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Sinners and a Muslim's Prayer

MP3

by Voruganti Krishnayya

Bhagavan was most tender with people who thought themselves for some reason or other to be miserable sinners and who went to him torn by repentance.

During summer evenings we used to sit in the open space near the well. We would collect in the dining hall for dinner and come back to the well. Suddenly, one day, a visitor started weeping bitterly, "I am a horrible sinner. For a long time I have been coming to your feet, but there is no change in me. Can I become pure at last? How long am I to wait? When I am here near you I am good for a time, but when I leave this place I become a beast again. You cannot imagine how bad I can be—hardly a human being. Am I to remain a sinner forever?"

Bhagavan answered: "Why do you come to me? What have I to do with you? What is there between us that you should come here and weep and cry in front of me?"

The man started moaning and crying even more, as if his heart were breaking. "All my hopes of salvation are gone. You were my last refuge and you say you have nothing to do with me! To whom shall I turn now? What am I to do? To whom am I to go?"

Bhagavan watched him for some time and said, "Am I your guru that I should be responsible for your salvation? Have I ever said that I am your master?"

"If you are not my master, then who is? And who are you, if not my master? You are my guru, you are my guardian angel, you will pity me and release me from my sins!" He started sobbing and crying again.

We all sat silent, overcome with pity. Only Bhagavan looked alert and matter-of-fact.

Bh: "If I am your guru, what are my fees? Surely you should pay me for my services."

D: "But you won't take anything," cried the visitor. "What can I give you?"

Bh: "Did I ever say that I don't take anything? And did you ever ask me what you can give me?"

D: "If you would take, then ask me. There is nothing I would not give you."

Bh: "All right. Now I am asking. Give me. What will you give me?"

D: "Take anything, all is yours."

Bh: "Then give me all the good you have done in this world."

D: "What good could I have done? I have not a single virtue to my credit!"

Bh: "You have promised to give. Now give. Don't talk of your credit. Just give away all the good you have done in your past."

D: "Yes, I shall give. But how does one give? Tell me how the giving is done and I shall give."

Bh: "Say like this: 'All the good I have done in the past I am giving away entirely to my guru. Henceforth I have no merit from it nor have I any concern with it.' Say it with your whole heart."

D: "All right, Swami, I am giving away to you all the good I have done so far, if I have done any, and all its good effects. I am giving it to you gladly, for you are my master and you are asking me to give it all away to you."

Bh: "But this is not enough," said Bhagavan sternly.

D: "I gave you all I have and all you asked me to give. I have nothing more to give."

Bh: "No, you have. Give me all your sins."

D: The man looked wildly at Bhagavan, terror stricken. "You do not know, Swami, what you are asking for. If you knew, you would not ask me. If you take over my sins, your body will rot and burn. You do not know me, you do not know my sins. Please do not ask me for my sins." And he wept bitterly.

Bh: "I shall look after myself, don't you worry about me," said Bhagavan. "All I want from you is your sins."

For a long time the bargain would not go through. The man refused to part with his sins. But Bhagavan was adamant.

Bh: "Either give me your sins along with your merits, or keep both and don't think of me as your master."

In the end the visitor's scruples broke down and he declared: "Whatever sins I have done, they are no longer mine. All of them and their results, too, belong to Ramana."

Bhagavan seemed to be satisfied. "From now on there is no good nor bad in you. You are just pure. Go and do nothing, neither good nor bad. Remain yourself, remain what you are."

A great peace fell over the man and over us all. No one knows what happened to the fortunate visitor; he was never seen in the Ashram again. He might have been in no further need of coming.

Another time, a visitor started wailing before Bhagavan that he was being quite crushed under the enormity of his sins.

Bhagavan asked: "When you sleep, are you a sinner?"

D: "No, I am just asleep."

Bh: "If you are not a sinner, then you must be good."

D: "No, I am neither good nor bad when I am asleep. I know nothing about myself."

Bh: "And what do you know about yourself now? You say you are a sinner. You say so because you think so. Were you pleased with yourself, you would call yourself a good man and stop telling me about your being a sinner. What do you know about good and evil except what is in your mind? When you see that the mind invents everything, all will vanish. The good will vanish, the evil will vanish, and you will remain as you are."

Once a visitor said: "I have been coming to you, Swami, many times, hoping that something will happen and I shall be changed. So far I do not see any change in me. I am as I was, a weakling of a man, an inveterate sinner." And he started weeping piteously.

"On this road there are no milestones," replied Bhagavan. "How can you know in which direction you are going? Why don't you do what the first-class railway passenger does? He tells the guard his destination, locks the doors and goes to sleep. The rest is done by the guard. If you could trust your guru as much as you trust the railway guard, it would be quite enough to make you reach your destination. Your business is to shut the door and windows and sleep. The guard will wake you up at your destination."

Dr. Syed was a Muslim scholar and a great devotee of Bhagavan. His wife too became a devotee without losing her faith in the ways and conventions of the Muslim religion. She would not appear before other men. Stealthily she would come to the Ashram, hide herself in one of the rooms and implore her husband to ask Bhagavan to come to see her. It was a most unusual request, but such was Bhagavan's grace and compassion that even this was granted. Mrs. Syed would at first keep silent, rather than talk to Bhagavan through her veil; then later she would talk to him without a veil. But it took a long time for her to venture into the Hall without a veil and sit there like everybody else.

Dr. Syed and his wife used to stay in a rented house outside the Ashram and cook their own food. One day she felt a very strong desire to invite Bhagavan to their house for food. She nagged her husband, but he did not have the courage to request something so unusual. Meeting his wife outside the Hall was unusual enough, and twice he had asked Bhagavan to consent to it; that Bhagavan should go to their house for food seemed unthinkable. But the intrepid lady went on pressing her husband until he became more afraid of her than of the enormity of her request and hinted her wish to Bhagavan, who smiled and kept quiet. She would not give up. She was certain that Bhagavan would grant her wish if the matter were put before him in the proper spirit and form. At last, while Bhagavan was going up the hill, *Dr. Syed* and his wife stood before him and told him her desire. Bhagavan just laughed and went up the hill.

When they returned home in the evening, there was quite a row in their house, she accusing him that he had not asked Bhagavan in the proper way. At last he had enough of it all and said to her: "How am I responsible? The truth of the matter is that your devotion is deficient. That is the reason why Bhagavan refused." These words of his must have touched her deeply and she sat in meditation throughout the night. She wanted by sheer intensity of prayer to bring Bhagavan to dinner. During the early hours of the morning she must have dozed. Bhagavan appeared to her in a dream or vision and told her: "Why are you so obstinate? How can I leave the Ashram and come to your house for food? I must dine along with others, or they won't eat. Besides, as you know, people are coming from distant places, facing a lot of trouble to see me and to have food with me. How can I leave all these guests and come to your place? Feed three devotees of mine and it will be the same as feeding me. I shall be fully satisfied." In her vision she saw the three devotees whom she had to invite. One was Dr. Melkote, the second Swami Prabuddhananda and the third was myself.

She told of her vision to Dr. Syed, who invited all the three for food in his house, telling us that he could not possibly refuse. We were astonished and asked him the reason. Dr. Syed told us the whole story. We were all Brahmins and, although we were delighted to represent Bhagavan at the feast, we were afraid of what the Ashram Brahmins would say. For a Brahmin to eat in a Muslim's house is a serious breach of convention.

Dr. Melkote was in the guest room near the flower garden. I went to him and asked him, "What are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking of the dinner at Syed's place."

"Are you going?"

"I wonder. They are Muslims."

"If we go, we are bound to get into a lot of trouble."

"Yes, they may turn us out of the Ashram."

"Then are you going?"

"I am going," said Dr. Melkote. "I am taking it as Bhagavan's direct order. Otherwise, how could Mrs. Syed pick us? How could she know our names and faces so as to show us to her husband?"

"Prabuddhananda can go, for he is a sannyasi and can eat anywhere. Besides, he is not afraid of the Ashram authorities, for he cooks his own food. But we are taking serious risks," I said.

"Well," said Dr. Melkote, "we are going, and Bhagavan will attend to the risks."

In spite of these brave words Dr. Melkote was perplexed. We were to dine in a Muslim's house. Even if the food were vegetarian, what about the kitchen and vessels? What do Muslims know about the Brahmin rules and habits concerning cleanliness? How would we explain our going to a Muslim house for food? Why should we trust the vision of some Muslim lady? Could we really say that we were merely obeying Bhagavan's orders? Who would believe us? Surely not the Ashram Brahmins! And what an assortment we three made! One was a Kanarese householder, the other an Andhra bachelor, the third a Bengali sannyasi!

The next day when the bell for dinner was rung, we three went before Bhagavan and bowed. Bhagavan did not ask us the reason, he merely looked at us. Instead of going to the dining hall with others we marched out of the Ashram, passing before Chinnaaswami who—O wonder!—did not ask us why we were going out without taking food.

Mrs. Syed got up early in the morning, swept the kitchen and washed the vessels carefully herself. She would not allow the servant girl to enter the kitchen. She had been scolded repeatedly by her relatives and the Muslim Moulvis for her devotion to a Hindu saint. She told them that while she used to say her prayers she would see the Prophet standing by her side. Since she met Bhagavan, the Prophet had disappeared and Bhagavan was coming to watch her pray. So great was her devotion!

After getting everything quite clean, she lovingly prepared dish after dish, and when we arrived, we found the food excellent. After the meal she offered us betel with her own hands.

When we were returning to the Ashram, Dr. Melkote had tears in his eyes. He said: "I come from Hyderabad and I know well the Muslim ways and customs. A Muslim lady will give betel leaves with her own hands to nobody except her husband or a fakir (a saint). In her eyes we were fakirs, the forms Bhagavan took to go to her place."

When we returned to the Ashram we were astonished that nobody enquired why we had not been present in the dining hall, where we had gone or what we did in a Muslim's house. How wonderfully does Bhagavan protect those who obey him!

The Journey of My Heart

Passages from the Diary of a Pilgrim to Sri Ramanasramam
(part 6, continued from *May/Jan*)

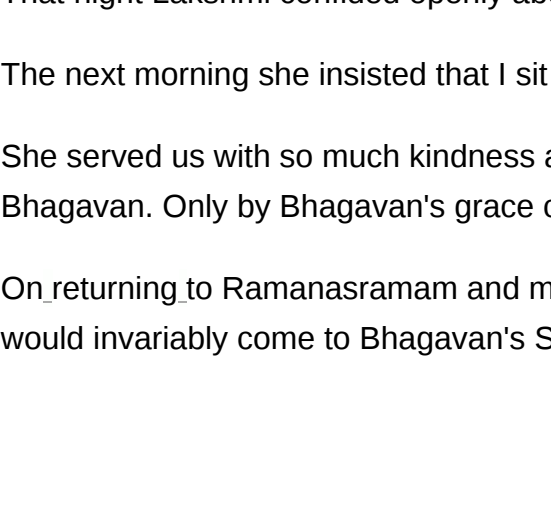
MP3

January 8, 1983 - Our trip to Madras

The pleasant taxi ride which Paul, Ganesan and I were enjoying on the way to Madras became a nightmare when at Chingleput our driver took a drink or some narcotic. However, good fortune was the final result of our misfortune for we were forced by circumstance to spend the night in the home of the President's [Sri T. N. Venkataraman's] daughter, Lakshmi.

Lakshmi's sublime devotion to Sri Bhagavan made a sweet and very deep impression on me. She was elated and enraptured to be visited by Bhagavan's devotees. The devotion with which she one-pointedly served all and the way she later kept me up during the night to talk of Bhagavan deeply inspired me. Her dedicated and devoted presence uplifted us all immensely.

I entered Lakshmi's kitchen and saw on her shrine the two cutting knives I had brought to India. "I brought these for you," I said.


*Lakshmi in Madras
(from Sri Ramana Souvenir)*

Looking at me with her deep, dark eyes she replied, "Your presence is the greatest gift for us." Extremely fatigued, I looked away and she caught my eyes again, "Do you understand?" she said most tenderly, pressing my arm with her hand.

Lakshmi served dinner in the traditional manner: she remained standing and waited on all, refusing to eat herself. She seemed to know the want of each. Her food was delicious and mild. It had the mark of being prepared by a devotee, for it was so light and pleasing.

At night Lakshmi and I stayed up to share some of our experiences before falling asleep. She seemed never to tire of offering little services! She placed water by my side just in case I became thirsty in the middle of the night; she offered to rub my temples with oil, thinking I must have had a headache after our going about Madras during the day in the heat. In fact, while I thought I was drifting off to sleep I heard her voice: "Oh, how I feel like staying up with you to talk! Please, tell me something about yourself, your Ashram and Bhagavan!" I opened my eyes and found her leaning close to me in the dark!

Lakshmi was nine years old when Ashavakra left the body and is the eldest sister of the family. "Bhagavan must have been like a father for you," I said.

"Bhagavan was everything to us," she exclaimed, her eyes shining in the dark, "even though we were playful children, he was our mother, father, brother, sister, grandfather—everything!"

"I must have been an Indian in my former birth," I mused, "because when I am here with devotees like you I feel so happy and light."

"Where is India and where is America?" she cried out, putting her face nearer to mine, "We are all only with Bhagavan, wherever we may be!"

That night Lakshmi confided openly about the hardship she and all her sisters experienced on leaving Sri Ramanasramam after their marriages. Maybe in the end they will all return there, I thought.

The next morning she insisted that I sit with her again in the kitchen as she prepared daisais for us. Though her cooking was so light and delightful she apologized for it, saying, "I am not at all talented."

She served us with so much kindness and love that upon our leaving I saw her eyes rimmed in tears. In her life I could see and feel a cool, gentle breeze of devotion issuing from a heart filled with the holy presence of Bhagavan. Only by Bhagavan's grace can we meet such pure and humble souls.

On returning to Ramanasramam and meeting *Ramaswami Pillai* I told him of our visit to Lakshmi's home. "Lakshmi!" he exclaimed, "She is the ideal girl!" Then he went on to describe how *Muruganar*; and other devotees would invariably come to Bhagavan's Samadhi when they heard that Lakshmi was singing.

by Evelyn Kaseelow Saphier
continued in the *Jan/Feb, 1999* issue

Ashvakva Teaches King Janaka

MP3

Ashvakva is an interesting character in Indian mythology. His name - which means eight contortions - is derived from the fact that his body was twisted in eight places. Venerated as a scholar and teacher, he was the preceptor of King Janaka of Mithila, Sita's father.

Ashvakva was the son of Kagola and Sujata. Once, while the future sage was still in his mother's womb, Kagola was sitting beside his wife and reciting the Vedas. To their great surprise, the child suddenly cried out, "Father, even though I am still in my mother's womb I have already learned the Vedas through your grace. But I regret that you often make mistakes in your recitation." Gravely insulted, Kagola cursed his yet-unborn son and he was born deformed.

Legend has it that king Janaka once demanded to be enlightened in the brief time he spent between putting his foot in the stirrup and mounting his horse. He had challenged the country's foremost savants to fulfill his demand or suffer punishment. No one could help him, and he grew disheartened. Then one day, there appeared in his court a strange individual with eight crooks in his body. Everyone present burst into laughter at the sight. Ashvakva silenced them by declaring they were all cobblers: "You judge a man by the skin that covers him." King Janaka, however, extended him every honor.

Before satisfying Janaka's demand, Ashvakva asked the monarch to offer up everything he possessed as his guru-dakshina or obligatory gift to the teacher. Once Janaka had declared that everything he possessed now belonged to Ashvakva, the latter ascended the throne and asked the king to sit among the shoes that those present had removed in respect. Janaka did as he was commanded, but felt insulted; his mind wandered through the apartments of his comfortable palaces. At this, Ashvakva shouted, "Stop. You cannot think of your palaces or any of your former possessions. They no longer belong to you."

The king folded his hands in contrition; but before long, his mind wandered to his queens. "Stop," said Ashvakva again. "You have given me all your queens." Dumb struck, the king complied, but he could not restrain himself from dwelling on his plight. At this, Ashvakva once again said, "Stop, you have given yourself to me. You have no 'I' any longer."

Trapped, the king was grappling with his condition when Ashvakva shouted yet again, "Stop. Your 'I' is mine. You cannot even think of yourself without my permission."

It was then that Janaka's mind became suddenly empty of all thought. A strange calm descended on him, something that he had sought all his life but which had eluded him. He had thus been brought to the threshold of an experience of truth, through the grace of Ashvakva.

The Janaka-Ashvakva Samhita is a treatise of wisdom comparing well with the Gita; it has even been called the "Ashvakva Gita," and its teaching is simple and direct in its appeal. In answer to Janaka's question as to how freedom could be achieved, Ashvakva observes that if one knows "the Self as pure consciousness, the unaffected witness of the phenomenal world, he will be free."

Note: The above was reprinted from the Times of India, "The Speaking Tree" by Vinod Dhawan. This version of Ashvakva's instructions to Janaka differs somewhat from the way the Maharshi used to tell the story. The Maharshi said there were different versions. If any of our readers knows from what books the different versions of this story originate, we would greatly appreciate being informed about it.

Sri Bhagavan Replies to Questions

Submitted by Sri D.C.C.
from the June 1953 edition of *The Call Divine*.

MP3

Koham

Japa of Koham is correct. Put the question "Who Am I?" once and then sit among the people present on finding the source of the ego and preventing the occurrence of thoughts.

Pranayama

You should not attend to the breath if you are capable of concentrating on the Enquiry without it. Some may have to attend to the breath if unable to concentrate on the Enquiry alone. Some may practice Kevala Kumbhaka (retention of breath) during the Enquiry. Some may require the help of regular pranayama also to steady the mind and control the thoughts. All these practices are to be given up when the mind becomes strong enough to pursue the Enquiry without aid. Pranayama is to be practiced with the usual caution. It will gradually increase the power and duration of the kumbhaka. It will make the mind one-pointed. Take its help if unable to concentrate without it. Pranayama is like the reins to control the mind-horse, or like brakes to control the wheels of thought.

The true answer will come by itself

Suggestive replies to the Enquiry, such as Sivoham, etc. are not to be given to the mind during the meditation. The true answer will come by itself. Any answer the ego may give cannot be correct. These affirmations or autosuggestions may be of help to those who follow other methods, but not in this method of Enquiry. If you go on asking, the reply will come. The method of Enquiry is dhyana, and the effortless state is jnana.

Guru-mantra

"I" is also a Guru-mantra. The first name of God is "I" (tasya aham nama -Brihadaranyaka Up.) Even OM comes later. Atma or the real Self is always saying "I-I." There is no mantra without the person (the aham) who does the japa. The japa of "Aham" is always going on within. Japa leads to dhyana and dhyana leads to jnana.

Japa is always going on. Japa and God are one and the same. See the philosophy of the Name as given by Saint Namdev.

You may practice saguna meditation or the method of Enquiry according to your inclinations. Only that method will appeal to a person which is most suitable for him.

You may continue all activities

Without losing hold of the knowledge of "Who you are," you may continue all activities as prompted by the Inner Controller. They will go on even without your efforts. What you are destined to do, you cannot avoid. They will follow your way of their own accord.

You are already perfect

Don't entertain thoughts of imperfection, the lack of desirable qualities, etc. You are already perfect. Get rid of the idea of imperfection or the need for development. There is nothing to realize or annihilate. You are the Self. The ego does not exist. Pursue the Enquiry and see if there is anything to be realized or annihilated. See if there is any mind to be controlled. The effort is being made by the mind which, in reality, does not exist.

Real asana

Real asana is "being established" in the Self-Reality or the Source. Sit in your Self. Where can the Self go and sit? Everything sits in the Self. Find out the source of the "I" and sit there. Don't have the idea that the Self cannot be realized without the help of asanas, etc. They are not at all necessary. The chief thing is to enquire and reach the source of the ego. The details such as posture, etc. may distract the mind towards them or to the body.

The real book

You may read whichever book you like. Self (Atma) is the real book. You can look into it whenever you like. Nobody can take it away. It is always at hand to be read. Hold on to your Self and then you can read any book.

Doubts, fears and worries

Ask yourself, "To whom do these doubts, fears and worries occur?" and they will vanish. Cease to pay attention to them. Pay attention to the Self within. Fear, worry and doubt can only arise when they are two, or when anything else exists apart from or separate from, or outside you. If you turn the mind inward towards the Self, fears, etc. will disappear. If you try to remove a doubt or fear, another doubt or fear will arise. There will be no end to them. The best method to annihilate them is to ask "To whom do they occur?" and they will disappear. To destroy a tree by plucking its leaves one by one is impossible. By the time you pluck just a few, other leaves will grow. Remove the root of the tree. The ego and the whole tree with its leaves and branches will then be destroyed. Prevention is better than cure.

The ego and the Heart

The ego arises within the body. Hence, in the first instance, you may look within the body for its source. When you reach the source there will be no inside or outside because the source of the Self is all-pervading. After realization everything will be seen to be in the Self. The Heart is the place from which the "I thought" arises. Heart means the center of consciousness. It cannot be identified with any part of the body.

—also excerpted from the Oct 1969 issue of *"The Mountain Path"*
in the *Sep / Oct 2001* issue of *"The Maharshi"*

Letters and Comments

MP3

Dear Sir,

Having heard excerpts from the latest issue of your inspiring newsletter read out yesterday at our weekly Satsang, I am induced to offer the enclosed account of a personal episode of another devotee of Bhagavan from my family for possible inclusion in the next issue of the newsletter. Thanking you.

Yours at Bhagavan's Holy Feet,

Dr. T. Sankaran,
193 Ganganagar, 9 Cross
Bangalore 560 032
India

The following episode was recounted to me by an uncle of mine who was employed in Ananthapur, which was then in the Madras Presidency of the former British India.


It was the mango-fruit season and he left for Tiruvannamalai for darshan of Sri Ramana Maharshi. He took with him a basket of mangoes for offering to Bhagavan and changed trains at the Madras Central Station and Villupuram Junction, arriving in Tiruvannamalai at a time when it just started raining heavily.

Since the train halted in Tiruvannamalai for only a short time, he alighted in haste with his baggage and rushed out of the ticket barrier to hire a bullock cart. Having succeeded, he proceeded to a hotel in the town and settled down for a bath when he suddenly discovered to his dismay that he had left the basket of mangoes on the railway platform. He, however, still found the same cart waiting for another fare. Daunted by fear of losing his basket he thought to himself: "Oh Bhagavan! What have you done to me? Is this how you care for your devotees?" He engaged the cart again, went to the railway station in the unabated rain, reached the spot where he had alighted and found the basket untouched by anyone, with all the fruit cleaned by the shower.

He returned to the hotel room, had a refreshing bath and reached the Ashram with his offering. When he got up after prostrating before Bhagavan the latter asked him with His graceful smile: "Oh! You still have trust in me?" My uncle was nonplussed by the humorous remark, but Bhagavan put him at ease by asking him to join the party going for lunch. Bhagavan also sat near him and when sliced mangoes were served on the leaf-plates he took an extra piece and offered it to my uncle with extreme love.

Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please see the *Sri Ramana Satsang* online pages.

"*The Maharshi*" is a free bimonthly newsletter distributed in North America by *Arunachala Ashrama*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. You can subscribe to this newsletter's announcements *by email*. All back issues are available as *html pages* and in *Acrobat PDF* format from 2000 to the present. *Books, images, videos and audio CDs* on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found in the *eLibrary*, the *On-line Bookstore* pages and the Ashrama's  channel.

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