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Remembering Viswanatha Swami

Despite a lapse of more than thirty-five years, the devotees of the New York and Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama continue to experience the profound benefit of their association with Viswanatha Swami. We conclude in this issue a few anecdotes from his life, his writings and our meetings with him during the 1970s.

SWAMI Viswanathan would never forget any sincere seeker or devotee he had met. If we wrote to him from New York or Nova Scotia we felt assured that he would respond, pouring out his insights, instructions and blessings in words that sprung spontaneously from his pure, surrendered heart.

On the topic of Heart, the Swami understood from his own experience and learning why Bhagavan Ramana gave the utmost importance to it (see article by Swami Viswanathan on page 3). He wrote to Evelyn Kaselow (now Kaselow Saphier) on March 1st, 1978: “The Heart is the soul of Bhagavan’s teaching in one word, and it has been clearly expounded in chapter five of *Sri Ramana Gita*. If possible one should study the Sanskrit text itself, as it is so inspiring.

भुवनं मनसो नान्यदन्यन्न हृदयान्मनः ।

अशेषा हृदये तस्मात्कथा परिसमाप्यते ॥

bhuvanani manaso nanyadanyanna hrdayanmanah |

aseṣā hrdaye tasmātkathā parisamāpyate ||

“The universe is nothing but the mind and the mind is nothing but the Heart. Thus the entire story of the universe culminates in the Heart.” (Chapter V, verse 12)

And हीं (hreem) is the holiest बीजक्षर (bījakshara, seed mantra) of the Mother of the universe. Hrit (ह्रित्)

is the shorter form of Hriday, and this is Hreem.

“If you very subtly meditate on Hreem with your attention (lakshya) on the Heart Center on the right side of the chest as revealed by Bhagavan, that is the subtlest and easiest and best meditation. The Heart vibrates as Hreem, Hreem, and everything is swallowed up by it.

“H, R, EE and M, the four constituents of HREEM, represent the gross, subtle, causal, and transcendental aspects. Hreem is the Tantric Pranava.

“I want you to convey this essence of ultimate teaching to Sri Bhagawat and all co-devotees there. I have taught you “Arunachala Siva, Siva Siva Siva Siva.” And now I give you this. Nothing more is needed.

“That you are deeply moved by the “Sri Lalita Sahasranama Stotram” is sure proof that you are enjoying the supreme Grace of the Mother. May the Mother bless you all with her All-pervading Grace.”

After inquiries about his health and making a trip to the New York Ashram are answered, the Swami concludes this letter, writing: “Praying again for the abundant Grace of Bhagavan, our Mother, I am ever yours, Viswanathan.”

Regarding the meaning of his name, Viswanatha, he wrote in another letter, “There is Bhagavan, ever residing within our Heart, one with us. For the sake of

play (lila) he has endowed us with a seeming separateness from Him. The waves are nothing but the ocean. I am the 'Lord of the Universe' - that is what my name means."

Swami Viswanathan had much love, respect and devotion for his mother. About ten years after the Mahanirvana of Bhagavan she became ill at Dindigul and he went there to serve her till her dying day.

We were told that she had kept on her altar a small little bundle of something, carefully wrapped and tied in a cloth, which she would worship daily. She did not permit anyone to open it or know its contents. But after her passing it was opened. Swami Viswanathan then saw that it was a small booklet of the 108 names (Sri Ramana Ashtottara) that Bhagavan had written in his own hand for her in Sanskrit. Swami Viswanathan himself had composed this work. Such was her devotion to Bhagavan.

While serving his mother during her last days he wrote about the refined spiritual qualities of his mother as follows: "She is an extraordinary woman. None of the calamities have shaken her. She is serene, dignified and childlike in her indifference to so many things of the world that usually disturb even those endowed with a clear intellectual grasp of what is what. I am sure that apart from her natural make-up that way, her lifelong adherence to the Divine, culminating with her contact with Bhagavan and her deep and real devotion to Him stand by her now to sustain her in her otherwise pitiable physical condition.

"I am reminded of her advice to my father who was himself a man of unalloyed Advaitic conviction as he was being taken to the hospital for a strangulated hernia: 'Look here! Your son and the doctor are there to take care of your body, so turn your whole attention to what you have been saying of the Ultimate Reality all these years.'

"My late younger brother (R. Subramanian), who also had inherited that adherence to Advaita, reported to me the above conversation, expressing great admiration for Mother's presence of mind. Yes, undisturbed, unruffled inner serenity under all changing circumstances of life is the greatest asset an intelligent person should care to have. Bhagavan has opened our eyes to the great fact of life that unruffled serenity (shantih) is our very nature and that all

disturbing waves are only on the surface and that they also are nothing but the Reality when viewed from the Heart, the ultimate Source of everything.... Understanding is beyond thought, and so is real love and devotion."

In his letters to us he always hit the mark, straight through, defining what we must do to attain that state of beatitude:

"Leave alone individual relationships. Study the 'Five Verses on the One Self of All' ('Ekatma Panchakam') again and again and realize that there is but One Self. We are all one in it. It is the last of Sri Bhagavan's utterances. Feel one with the whole universe. That is universal love."

Whatever Swami Viswanatha spoke or whatever he wrote had the stamp of truth on it because it sprung from his own unshakable convictions born out of experience.

He told us that he was in the Nirvana Room when Bhagavan's body expired. For Viswanatha Swami this was not a depressing experience but rather one of revelation and illumination. He saw that small room flood with light. His heart soared in bliss. He then saw this same light leave the room and believed that it took the form of the heavenly body that was immediately seen slowly traversing the sky at the very moment of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana.

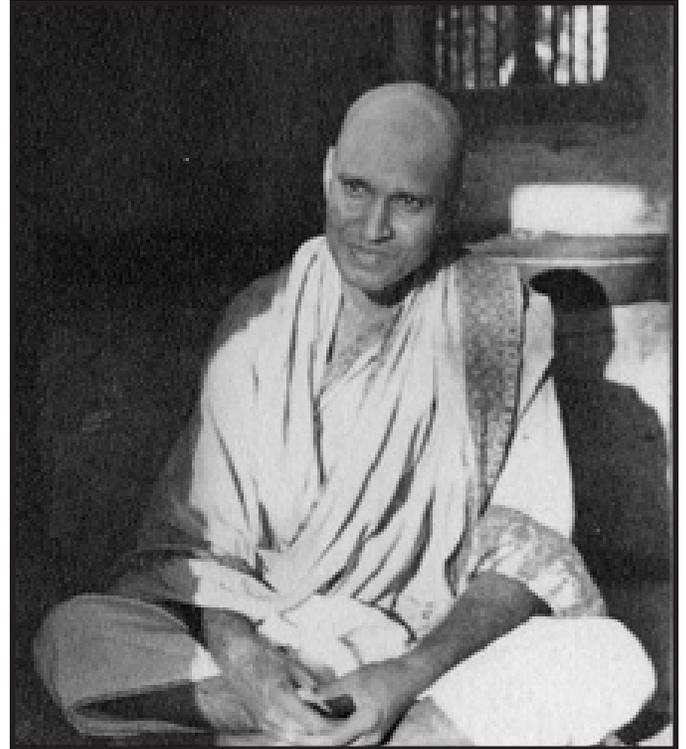
Swami Viswanatha's sudden departure on October 22, 1979 was a shock to all who knew him. His younger brother Sivaraman said he died by an act of will, and that he could have lived beyond those 75 years if he had wished. It is true he suffered from some illness, possibly heat stroke, for a couple of days. He requested no treatment and foretold that he would not survive but would depart after two days. And that is what happened.

Although reluctant to write about himself, the Swami was persuaded to write some personal reminiscences in four issues of the 1979 Mountain Path. His legacy was not those writings but rather his unflinching lifelong devotion to Bhagavan, the example of a pure, surrendered life to the Master.

During Swami Viswanatha's final years he was sought by ardent devotees from India and abroad for the clarification of their doubts. In the evenings several devotees used to meditate with him in his room. He

did not talk much, but when he did the subject was either Bhagavan or Nayana. He had the rare privilege their close proximity and blessings. However he never boasted of his association with them. He was without ego of any kind. He never made any fuss about himself. He looked after his needs himself and did not depend on others. He mingled freely with the high and the low. There was no exhibition of his scholarship or his lifelong sadhana or deep spirituality. While he had a thorough grasp of Bhagavan's teachings, he also had deep faith in the potency of great mantras, having been influenced by Nayana.

The boy who had surrendered to Bhagavan in his teens, merged with Arunachala. His samadhi is near the back gate of the Ashram on a site specially selected by the Ashram President, Sri T. N. Venkataraman, who showered on Sri Viswanatha Swami his love and affection till the last minute. Hundreds of devotees cherish the memory of this unostentatious and simple child of Bhagavan.



The Central Teaching of Bhagavan Ramana

In his first editorial written for the April, 1974 issue of The Mountain Path, Viswanatha Swami pours out the fruit of his lifelong effort to understand and experience his Guru's teaching. Beyond what is written here, there is nothing more to know or practice to experience complete spiritual fulfillment as taught and lived by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

ONCE when Bhagavan was asked what his central teaching was, he replied that the *Centre* itself was his central teaching. By the Centre he meant the Heart, the Source of everything.

Though we find mention about the Heart in the traditional scriptures, as for instance,

I am the (One) Atman ever present in the heart of all beings." (XV. 15)

Iswara (God) dwells in the heart of all beings."(XVIII. 61) —Bhagavad Gita

we do not find a satisfactory definition of it anywhere. Many take it as the physical heart. Though life and death are due to its throbbing and stopping, it is not the spiritual Heart. Then, what is the Spiritual Heart?

Here is the reply, as recorded in Chapter V of *Sri Ramana Gita*:

...wherefrom all thought movements of embodied beings emanate, that is known as the Heart.

The I thought is the root of all thoughts and so, from where the I thought springs up, that, in short, is the Heart. (v. 3)

And so, Bhagavan directs us to watch the source from which the I-thought emanates.

The I-thought disappears as one searches for its source. This is Self-enquiry. —*Upadesa Sara*, v. 19

On the annihilation of the I thought (by means of constant Self-enquiry) the Heart itself shines forth as 'I-I' and it is the Supreme Self, all pervading.

—*Upadesa Sara*, v. 20

The ego, I, as subject is always associated with an object, whereas the real I shines alone as 'I-I', Pure

Awareness, devoid of the mental subject-object split. And this Pure Awareness is known as the Heart.

As Thou dancest in the heart of all beings as 'I-I',
the Self of all, Thou art known as the Heart.

—*Arunachala Pancharatna*, v. 2

Bhagavan has from his own experience revealed to us the location also of that Heart Centre. It is on the right side of the chest and not on the left. It is the centre from which the mind with its root thought 'I' is born and it is the source of light and life in the individual. It is the natural centre where everyone feels his identity. The mind withdraws into it during sleep without knowing it. If one consciously touches it seeking the source of one's being, then one transcends individuality. It is the centre from which the ego emanates and perceives the world.

Withdrawing consciously into it one experiences the unity of the Self, in which all differentiation is lost and everything is experienced as nothing but the Self. That is blessedness and that is not only the summit of spiritual experience, but should be the quite normal state of every being, the Reality of all beings. All suffering born of a false sense of separate individuality completely disappears and that is the state of unalloyed, perennial Bliss.

Those who find it difficult to follow this path of pure Self-enquiry may practice mental repetition (japa) of any Name of God or simple OM as representing the One Self of all, with their attention focused at the heart centre. By this process also, all thoughts including the root thought 'I' get destroyed and one reaches the same goal, the One Real Self of all, the ever blissful Pure Awareness. We find approval of this method in the following verses of *Sri Ramana Gita* (Ch. III, v. 10, 11):

By incessant japa of mantras or pranava alone with steady mind and unwavering faith one attains perfection.

By (constant) japa of mantras or even by the japa of simple pranava (Om) alone thought gets turned away from objects and merges in the Self.

The first is the path of Self-enquiry and this is the path of meditation. Both of them lead to the same goal, the One indivisible Self of all.

This merging in the Heart, the reunion with the

ground of Being-Awareness is of course the Heart, the core and the ultimate goal of every religion. That is why earnest seekers, whatever their religion, find Bhagavan's teaching not only acceptable but the very essence of their own tradition.

What makes the teaching most attractive is that it is so clear, precise and definite and comes from a realized Sage. Also, it carries with it a sense of special urgency because it is accompanied by the safe and simple method of Self-enquiry (vichara) which is the most practical and useful aspect of Bhagavan's teaching.

This method explained in *Who am I?*, "Upadesa Sara" and "Forty Verses on Reality" is the final stage in the spiritual path, but all other sadhanas like bhakti, dhyana, upasana, yoga and seva, prescribed by the various traditions are recommended by Bhagavan as helpful preliminary or supplementary disciplines. Self-enquiry, whether taken up as the main or a collateral method, forces the pace of self-surrender and the access to awareness.

The mutual reinforcement of the two processes – extinction of the enquiring ego and merger in the cherished ideal – is well brought out in the contents and arrangement of the first two verses which form the Invocation of the "Forty Verses on Reality" ("Sat Darsana"):

Without the Reality existing, can there be a knowledge of existence? Free from all thoughts, that Reality abides in the Heart, the Source of all thoughts. It is therefore called the Heart. How then to contemplate it? To be as It is in the Heart, is Its contemplation.

Those for whom there is the intense fear of death, seek only the Feet of the Lord as their refuge, who has neither death nor birth. Dead to themselves and their possessions, can the thought of death occur to them again? Deathless are they.

The first verse asserts that Being and Awareness are identical, and that this Being-Awareness is no object for meditation, Being indeed is the Heart to know which can only be abiding as Itself. According to the second stanza, the dissolution of the ego in Pure Awareness is accomplished by confrontation with death, that is, by a willing acceptance of individual non-being, and by the consequent total surrender to

the Lord immortal, for true surrender amounts to the extinction of the individual self with all its attachments. Once the ego has disappeared, who is there to think of death?

Disassociation from the perishable body and identification with Awareness which has no beginning, end or change, should not merely be accepted as an intellectual proposition, but directly experienced and remembered as a transformation of consciousness. When this happens it is the real “conversion” for which all the religions have come into being and are labouring hard, a death which is a rebirth, for which, according to Bhagavan, all men and women are eligible here and now.

The enemy to overcome is not death of the physical

body, but the fear of death. Whether it is the philosopher Socrates who did not shirk from drinking hemlock, or the poet Shakespeare who declared: “Death once dead, there is no more dying then,” or the Seers who smile at the dissolution of the body as the common human lot, the “critical moment”, or “the voluntary process,” which releases the God imprisoned within our ignorant, limited self, does occur when one dares and chooses, consciously and willingly, to die as corruptible and mortal flesh only to find oneself born into incorruptible and immortal Being as Awareness. It is only after this event, which has now been brought within the reach of many by Bhagavan’s grace, that true human living can commence in the plenitude of awareness and in the harmony of right relationship.

Letters and Comments

Fear of Aloneness

IM writing this email to ask you for advice. Yesterday I had an experience that I have never had before. I was reading a book on advaitic teachings and while I was thinking deeply about them I suddenly felt, half-intellectually, that I am consciousness, not the body, and this consciousness drew my attention to itself. It was totally unlike anything I had ever experienced.

I often used to have a strong sensation in the heart centre, like a feeling of love or joy, but this used to be connected with the body. But yesterday’s experience was totally disconnected from the body. Of course, there was the body and everything else around it but it was just not me.

That may sound very good so far, but this experience was not at all pleasant. There was no peace, no light, no bliss, only fear. I felt totally alone. In such situations I usually pray to Bhagavan but even the Bhagavan I used to know, his picture, seemed to belong just to the physical world. He was not there to pray to, and that’s why I felt so alone. Even now as I’m writing this and I remember the experience I feel this fear once again. It probably is the fear of the loss of everything real to me and the feeling that I will be all alone from now on. Again, there was nothing like bliss or peace about this experience, although the consciousness attracted my attention forcibly, like a strong magnet.

For a few minutes I was even afraid I would go crazy. But because I was so afraid and this state scared me so much, I used all my energy to forcibly escape it and draw my attention back to the physical world. After a few minutes I was back to normal consciousness. Then I closed the book because what I read just scared me even more.

I don’t know if it was good that I returned to normal consciousness or better if I had surrendered myself to this consciousness. I probably should have, but I was so frightened that I would go crazy! Bhagavan’s advice to me would probably be ‘Enquire for whom is this fear’, and I remember having read some passages in Talks dealing with the topic fear during meditation. But I just didn’t have enough courage to do that. I felt I would have been all alone forever if I had gone further.

Was it once again just the ego which protested its impending loss of consciousness? Or, did I do something wrong, I mean something dangerous? Did I make some mistake in the meditation, something that could really drive me crazy?

I would appreciate any advice. Maybe you have had a similar experience or you have heard or read about it and you can help.

Devotee from Germany

First of all, it is certain that you are *not* going crazy. The physical life that this experience negated, causing you fear, is much closer to madness than the experience of loss of bodily identification.

As your mind was withdrawing from all outward ties, the innate samskaras rose up to thwart this inward journey by interpreting it as a descent into aloneness or nothingness. Why? Because to the mind the opposite of objective creation is nonexistence, where the mind cannot go. But in the state Self-aware aloneness there is, in reality, no 'others' separate from us. There is in fact no aloneness, but only pure Being. So the ultimate state is not one of aloneness but completeness and fullness, in which no individual is present to experience fear.

Out of deeply ingrained habit the ego/mind will fight back, declaring that to lose everything objective is to lose ourselves, which is just the opposite of the Truth. To experience the Truth we *must* lose all and die in order to have true life in and as the Self alone. Seekers usually do not grasp clearly that the total annihilation of the seeker, the ego, the I who seeks, is the goal of all spiritual paths, for once the seeker is

lost in the depths of Being, only then the true eternal Self is experienced.

Since you have been studying Bhagavan's teaching for so long, I am sure that you know all this. But now that you have come face-to-face with this aspect of its truth, you should not allow the thief (ego/mind) to steal it away or reject it. Once you hold onto this Consciousness and discard everything — world, body, thought, mind, ego — you will remain as the Self alone. You have had a taste of the awareness of your existence as undivided consciousness. However, you should remember that it is he who recollects that taste who fears the thought of losing all. It is not the pure Awareness that fears loss. That is why the ancients have said that the mind is a good servant but a bad master. We must not listen to what the mind tells us but trace it to its source and hold on to the Arawareness. Then we shall be free from troubles, including the one you have just written about. The next time you are called to surrender to this inward pull of Self-awareness, please remember this so that you can allow your individuality to dissolve in It without fear and experience your true natural state of Being. *Editor*

Mahanyasa Purvaka Ekadasa Rudrabhishekam

led by

Murthy Vishnubhatla

You are cordially invited to attend a Mahanyasa Purvaka Ekadasa Rudrabhishekam to be celebrated during Kartika Masa, the month in which the beacon is lit on the summit of the holy hill of Sri Arunachala. The event will be held at:

Arunachala Ashrama

86-06 Edgerton Boulevard

Jamaica, Queens, New York 11432

on

Sunday 10 November 2013

7:30 a.m. - 7:45 a.m. Ganapati Puja

7:45 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Mahanyasa Parayanam

9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. Arunaprashna Sahita Panchamruta Abhishekam

11:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Rudrabhishekam with Ekadasha Rudra Parayanam

2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. Pooja with Lalita Sahasranama

Luncheon prasadam will be served after the program.

Awareness or Consciousness

THE essence of mind is only awareness or consciousness. When the ego, however, dominates it, it functions as the reasoning, thinking or sensing faculty. The cosmic mind being not limited by the ego, has nothing separate from itself and is therefore only aware. This is what the Bible means by "I am that I AM".

The ego-ridden mind has its strength sapped and is too weak to resist the torturing thoughts. The egoless mind is happy in deep, dreamless sleep. Clearly therefore Bliss and misery are only modes of mind; but the weak mode is not easily interchangeable with the strong mode. Activity is weakness and consequently miserable; passivity is strength and therefore blissful. The dormant strength is not apparent and therefore not availed of.

The cosmic mind, manifesting in some rare being, is able to effect the linkage in others of the individual (weak) mind with the universal (strong) mind of the inner recess. Such a rare being is called the GURU or God in manifestation.

—*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, No. 188

Ramana Satsangs

Regular satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in or near large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-546-0378 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Ann Arbor, MI — Nirupama & Ramesh (574-514-4766 / neeru_2@hotmail.com)

Birmingham, AL — Sai Kand (205-441-6859 / kandsai@yahoo.com)

Boston, MA — David & Anna (617-928-1487 / annaklegon@gmail.com)

Connecticut Area — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)

Chapel Hill, NC — Ranjani Ramanan (919-338-2551 / ranjanil@yahoo.com)

Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)

Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Rubinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@gmail.com)

Houston, TX — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)

Los Angeles, CA — Natarajan & Indira Venkatesan (310-473-9441 / nvenky30@yahoo.com)

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