

Notes:

The analogy of river and sea given here, is a deep spiritual concept that finds mention in Shruti and Smṛti as well.

In Chandogya Upanishad, Chapter VI, there occurs the following teaching:

*imAH somya nadyaH purastAtprAchyAH syandante
pashchAtpratIchyastAH samudrAt samudramevApiyanti sa samudra
eva bhavati tA yathA tatra na viduriyamahamasmyamahamasmlti
|| 6.10.1 ||*

evameva khalu somyemAH sarvAH prajAH sata Agamyā na
viduH sata AgachChAmaha iti ta iha vyAghro vA simho vA vR^iko
vA varAho vA kITo vA pata~Ngo vA damsho vA mashako vA

yadyadbhavanti tadAbhavanti

|| 6.10.2 ||

sa ya eSho.aNimaitadAtmyamidam sarvaM tatsatyam sa AtmA
tattvamasi shvetaketo iti...

|| 6.10.3 ||

Meaning:

‘O Somya, those rivers belonging to the east run to the east, and those belonging to the west run to the west. Rising from the sea, they go back to it and become one with it. Just as, when they reach the sea, they do not know their separate identities - ‘I am this river,’ or ‘I am that river’. In the same way, O Somya, all these beings, having come from Sat [Brahman], never know this. They never think, ‘We have come from Sat.’ Whatever they were before in this world – whether a tiger or lion or leopard or boar or bug or insect or flea or mosquito – they are born again [according to their karma. They never know that they came from Sat]. That which is the subtlest of all is the Self of all this. It is the Truth. It is the Self. That thou art, O Śvetaketu.’¹

Explaining this in his commentary on the above statements, Swami Lokeswarananda says²:

There are so many rivers in this country, and each originates from a different area. Ultimately, however, they all flow into the sea. They then lose their separate identities and become one with the sea. When the Ganga flows into the sea, you can no longer identify it as such. Can a drop of water in the sea say, ‘I am the Ganga,’ or ‘I am the Sindhu’? No. So also, when we die our sense of identity disappears temporarily.

Then again, where did these rivers come from? They came from the sea. Sea water becomes vapour, rises, and forms into clouds.

¹ Chandogya Upanishad – Translated with notes based on Shankara’s Commentary, by Swami Lokeswarananda, published by Ramakrishna Mission of Culture, 2017

² Ibid.

The clouds then go over the land and pour down rain, which eventually goes into the rivers and at last into the sea. The rivers come from the sea and go back to the sea. The sea is the source, but the rivers do not know this. This cycle is going on all the time.

So also we come from pure Spirit and go back to pure Spirit, but we are not aware of it. We are only conscious of our separate identities. In dreamless sleep, our separate identities are wiped out for the time being. We sleep so soundly we do not even know we exist. We are then part of the Cosmic Self. Then when we wake up, we resume our separate identities again.

Similarly, when we die, it is the body that dies. The individual self continues and is one with Existence. This does not mean liberation, however. We do not know that we have become one with Existence. It is as if we are in deep sleep. As the water rises from the sea and again falls down to become the Ganga or the Sindhu, so also, we again become some individual with a new body.

Why are we not liberated? Because ignorance is there. When we die, our ignorance is suspended for some time, and we are temporarily not conscious of our separate existence. But when we are reborn, we resume our life from the point where we left off. We then have a new body but we retain all the impressions that we had in our previous life.

These impressions manifest themselves again in our new birth because they have become part of our being. This is why we often find so much difference between one brother and another. Two brothers may be close in age but poles apart in temperament. One may be very studious, with scholarly inclinations, and the other may be very outgoing, more interested in sports and other activities. Even in terms of physical appearance they may be quite different. They are two separate identities.

So, unless we attain Self-knowledge and become free, death is like going into deep sleep. It is a temporary pause in our life's struggle. But the struggle must go on because of our ignorance.

Ramana is the Way of Ramana

Shyam Sunder

It is good to realize everyone in the heart (not in the mind) with our own Self-abidance practice for equality.

Otherwise mere equality word is not equality. We may go on talking about it without realization of the truth.

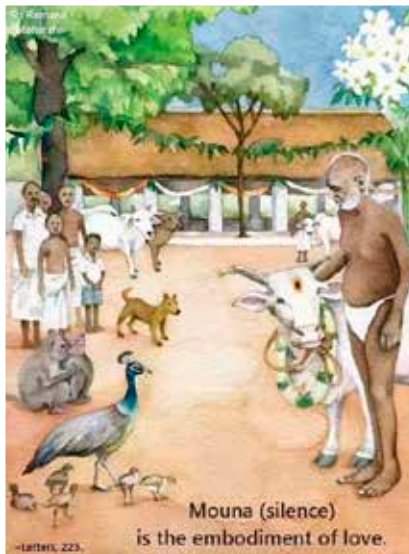
“Do not think that you are. Be.”

“Do not meditate. Be.”

-Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Silent Self-abidance practice makes it possible.

“Sri Bhagavan tells us that we realise truth only by being still.”



Self-escape is not self-respect.

Self-respect is beginning of deep Self-abidance practice.

“Enquire who am I? Sink deep within and abide as Self. That is God as being.”

- Sri Ramana Maharshi

Without the belief that I am this body, only I am. This wrong belief acts as ego on behalf of us - the Self ever-present in the heart as consciousness.

- “Be Still.” Sri Ramana Maharshi

What are we 'doing' to be still as we are already gone? We think about Self, talk about Self but we do not practice stillness which is more important.

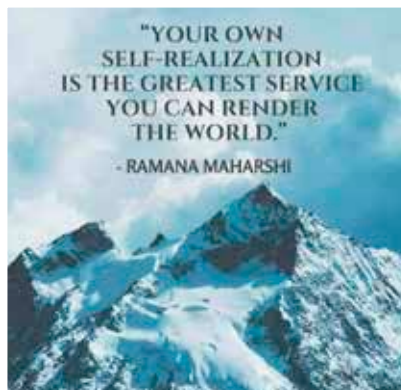
Spontaneous thoughts cannot solve problems created by spontaneous I-thought which is mind.

Hence who am I, hence Self-abidance practice.

Without Self-abidance practice we can't realise the Self perfectly and permanently.



We go on acting as mind divided into seer and seen -always in conflict. Neither I am body, nor I am not body only "I am" as existence, consciousness.



"When the mind melts with love and reaches the cave of the heart in which the benign Supreme dwells, the eye of consciousness will open and you will know the truth, for it will become manifest."

-Sri Ramana Maharshi

"We have to contend against age long mental tendencies. They will all go."

THE HALLOWED PRESENCE OF MAHARSHI

Alan Chadwick

It is hard to think of anything new to say about the Maharshi, so much has been written already. His life has been so uneventful and his philosophy is so clear cut that it almost appears simple.

When I see him now surrounded by an ever-increasing crowd of devotees, my mind is involuntarily drawn back to my early days in the asram when the tiled hall was more than sufficient accommodation even on the most crowded days. Things were much simpler then and there were none of the restrictions which have of necessity grown with the increasing numbers. We could come and go as we liked and it was often possible to find the master alone and talk with him intimately. We little realized then how lucky we were! It all seemed so natural and just as it should be. But in spite of all the changes that have taken place in recent years, he remains just the same. His body may appear older, the approach to him may seem more difficult, but it is merely a change in setting. The essential, the "I", the realized-soul shines through it all, apparent to all but the most blind, with growing lustre.

I have often marveled how Bhagavan seemed to change. He takes on an entirely different form on different occasions. I do not know if others have experienced this too. But sometimes when I walk into the hall I see my mother come back to life, sitting in front of me. The same expression of welcome, the same loving interest in the look with which I am regarded as I take a seat. It is almost uncanny. Yet why should I be surprised? Is he not universal? Does he not take on all forms if we were only pure enough in mind to see it?

"The Self is one, and can be only one" his own words! And so when in his presence, we are for one brief moment able to pierce the veil and find the universal behind the embodiment before us, we can certainly see other forms than the one we are used to associating with Sri Ramana. Did not the same happen on

the battlefield of Kurukshetra to Arjuna? He found all familiar forms in his beloved guru Lord Krishna, and why should this be in any way exceptional? The master is all powerful. It is entirely up to us, each one individually.

Has not Bhagavan's apparently gradual withdrawal from close contact with his disciples been the natural consequence of his philosophy? He has never ceased to tell us that we must realize the Self ourselves, and that no guru, however wonderful he may be, can do it for us. A friend may give us a glass of water but he cannot possibly drink it for us. This is much the same. Bhagavan can and does shed his grace on all who come to him, but he cannot make them receptive to it. As the Self is one, there should logically be no need of grace or outside assistance, and Bhagavan says that this is actually the fact. Just "be still" he tells us. But we are so tied up to our concept of ego (the individualized self), we have so identified ourselves with an unreal idea of separate existence, that without some assistance we find ourselves unable to do anything except go on identifying ourselves with this unreality. And so we come to him.

Here is one who knows his identity with the One Self, not only knows it but lives in constant awareness of it. And as it is the faculty of human nature to grow more and more like that person with whom we are in constant contact, so by such constant contact with the Maharshi we too, in time, will grow to a realization of our oneness with the only Self.

The truth is, of course, that we do not really want Self-realization, however much we may persuade ourselves that we do. Because if we really want it we have it already. There can be no doubt about that! But we want to have bliss and keep the ego at the same time, an impossible combination, if we would only be honest with ourselves. For, if we still have any desire there is something wanting, so it cannot be bliss, which must needs logically be a desireless state. And the ego itself is nothing but desire, the desire for separate existence. And yet we, in our foolishness, are trying to find bliss which is desireless in a state which is nothing but desire. But it is not chiefly for Self-realization that the majority of people flock to Bhagavan. It is because in his presence they find peace, problems miraculously solve themselves or cease to exist; the strength to go back to the world and tackle life is found but

the conception of anything higher is often felt to be beyond the capacity of the one who seeks his presence. It is left to time and the secret working of his grace, in which they have complete faith. And herein lies their wisdom for by faith all things are possible.

People having experienced this peace and spread the good news, the numbers that flock to the asram grow steadily, for there is little peace to be found in the world in these troubled times. And especially will there be vast numbers at this festival of jayanthi which we celebrate this year on December eighteenth, for on such occasions Bhagavan is magnificent; seated on his couch like an emperor on his throne, his fan held stiffly before him like a scepter, he emanates tremendous power and grace. And just to be in his presence at such a time is a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

Bhagavan has many amusing stories to tell of the attentions of his early admirers. Of the good lady who forcibly gave him a bath, washing his unkempt, matted hair, untouched for months, which became, in some miraculous way immediately disentangled and clean. On another occasion, when Bhagavan refused to go with some devotee to his house for a meal how the importunate man would take no refusal but picked him up bodily and putting him into a cart drove off with him to his house. Such stories when told by Bhagavan himself, with his radiant smile overflowing with humour, are a great source of joy to the listeners, showing them how human he is for all his attainment, and thus are a beacon of hope for all. For what one can attain is surely possible for others.

At jayanthi it is this human side of Bhagavan that we especially tend to emphasize. For it is essentially a family affair. Then the children flock to their father in thousands to pay their homage and offer their congratulations at the beginning of a new year of his blessed life. And we silently pray to him that his physical frame may remain with us for many more years, for like children we feel the need for the bodily presence of our beloved father. And we rejoice to see the number of devotees grow and to realise that his word of hope is spreading its influence year by year, until now there is no quarter of the globe where his name is not known.

The Dance in the Heart - Ramananjali Nritya - VIII

Ujwal Jagadeesh

Dr.Sarada, President, Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bengaluru.

Dr.Sarada's literary aptitude blossomed in her early years. The insistence of her parents, Smt.Sulochana Natarajan and Sri.A.R.Natarajan, on giving her equal exposure to culture as her sister Ambika, now Kalaimani Dr.Ambika Kameshar took her into the world of Carnatic Music and Bharatanatyam. This, coupled with her conceptual clarity, communication skills and yen to work with new concepts, laid the foundations for her work in the field of creative theatre. The all-enveloping grace of Ramana that drew her into its fold and gave her the best spiritual, educational and cultural inputs has led her to script and direct more than 125 dance ballets on the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and essential values in Indian Heritage. She now heads the Ramana Maharshi Centre for learning as its President. She inspires and supports the passion of the team members to pursue Self-knowledge flying on the multiple wings of RMCL, self-enquiry, publications, heritage awareness, education and the cultural wing.

Ujwal: Namō Ramana Akka. You had shared how photography, storytelling, music, dance and other art forms entered your life. You also shared your experience seeing the performances of senior dancers. You started learning Carnatic Classical music under your mother Smt. Sulochana Natarajan. When did you start learning Bharatanatyam? Who was your teacher in dance?

Dr. Sarada: Bhagavan's timing, as his placing, is immaculate, although it often takes one by surprise. The actual full-fledged training in Bharatanatyam came to me when I was twenty years old, in the beginning of 1981. We had shifted to Bangalore in 1977 with my father's transfer there. Practically before we knew it, in 1979 we were pulled into the vortex of the whirlwind of grace, the Ramana Movement that took off at top gear with the celebration of Bhagavan's birth centenary. The Ramana Music Movement, the blossoming of Ramananjali, the birth of Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, the inception of Ramana Bala Kendra, and

many large scale events, International Seminars, congregations, festivals. All these had cultural events as an integral part of them. For music there was Ramananjali. What about dance?



To repeat the concept from Ambika Akka and my favourite song of Muruganar, the Vaitta Pattu, which we never tire of quoting, Bhagavan is undoubtedly the Master of proper placement and timing. Much the same time as we came to Bangalore, Bhagavan brought Dr. Balasundaram and Smt. Veena Visalakshi from Rishi Valley School to Bangalore and he placed them, along with Visalakshi Mami's danseuse niece, Kumari Meenakshi, just a few furlongs away from our residence. Dr. Balasundaram and Visalakshi Mami were two of the Founder Members of RMCL's Governing Body. We learnt from them about Visalakshi Mami composing dance dramas for Rishi Valley and Kumari Meenakshi choreographing and teaching the dance.



In typical fashion, Appa inducted 'Meenakshi Akka', as students addressed her, into the Ramana Movement by giving her a Ramana dance program to choreograph and present for the mega Jayanthi Celebrations at Chowdiah Memorial Hall in January 1981. How it came

about that Ambika Akka was to be a part of that program, I don't quite remember, but that she held centre stage for the Bharatanatyam number choreographed and presented by Meenakshi Akka in that eventful program is now an integral part of the history of the Ramana Movement, especially of Ramana Dance.





A few days after the event, we met at Dr. Balasundaram's house. Visalakshi Mami, whom I have heard speak probably only a couple of dozen sentences in the 7 or 8 years that we knew her, so silent was she, told Appa 'Natarajan Sir, Ambika is born to

dance. You must permit Meenakshi to give her intensive training in Bharatanatyam'. Appa replied unhesitatingly, 'That is wonderful but we have always given of everything equally to Sarada and Ambika'. Now I wonder what made him say so, because, while this was by and large true, there was the exception of tennis which Ambika Akka learnt and I did not. Appa must have recalled that I had always loved dance and had been unable to learn it at Delhi. Perhaps he thought it would be unfair to allow Ambika Akka alone to learn. Whatever his thoughts at that moment, this is what he said. Pat came the answer from Meenakshi Akka, 'Let both Sarada and Ambika come to learn Bharatanatyam. I will happily teach both of them.' Appa still demurred. 'I cannot afford dance classes for them', he said truthfully. 'Who talked about fees for the class?' came Visalakshi Mami's repartee. And the matter was clinched.



U: How was your experience learning dance?

Dr. S: It is rather unusual that I actually started learning Bharatanatyam in a formal manner when I was twenty one years of age. Much as I loved dance and still do, it was no easy task for me to cope with the physical requirements of the discipline. Bharatanatyam requires a high degree of physical stamina as well as flexibility of the body. The fact that I was totally unused to any form of physical exercise in all my twenty one years of



life, other than the leisurely swimming that I had done in my adolescence, did not make the task easier. And Meenakshi Akka was as uncompromising in instilling the correct postures and rules of physical form and performance as she was loving



in her interactions with every one of her students. She was free with her words of praise. But she was firm on the tenets of the art form as she was unbending in her posture. If any student did not maintain the ardha-mandala or half-standing posture while executing the primary steps, another student was asked to go behind her and hold her down. If the arms drooped down at the elbows, the student behind would hold them up.



Wearing a bindi was compulsory and Akka would have a beautiful container of Kumkum next to her to decorate any bare forehead. The elder students had to wear a knee level sari for the class, the end of which would finally be brought round the waist like a belt and tucked in tight. Younger students would wear a traditional skirt with a short blouse and had a dupatta tied tight around their waist. Tight, meant really tight. Akka would not countenance anyone adjusting any part of their attire once

the class had commenced. If by chance anyone did so, or even so much as touched their sari or dupatta, they would immediately be asked to go to the adjoining green room, retie their sari and rejoin the class. She would say, 'If you are focusing on your dress, you are not focusing on the dance. Your entire attention should be given to the dance and the dance alone. Once you are ready, you should completely forget about your attire and lose yourself in the dance.' She evidently enjoyed teaching dance and we enjoyed learning from her. On a few occasions, when our afternoon class went on for longer than scheduled and melted into the evening, we have had the good fortune of listening to the mystic veena of

Visalakshi Mami wafting downstairs to us as she would play and sing in absorption during her evening puja upstairs.

Physically the routine was tough for me, including waking up and getting ready earlier than usual on days when we had morning class. But Akka was so loving that emotionally it was a marvelous experience, just like learning at home. The home of the Balasundaram's was ever welcoming guests, followers of Krishnaji, old students from Rishi Valley who came to brush up some earlier dance numbers or learn new ones from Akka, many eminent writers and artistes. Most of them stayed with them for a week or ten days. Appa, Amma, Ambika and I have enjoyed many delicious meals cooked by Meenakshi Akka. Our first full 'margam' of the Ramana repertoire was after Ambika got married. So Kameshwar was also invited for lunch there during some of our practice sessions. He recalls the delicious badam halwa (a sweet delicacy made purely from badam nuts and ghee) which Akka would prepare.

U: Please do tell us about your maiden full-fledged performance, the debut performance as it is called, with your younger sister Dr. Ambika

Dr. S: In those couple of years, I would often wonder whether it was appropriate for me to learn dance at that stage in my life. I only kept at it because I knew Appa had made it a condition for Ambika to learn and she was evidently born to dance as Visalakshi Mami had intuitively stated. Yet, I must also say that I kept at it because Meenakshi Akka was all encouragement. She would always find the good part of my dance and talk about it. I was a little plump, but very often when she started the warm up exercises (these had to be done without fail before every class), which included sitting on one's toes with knees outward and jumping a few times in that posture, Akka would state with wonder, 'Sarada is so light in her movements'. Or else she would commend my posture.



Before our maiden full-fledged performance, I openly expressed my misgivings, wondering whether I could manage, and



whether it would be better for Ambika to give a solo performance, Meenakshi Akka insisted that I too should perform without fail. 'You must perform. You are dancing extremely well. There are only a few steps that you find difficult.' Then she said with a naughty smile, 'I will teach you how to cheat on those one or two by simplifying it.' Bhagavan is naughtier than Meenakshi Akka. The videographer for our performance focused only on my feet exactly on those two instances when I performed the modified step! All of us had a hearty laugh about it thereafter.

Meenakshi Akka choreographed a solo number for Ambika but she insisted on my performing some solo portions in the Varnam. She would spend endless hours on rehearsals and never tire of repeating a piece until both she and we knew it backwards. There was a piece where Ambika Akka had to come in running and fall down weeping on her knees, a virahotkantita nayika represented in a padam with verses from Bhagavan's Aksharamanamalai. Her knees were badly bruised from the number of times this had to be done. Meenakshi akka would not relent and Ambika Akka did not complain or demur either. More than a decade later, when Ambika Akka was to perform solo at a Shrine event, during the morning grand rehearsal she got her big toe nail caught in a floor tile and the whole nail came out. The pain was excruciating. Yet she danced that evening without flinching. Sundaram Anna, then Ramanasramam President, who had come to preside over the occasion, said, 'I was flinching each time Ambika pressed her foot down, but not she.' Of course, it is because of Ambika Akka's courage, but I am sure Meenakshi Akka's training in that very first performance must have contributed to this too.



Despite the rigorous grind of the rehearsals, there was a possibility that we might forget something in the excitement



of being on stage. Ambika was capable of composing her own steps in case she forgot any portion, but I was not. So, Akka smilingly told me, 'In case you forget anything, simply strike a pose. It will seem to be a part of the choreography.' It was in fact

a part of her style to interweave statuesque poses into the dances, enhancing the sthayi bhava.

Meenakshi Akka did not take any remuneration whatsoever for any part of the training that she gave us, not even for the major performance, nor for coming and conducting it with nattuvangam and singing. In fact, she was there at Ravindra Kalakshetra before we reached there, anxious that we may delay. The one thing that had her really worried was that I had cut my hair really short nearly a year prior to that but it had grown only till my shoulders and it would be difficult to attach the false hair with the long plait. Nowadays we get these beautiful readymade long plaits that are ornamented and easy to tie on. Not so then. Akka personally worked on my hair style that evening and ensured that the plait would not fall off during the performance under any circumstance. As I said, she was very particular that attire should be neat and in place.

Ambika and I have been ever grateful to Bhagavan for providing us with a Bharatanatyam guru who was not only an expert in the art, but endowed with the true qualities of a guru, with pure love for imparting the art and equal love for her students, asking for absolutely nothing in return, not



money, not name or fame, not even gratitude towards her. She was totally unconscious of the bounty that she was gifting to every student.

U: What are the lessons you cherish learning from Meenakshi Akka?

Dr. S: One thing I wish I had learnt from Meenakshi Akka along with dance is her pure joy in seeing her students' dance. During class she was a stickler for accuracy, never with a stern attitude but

with unchanging firmness. But after each and every performance she was full of abounding praise for all the students. Surely there would have been a few mistakes here and there but she would never ever mention them except sometimes much, much later with an affectionate laugh. Immediately after the performance she would come and hug and bless all her students saying repeatedly, 'How well all of you danced! You were fantastic! *Romba nanna pannel!*' That is something rare indeed. Every teacher loves to see their students perform, but I am talking about her absolute acceptance. Ujwal, as I speak to you in this interview, I think I should try and emulate this quality for I am sure it was responsible in no small measure in giving me confidence in my dancing.

Ambika went on to become a solo dancer of eminence, evolving her own unique style of Bharatanatyam which she later formatted into a school of practice called the 'Lasyapriya Pani'. She was always filled with deep faith in her art and confidence in her artistic ability. Dance is a natural part of her very being. Even when she



was a child, the moment someone wanted to take a photograph of her she would go into a dance pose. After completing dance training under Meenakshi Akka, I never performed solo, nor gave any classical Bharatanatyam concert after that one full length show. But I have had the great joy of performing several roles in many of RMCL's dance dramas and I have loved and enjoyed every bit of it. Certainly, a great part of the credit goes to our Bharatanatyam guru, Meenakshi Akka and the faith she reposed in my dance.

U: It was your father Sri A.R. Natarajan who enrolled you to the dance classes. How did he encourage and support this endeavor?

Dr. S: Appa was very different from Meenakshi Akka in his approach. He would praise freely, but he would never fail to give a critical review of our performances either. Be it a Ramananjali program or a classical solo performance of music or dance or a dance drama, he would analyse it bit by bit, song by song,



scene by scene. Very often the euphoria of the performance would be shattered to pieces and we would be left crying about our failure. He would then say, 'I told you it was very good right in the beginning. That is the overall picture but all these details need to be corrected.'

Can I say that he did not have confidence in my dance or ability because he pointed out my errors? Far from it. It was



he who gifted me with the joy of dancing by insisting that I go for the class. He also provided ample opportunities in RMCL for each one of us to express our love for Bhagavan through our natural aptitude, that is how Bhagavan guided him, for

he was undoubtedly guided by Bhagavan always. So there was music, Amma's passion through which Bhagavan exploded the Ramana Music Movement. The Ramana Way, our monthly journal, was an opportunity for me to offer my natural flair and love for writing to Bhagavan. Dance programs were the shrines for Ambika Akka's worship of Bhagavan. Appa nurtured these natural abilities with which Bhagavan had blessed us so that we could serve Him best.



When I think deeply about it, I realise that the greatest praise is this opportunity that has been given to us. I read a sweet saying somewhere that every new born baby is a declaration that God has not yet lost faith in mankind. In the dance arena it has been through Natya, or theatre productions that these opportunities have been given to me. I really cannot adequately thank Bhagavan for the immense fulfilment that He has given me through these.

Ramana Class... Anyone?

Jayashree Ganesh

Jayashree is the eldest of 3 siblings who were an integral part of the core of Ramana Bala Kendra and continue to play an active role in RMCL. She was the first young 'hero' of RMCL's dramatic ventures, playing the 16 year old Bhagavan, Venkataraman who heard of the glory of Arunachala, conquered Death and journeyed to Arunachala to report 'Father I have come'. Her enactment of those glorious scenes never failed to move with her total simplicity and surrender.



It is not surprising that Ganesan Anna would affectionately tease her saying 'Jayashree is always my favourite'.

Absolutely honest and unbending, she would stick to her questions regarding God as strongly as she held on to her faith in Him. Coming from a deeply musical family and being a good singer, she was invariably inducted by Smt. Sulochana Natarajan in all the bhajan programs at the Shrine.



It may be her deep involvement in music which made her give the unforgettable performance as Arunagirinathar in RMCL's first video dance drama 'Skanda Ramana'. The powerful way in which

she starts the song 'adala cheranaaraada' rendered by H.K.Narayana in the background, is an all time favourite, so also is her indrawn scene in the following song 'guruvaay varuvaay'. Scenes that we had the joy of revisiting recently when the production featured in our YouTube channel, Ramanacentre Bengaluru.



Some of the other memorable roles that she has played in the Ramana dramas is that of Adi Sankara in the Centre's drama on Bhagavan and Mother Azhagamma, and the role of Muruganar in our first full length dance drama 'Ramana Vijaya'. A more detailed depiction of Muruganar was played in 'Ramana Arpita'.





The Windfall



Kheddah (for those unversed in Kannada) is a practice in which wild Elephants are trapped, caught unawares in a pit dug deep, perfectly camouflaged to sync with the environs using twigs, dry grass, leaves etc., in the forest area frequented by the pachyderms. Its relevance in context is my “fortuitous fall” in the feet of GREAT MASTER RAMANA, no different from an untamed Elephant falling into the pit. My LORD RAMANA, humble salutations to you for drawing me into your Sannidhi even before I entered my teens. The Tamils

devotion to Lord Subrahmanya, is not uncommon. Well, I am no exception. I quote Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni’s “Subrahmanyam Narakrutim Jayaguru Ramanam Vandeham....” (I prostrate to Ramana who is none other than Lord Subrahmanya in Human form). That’s when I realized Bhagavan Ramana had come closer in the pecking order – Maatha Pitha Guru Deivam. The Divine lord had come into my life in the form of Guru.

The First signs

Circa 1980 - My entire family was in Tamil Nadu to attend the ceremonies of my maternal grandfather post his departing, where one of my aunts exclaimed that her daughter had won a prize in the music competition in the Birth centenary celebrations of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and they would visit Sri Ramanasramam to

collect the prize. My mother pitched in and described Bhagavan's mesmerizing eyes and one of his teachings that she knew –

“A passenger in a train keeps his baggage on his head due to his own folly. He can as well put it down to find the load reaching the destination all the same without straining himself”. This was the first time I heard about HIS name and this teaching of HIS I recall quite often.



Tiruvannamalai, of course I knew it was a place on Earth!!!

Courtesy my primary school friend who hailed from there and came to Bangalore looking for English medium schools.

The Beginning

We were back home at Bangalore after the ceremony, back into our routines, I set off to school to hear something off-routine. Most of my classmates were chatting about Ramana Bala Kendra which they were eagerly looking forward to attend after the school hours. This time hearing the name RAMANA, I could immediately place and sense HIS grace. And yes, they didn't forget to mention the delicious prasadam distributed at the end of the class!! Although I missed the first few weeks, without a second thought I just went along with my friends to the class for seniors. Likewise, my younger sister Savithri enrolled herself in the junior section. My



younger brother Jaisriram was to join very much later (I recollect my mother thankfully stating better late than never). I too join in thanking Bhagavan for having drawn all the three of us into his fold at a tender age.

The Organization

Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning (RMCL), a non-profit Spiritual and Cultural Organization founded by Sri A R Natarajan spearheaded the Ramana movement in Bangalore in an impactful way. It is a rarest blessing that the entire family was into the sacred cause with his wife Smt. Sulochana Natarajan heading the Music section and daughters Dr Sarada and Dr Ambika in charge of the Students wing, Cultural activities, Publications etc. of RMCL.

All of them were born charismatic, capable of galvanizing Ramana BHAKTHI in all who came in contact with them and to me seem like the chosen apostles of Ramana to spread his message. An acquaintance or interaction with them by choice or chance is the gateway to the world of Ramana OR the name RAMANA at the least.

RMCL was looking for schools to inculcate the teachings of Bhagavan in the minds of young children.

The Ramana Class

Our School - Karnataka Education & Cultural Society (KECS, Kumara Park) - was hallowed to be chosen for the cause. Smt. Sivakamasundari, a teacher in high school, took personal interest in ensuring that our School responded positively with a noble view to see to it that the students got benefitted. Getting permission from the higher authorities - to engage with the school children as well as to secure permission to conduct classes in the school premises was no mean task. Many many thanks to her. Initially the class was held in the Nursery school building and later on moved to high school premises and eventually to RMCL office itself. I remember the school watchman dutifully locking the school premises after class concluded late in the evening.

Officially it was Ramana Bala Kendra, better known as Ramana class. It is now 40 plus years young (not old!!). Time has flown, but till date it remains the first and the best. The class was holy no doubt, but holistic as well. Initially there were a little more than 100 students, gradually dwindled to less than 50. However, the ones who continued, I strongly believe are handpicked by



BHAGAVAN HIMSELF (Avan Arulaale Avan Thaall Vanangi!). I am sure HE continues to bless those who could not continue for whatsoever reasons. Attending the class every Saturday noon was a fulfilling experience with activities like Music, Dance, Drama, Spiritual Lectures, Yoga, Meditation, Chanting of shlokas,

Drawing, Collage, Crossword Puzzle, Storytelling, Essay writing, Games, etc. Our school of course did have a few of the above activities but they were very limited and seasonal.

The students in the Ramana class were from Grade 1 to Grade 10, bifurcated as juniors and seniors. There was a great camaraderie in the group despite varying age gaps up to a maximum of 10 years, greeting each other with “Namo Ramana!!” coined by none other than Sudarsanam Mama, a disciplinarian and a task master who ensured decorum in the class, punctuality and attendance, in particular. He handled the teachings of BHAGAVAN, ensured the cyclostyled (pre-Photocopy /Xerox era) notes reached us in advance which were expected to be filed properly, read and revised for subsequent classes. His explanation of Bhagavan’s Death Experience aided with block and line diagram is still fresh in my memory. Before entering the class, the footwear was left in the entrance. His strict instructions to leave them in an orderly manner lest we are lost searching in a pile of nearly 30 pairs is noteworthy. This may sound trivial (not for those who would have to search for theirs among 30 pairs every week!), but we all do follow it religiously even to this day.

The Music Class was handled by Sulochana Mami. We learnt a lot of Ramana songs from her. Her joy knew no bounds when we reported having sung them in various Music competitions, and at times bagging prizes as well. This is in addition to the shlokas taught viz Upadesha Saram, Arunachala Aksharamanamalai, Saddarshanam, Ashtottaram etc. I also proudly recall her appreciating my perfect pronunciation amongst the lot while chanting Upadesha Saram.

(Jayashree also played the role of Smt.Sulochana Natarajan herself in one of our dramas 'Bhagavan and Muruganar'.)



The Ramana Literature and Teachings were handled also by Sarada Akka besides chanting, Meditation and Dance Drama while Ambika Akka headed the dance section. Model making and collage of various structures associated with Bhagavan's life, crossword puzzles were taught by Sarada Akka. The extracurricular activities seasoned with the flavour of spirituality were very enlightening and exciting unlike our school activities which focused more on academics.

Murali Mama introduced to us the simple techniques in Drawing and Sketching. Kumar Anna and Srinivasan mama were always around taking care of the group. Nikki Mama handled the dance drama practice in the absence of Sarada Akka and was in charge of stage lighting for our ballet performances and was present in all the rehearsals. Shankar Mama was the Librarian at RMCL. He too was associated with the activities of Ramana Bala Kendra. Natesan Mama, a Sanskrit scholar and an old devotee of Bhagavan, also has shared many interesting incidents from Bhagavan's life.

The most adored Ganesan Anna was the one who took care of everything literally during our frequent stays at Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, also devoting his time to make us meet old devotees of Bhagavan - Kunju Swami, Lucy maa, Kanakamma to name a few who described their first-hand experiences with Bhagavan. He shared various interesting anecdotes connected with Bhagavan during Girivalam or ascent to Skandasramam and Virupaksha Cave. His unique way of narrating the incidents was remarkable. I fondly remember one occasion when



he ensured payasam of my choice was prepared for dinner in the Ramanasramam kitchen.

Being in the company of all those mentioned above has contributed to my holistic development for which I am ever grateful.

I remain indebted to my parents for wholeheartedly encouraging us to be a part of this organization. It was indeed a great blessing to have been able to attend the Ramana class as students till, we matured to young adults, moving ahead in life with our profession, family, relocation etc., yet continued to be associated to the extent possible with RMCL and maintaining the connect much before the foray of social media and instant messaging platforms.

I will forever cherish the memories associated with Ramana Class, starting from the Annual day celebrations at Bal Bhavan, weeklong Shrine opening event, naming of a stretch of Bellary Road as Ramana Maharshi Road, attending Ramananjali programs, weekly Satsangs, National Seminars, trips to Tiruvannamalai and many other places, Girivalam, spiritual workshops, audio recording for drama in Prabhat Studios and the unforgettable trip to Delhi for two weeks to perform a series of ballets. All these wouldn't have been as exciting and memorable if not for the wonderful, wide circle of friends a.k.a Ramana friends, the friendship going and growing stronger by the day.





The Impact

Being a part of the Ramana Movement for over 4 decades has had a subtle, yet profound impact. Sharing a few of the practices observed in the group:

The invitations for various social functions carry the name of Bhagavan on par with the Kula Deivam ("FAMILY DEITY")

The Calendar of regular festivals have Bhagavan's Jayanthi, Aradhana, Advent to Arunachala etc; added to the list.

Along with 'Pillayar Suzhi', the auspicious symbol, Ramana's naamam, His Name, also finds a place at the top of the page, the beginning of any project.

"Sankata Bandaaga Venkataramana" is a popular adage in Kannada meaning when in distress you call out to the Lord. True, in our case it is Venkataramana of Tiruchuzhi!

In addition to Parayanams on Lord Ganesha, Lakshmi, Vishnu etc; Ramana Shlokas Viz. Upadesha saram, Aksharamanamalai are also chanted daily.

The famous photograph of Ramana - Welling's bust - adorns every one of our living rooms.

My Favourite Teachings / Songs / Shlokas

1. Avar Avar Praapta Prahaaram.... (First written instructions to Mother)

2. Kruthi Mahodadau patana kaaranam... (Upadesha saram verse 2)
3. Swasya Swaroopam Vigneyayam.... (Ramana Gita)
4. Ennakennavendum enna vendaam (One of the most popular composition's of Sadhu OM)
5. Arunachala Aksharamanamalai (Bhagavan Ramana's 'Marital Garland of Letters')

TAKE AWAYS

The Hallmark of Bhagavan's teaching is Atma Vichara, "WHO AM I?" Understanding the Gnana Maarga will put an end to the seeker and the sought. However, to me it seems incomprehensible for now.

"Kareva ondhu dina Ramana Guru nannanu thannedhe guhege" (Bowing to the Guru of gurus, whose immeasurable grace will surely lead me to the direct path one day.)

HIS written instructions to Mother "Avaravar praaptha prahaaram...." This alone if I am able to follow in word and spirit, accepting everything as it comes and remain silent (Mounamaai irukkai), I consider myself blessed.

"Ramanaginthalu Guru unte? Aa guruvina karunege sama unte?" (Is there a Guru superior to Ramana, the grace of whom is incomparable!!!)

Ramana....is Class!!

Song of Grace

Revathi Sankar

Ramana makes our mind still by getting us to one thought and removing that also. When we think of the form of Ramana, the contemplation of the form itself will make the mind still and this is a sadhana by itself. Practising this method will help to get to the Ultimate goal.

Self – enquiry is the method revealed by Bhagavan to Siva Prakasham Pillai. He is the first blessed person to get the ‘Who am I?’ instruction from Bhagavan. This was composed as a poem called ‘Ramana Pada Malai’ in gratitude to the Sadguru.

Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning has produced a musical creation. Smt. Sulochana Natarajan has set the ‘Ramana Pada Malai’ as Ramana Pada Pancharatnam – a unique musical piece which has been composed by her on the lines of Saint Tyagaraja’s Pancharatna Kritis. Smt. Sulochana Natarajan has very carefully selected the verses from Pada Malai and set the ragas of Nattai, Goula, Arabhi, Varali and Sri which are the same as Tyagaraja Pancharatnam. We will be meditating now on the third kriti which is the Arabhi raga. The Anupallavi of the song goes like this

mUrtam manadai orumai seiyumen mUrti pAdam vAzhgavE
OrtiDaduvum sAdanamAmenRu uRaippOn pAdam vAzhgave
Tamil

mUrti dhyAna manava sangrihipudu emba mUrti pAda jayisali
kEndreekaripudu sAdheneyendu pELvana pAda jayisali
Kannada

Meaning –

Blessed be the Feet of the Murti (one with form) who says (Contemplation on) Form will make the mind one – pointed. Considered well, it is also a way’.

Bhagavan Ramana’s path is a path which takes us directly to the Ultimate goal. So, there is only one method which leads us there, which is the Self-enquiry. The method of Self-enquiry is such that it takes the mind directly to the source and destroys the mind henceforth.

However, Bhagavan Ramana would always guide people to hold on to the method that they are already practising. If one holds on to a single method or practise, then, as there is a saying, 'All roads lead to Rome', any path will bring you to Self-enquiry if it is done with shraddha and if it is continuous. Bhagavan Ramana says in his appala paattu, santatam salippara, santhoshamaagave. Do your sadhana continuously, without getting bored or tired and happily.

There is one more problem which we face during sadhana, this is the problem of plenty. We have so many paths, so many methods. Instead of getting carried away by these, we have to hold on to one, says Bhagavan Ramana.

I remember a parable of Sri Ramakrishna: There was a well digger who on a wonderful sunny day started to dig a well in his own land. As he started his work, some wayfarers came to him and told him, if you are digging a well you wouldn't dig it here, you will dig it there. The well digger thought he will get water in the other corner and he immediately went to the other corner. There came another elderly person who suggested another place. Yet another place was suggested and another place by each passer-by. Like these ten suggestions were followed by the well digger and he had dug ten pits with no result. One wise person saw this state of the well digger and gave him some good, wise advice. He said to the well digger, 'Oh young man. You have dug 10 feet each in ten different places. Just think about it. If you had dug 100 feet deep in one place, you would have got water for sure'. The well digger realised his error.

This is what Bhagavan Ramana says to us also, to dig deep into one well and not running away with the running mind. Any sadhana we do is a thought for sure as it is something different from the Self. But it is so much better to hold on to one sadhana and realise the Self than to just roam about from one path to another, ending up nowhere.

Bhagavan Ramana, I pray to you to let me hold on to Self-enquiry at all times without straying away into the thought world.

Thank you Bhagavan

Your attention seeking Child :)

How Bhagavan Captured Us

Smt.Sulochana Natarajan

I had said a new chapter opened in our lives with Sarada being cured by the gracious intervention of the Jagadguru of Sringeri, Sri Abhinava Vidyatirtha Mahaswami. This was our blessed association with Him as an immense munificent power in our lives. It was not that we were introduced to Him just then. We had had darshan on a few earlier occasions. But we had not sought to have further darshans. We were aware that my mother-in-law had taken mantra deeksha from His Holiness. We were also aware that He had completely taken over the entire being of ARN's nephew Umesh, now Umeshji to all of us, then a young lad, less than sixteen years of age. Umeshji had totally surrendered to Mahaswami at the very first sight and had entered into the pinnacle of intense Atma Sadhana at the very moment of receiving mantra deeksha from Him. All this we were aware of. Yet, the time for us to be personally drawn to Mahaswami had not yet come.

Looking back at our lives it becomes amply clear that Bhagavan is the Master of Proper Placement and Timing. The Time to be drawn into the gracious orbit of Mahaswami had come then. Though ARN did not specifically tell me that he had any prayer in this regard, he made it a point to plan a visit to Sringeri on our next long trip to the South in the summer vacations of the children. I had a specific prayer that I would climb the Tirupati Hills on foot along with Sarada and would do an 'anga pradakshina' – a full prostration circumambulation of the sanctum-sanctorum. This was to be in the summer of 1972. In the meantime a major event was in the offing in the family as well.

Somewhere around the end of 1971 my parents had started scouting for a suitable bride for my brother Babu (Srinivasan). He had 'seen' a couple of girls but nothing further happened in that front. My father's step-mother was staying with my father. She had been married to my paternal grandfather after my father lost his mother. As fate would have it, my paternal grandfather passed away even before his second marriage could be consummated. So my father's step-mother had become a virgin widow. She stayed with her mother and younger brothers for a few years but

my father believed it was his responsibility to take care of her and brought her home. She was very dear to every one of us as 'Chitti amma'. She adored my father as her own son and showed this adoration by tirelessly preparing delicacies for the family. She also spent long hours preparing large quantities of these delicacies to be shared with all doctor friends, artiste friends and every distant relative of the family as well. My father too was extremely generous and never kept an eye on the expenditure. Neither did my mother. What they had, they readily shared with all then and there.

I am mentioning this just as a small introduction to Chitti Amma. She had two younger brothers. The elder of them had four daughters – Hema, Uma, Bama and Kala. At this juncture Chittimma, who was her very dear maternal aunt, decided that Hema was meant to be wedded to Babu. The Divine ordainment went with her wish and the marriage was 'settled' to be held in the summer of 1972. It was to be a very eventful year indeed. Babu's marriage and then the visit to Sringeri. Suddenly, death loomed large. My mother was laid down with a severe infection of TB that had affected her back bone. She was bed-ridden for several months and literally on the brink of death.

405. PANCHOPACHARA SAMPUJYAH

Deserving of worship in the five- fold way.

The five ingredients of proper worship include the use of sandalwood, flowers, incense, light and offering of fruits or eatables.

Om panchopachAra sampUjYA namaha

406. PANCH BHUTA VIMARDANAH

Destroyer of the five elements

This has reference to Siva's dance at the time of 'Pralaya', the cycle of time. Creation and destruction are cyclical. Since Ramana is Siva incarnate, he is the great destroyer. His weapons of destruction are the piercing glance of grace darting from his eyes, which are like spears destroying the ignorance of the devotees, and the infallible weapon, self – enquiry.

Om panchabhuta vimardanAya namaha

407. PANCH VIMSHATI TATVATMA

One who is aware of the twenty – five tatvas.

The twenty five tatvas are:

- a) Five jnanendriyas which enable hearing, tasting, seeing, smelling and touching.
- b) Five karmendriyas like mouth, hands, feet, excretory organs and genitals.
- c) Five elements which are earth, water, fire, air and space.
- d) Five tanmatras which are the above five in their purity unmixed with each other.
- e) Five others, the mind, intellect, memory, ego and individuality (Purusha)

Om panchavimshati tatvAtmane namaha

News & Events

Revathi Sankar

As part of Bharat Ekta Divas celebrated along with South Zone Cultural Centre, a feature on folk dances of India '**Vividha Bharata**' was presented based on the chant of Arunachala Siva. The presentation was led by Ujwal Jagadeesh, Revathi Sankar and Vincent Paul. Students from Sphurana Nritya Kala Kendra, Maithri English School and Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning participated.



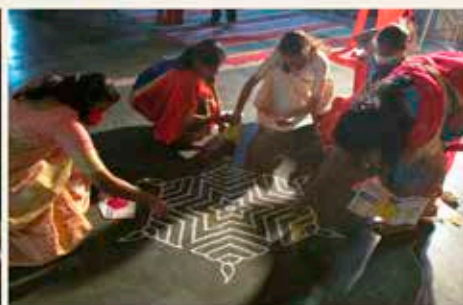
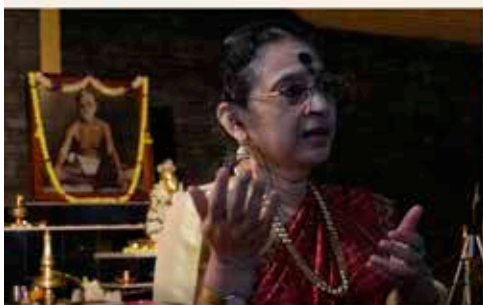
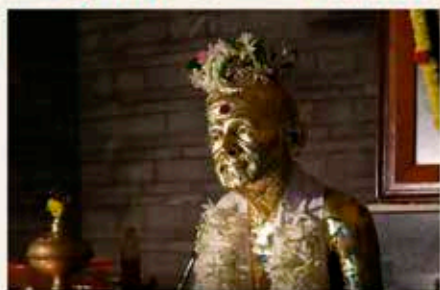
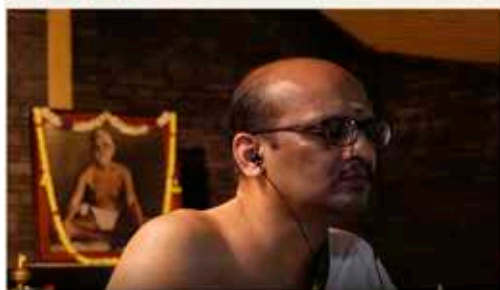
‘Natyavedi Bharata’ – Was a confluence of Indian Classical Dances led by Kum. Revathi Sankar with Smt.Rupa Hemanth, Sri Srinivasan Rajendran, Sri Ujwal Jagadeesh and Smt. Niveditha Srinivas.



'Veera Bhoomi Bharata' – A Drama in Kannada by Abhiranga directed by Sri Akshay Sridhar on the life of the martyr Mylara Mahadeva and his Gandhian values was presented in the festival.



Karthigai Deepam was celebrated in the Shrine with the lighting of a single big flame at the entrance. Aksharamanamalai was chanted with Ashtottara puja to Bhagavan. A self-enquiry session by Dileep Simha and a talk by Dr.Sarada concluded the event.





Special Dates in December and January

At Ramana Maharshi Shrine and Ramana Maharshi Heritage Campus, Bangalore

December

- » 18th Saturday, Pournami
- » 30th Thursday, Ramana Jayanthi Celebrations

January

- » 17th Pournami
- » 22nd, 23rd Saturday, Sunday – 45th National Seminar and Cultural Festival, English Session
- » 26th Wednesday – 45th National Seminar and Cultural Festival, Kannada Session Pournami

At Chennai

- » 17th January – Thai Poosam – ARN Day

Ramana Every Day

RMHC - Ramana Maharshi Heritage Centre - Sanjaynagar

RMS - Ramana Maharshi Shrine - Mekhri Circle

RSCS - RMCL Satsang Centre at South Bangalore

RSCR - RMCL Satsang Centre at Rajarajeshwari Nagar

To register for Online sessions contact

Uma 9538472026 or join on <https://meet.google.com/kwx-bdoa-gtf>

Online Self Enquiry sessions

Thursday: 7:00 pm to 8.00 pm at RSCS

By Sri Nandakumar ji

Friday: 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm at RMHC

By Dileep Simha and Dr. Sarada

Everyday: 5:30 am to 5.45 am, 9:30pm to 10:00pm (online)

By Sri Nandakumar ji & others

(Chanting and Self-enquiry)

Online Satsang

Chanting, Reading, Music, Talks, Puja

Saturday: 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm at RSCS

Every Sunday 7.00 pm to 8.40 pm Kannada Satsang

Every first Sunday 11.00 am to 12.30 pm Tamil Satsang

Online Music and Dance classes

[Contact - Uma (9538472026)] at RMHC

On site Talks, Parayana and Puja

By Sri Chandrashekar (9448839594)

Thursday 6:30 pm at RSCR

40 years of The Ramana Way

Posting the journal every month was and continues to be nothing short of a celebration at the Centre. In the early years the addresses would be pasted with gum and the postal covers would be strewn across a big hall for drying. Then came the task of putting the magazines into the covers with devotees, students and staff sitting in a charmed circle, chanting, singing, chatting, looking at Bhagavan Ramana's enchanting picture on each cover page...

The journal moved from childhood into adolescence in 1986 with the regular demi 1-8th format and moving on to 18

pages. Sri A.R.Natarajan began his first series of articles titled 'The Silent Mind' which went on to be compiled as one of the most popular books of the Centre. The trend was set for the journal to become the fount of the several hundred publications to follow. A charming feature introduced by Sri V.Ganesan was the large poster of Bhagavan's picture in every issue along with a newly narrated incident from Bhagavan's life, the kernel for the book 'Purushottama Ramana'.



Guru Vachaka Kovai in English

Original : Muruganar

Translation: David Godman

Investigation into Truth

131. The mind of the *jiva*, who delights in unreal activity – the life lived as an ego – will be extremely deluded. The only thing worth revelling in is the life of grace lived as consciousness, the supreme, the ego – free *Atma* – *swarupa*.