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Yoga Swami of Jaffna

“I am here, I am there, I am everywhere! And I am the madman who knows it!”

Sometime between 1934 and 1940, Sri Yoga Swami, the great sage of Sri Lanka, came to India and met Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. From then on, Yoga Swami always referred to Bhagavan as a Maha Viran — a great hero. About Arunachala, which Yoga Swami held most sacred as the silent, unchanging manifestation of the One-Without-a-Second and Sri Bhagavan’s acknowledged Guru, he sang:

The feet of which Sri Vishnu Himself could not attain the vision, the feet of Truth which stands as One, pervading heaven and earth, they are our ever-present help, our refuge and support. (*Natchintanai*, 232¹)

Tevaram used to be sung every evening in Yoga Swami’s presence. About the custom he once quipped, “We sang Tevaram to while away the time, but time has not gone. We too are eternal.”

THE story goes that when, in 1897, the great Swami Vivekananda stopped in Jaffna on his triumphant return from the World Parliament of Religions, an inconspicuous man named Yoganathan attended his lecture at the Hindu College. Vivekananda, who had many engagements that day, began his talk with the words, “Time is short but the subject is vast.” Yoganathan abruptly got up, left the auditorium, and at once set off in search of a Guru. The words remained with him all his life.

Little is known about the early life of the future sage except that he was born into a pious Saiva family on Wednesday, May 29, 1872 in the village of Mavittapuram. After his mother’s death, when he was still an infant, he was sent to live with his paternal uncle in Kolumbuturai about three miles outside Jaffna, where, for the most part, he remained for the rest of his life. He began his formal education in a Tamil school in the neighborhood and finished it at St. Patrick’s College, reputedly one of the leading educational institutions in Ceylon. He thus acquired advanced proficiency in both Tamil and English. Being a missionary school, study of the Christian Bible was obligatory. This, together with

the Tamil scriptures that he chose to study, made a profound impact on Yoganathan as evidenced by his frequent references in later life to Biblical quotations to illustrate Vedantic truths.

About 1901, he came firmly under the influence of his Guru, Chellappa Swami, who lived in the precincts of the great Murugan Temple of Nallur, some three miles from Kolumbuturai. From then on, every weekend Yoganathan would vigorously walk the full forty-five miles from where he was working to Nallur to be with his Guru, and again walk back to work the following Monday.

Near the house of the chariot at Lord Murugan’s shrine... I had darshan of the Master. ‘Hey! Who are you?’ he cried!...

1. *Natchintanai* means “good thought”. It was the name Yoga Swami gave to the large number of spontaneous songs he sang that were (or were not, as the case might be) written down by some devotee at the time of their utterance. All references are to the page number on which the song appears in the 1974 English edition of *Natchintanai: Songs and Sayings of Yogaswami* (hereafter referred to as *Natchintanai*), published by the Sivathondan Society, Jaffna.

Near the house of the chariot at Lord Murugan's shrine... I had darshan of the Master. 'Dive deep within and realize' he shouted and laughed aloud.

Chellappan Swami was a jnani who cloaked his greatness in *unmatha avastha*², the guise of a madman. Indeed, locally he was known as "Visai [mad] Chellappan". He would throw stones at people and use obscene language and mad talk to drive them from him and keep all at a distance but the most serious.

Attracting people to one's self is another self-deluding activity... Chellappan was great; he never gave in to such delusions. He merely muttered, "Who knows?" and "It was all settled long ago," and went about the outer courtyards of the Nallur Temple and sat in the dirt, saying that all the filth would frighten away the people who came to fall at his feet. "I don't think anyone ever got an answer to a question. I merely stood and waited behind him for the occasional gem that fell out of all the mad talk," Yoga Swami once said.

In addition to his apparent madness, Chellappan used to repeat, often for months at a time, one or another variation of certain enigmatic sayings of which he was particularly fond.

There were four fundamental sayings, and as they contained the essence of the teachings of both Chellappan and his disciple Yoga Swami, they came to be known as the "Mahavakyas" or "Great Sayings":

1. "There is not even one wrong (or harmful) thing."
2. "We do not know." or "We know nothing."
3. "It was all finished (or accomplished) long, long ago." Alternatively; "It was all perfect and complete from the very beginning."
4. "All is truth." Alternatively: "The entirety of everything is the Reality."

These apparently enigmatic sayings, when meditated upon, reveal a depth of meaning.

Their multi-dimensionality directs the mind to the very nature of Reality. About their profundity and the benefits that meditation on them bestows, Yoga Swami sang:

They are the best of all who know themselves;
Upon this earth they'll not take birth again.

Those who have seen how 'three' have become 'one'

2. One of the three classical "guises" of the *jnani*, as described in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: "*balonmathapisachavat*" — like a child, madman or ghoul.

— they are the wise. Know them!

He is the Guru, whose attributes and qualities transcend, who is Knowledge of all knowledge, beyond what is beyond.

The God who makes the Hearts of devotees His temple — He is indeed the Lord Supreme. He who is and says, 'IT within the Hearts of all — Perceive Him and be happy!'

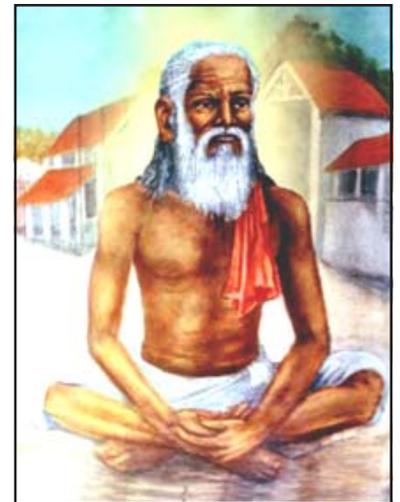
Clearly, employment forty-five miles distant from his Guru could not hold Yognathan for long, and after six years he quit his job to immerse himself completely in his Guru's holy presence.

"In speechless Silence he bade me to relish who I am. Distinctions fade. I imbibe his grace, and instantly I gain the clarity of wisdom and become immersed in bliss."

Yoga Swami and Sri Ramana Maharshi

There are striking parallels between the teachings of Yoga Swami and those of his contemporary, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, the Svayambhu Guru of Tiruvannamalai. Indeed, the phenomenon of similarity also struck Yoga Swami's disciples who, seeing no difference between the two Gurus, would frequently come to Ramanasramam, often for prolonged periods, for Bhagavan's darshan and to seek elucidation on points that the enigmatic Yogi Swami would not elaborate upon. They found Bhagavan Ramana more approachable and, though he might observe silence, he never, like Yoga Swami, sent anyone away. Yoga Swami observed the outward gunam of the kshatriya: like a king he ordered people to come or go. Ramana, the Brahmarishi, was ever the sakshi, the witness: he let people and events come and go and unfold as they would. On a deeper level, of course, both jnanis knew that "It was all accomplished long, long ago".

Among the regular visitors to Ramanasramam, readers of *Day by Day with Bhagavan* will be familiar with K. (Colombo) Ramachandran (whose son



Chellappan Swami of Nallur

lived and worked in Ramanasramam), and K. Navaratnam, and Ma Ratna Navaratnam. Of Bhagavan's attraction for these earnest seekers two examples should suffice. On the one hand we have the cryptic Mahavakya, "We do not know" or "We know nothing". On the other hand, we find Bhagavan saying in *Talks*, pg. 154: "Cease to be the knower; then there is perfection." And in *Day by Day*, pg. 195: "The state we call meditation is simply being oneself, not knowing anything or becoming anything."

About his remarkable experience with the two Gurus, Yoga Swami and Sri Maharshi, Sri Gauribala Swami, the first Western disciple of Yoga Swami, narrated the following anecdote. Before the Second World War broke out he had been living in Ceylon as a Buddhist monk. Like other German nationals, he was interned in North India for the duration of the war. On his way back to Ceylon after the war, he stopped at Ramanasramam to have darshan of Sri Bhagavan.

Having recently converted to Hinduism, the Swami had a great many questions he wanted Bhagavan to clarify. But as time wore on his mind became far too quiet for questions and they all evaporated. When three months were completed and he was preparing to depart for Lanka, Swami asked Bhagavan for one final upadesa for his sadhana.

"The Truth can be summed up in the words, 'I am that I am';" said Bhagavan, "and the method is 'Summa iru'".

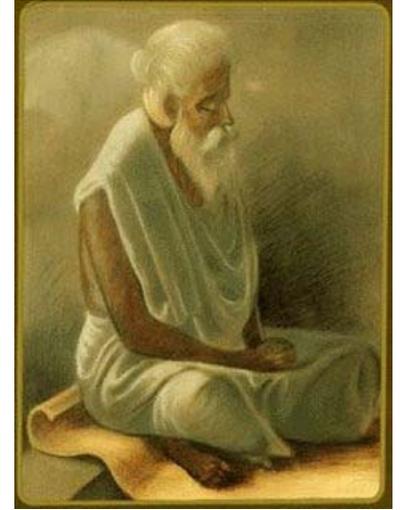
Not yet knowing Tamil, Gauribala asked another devotee what the word meant. Whether not knowing English or Sri Bhagavan's teaching well enough, the devotee answered that they meant, "Be quiet". Puzzled, Gauribala took leave and returned to Lanka. Shortly thereafter he met Yoga Swami and came strongly under his influence. At the time of initiation, Yoga Swami uttered only two words: "Summa iru." The last words of Sri Bhagavan were the initiatic words of Yoga Swami, and it took Gauribala many years to delve into the full meaning of this identical upadesa.

* * * *

From the time Yoganathan quit work to be with his Guru, his life became one of intense spiritual discipline, severe tapas and stern trials. One such tapas was a continuous forty-day meditation. At the end of it Yoganathan, presenting himself before Chellappan, received his Guru's benediction. Rude and peremptory, the words shot out: "Go you hither and thither and beg for your food!" With this he sent the disciple away to

stand on his own two feet and digest what had been transmitted. The year was 1906, and Yoganathan was thirty-four years old.

Thus began Yoganathan's solitary sadhana, when he too was absorbed in *unmatha avastha* like his Guru. Naked he would lie in the hot sun for hours and days, with chillie



Yoga Swami of Jaffna

powder smeared all over his body. If he was approached, he would hurl stones or abuse, often both. Thus he kept to himself and followed his Guru's upadesa. In 1910 he once again returned to Chellappan and heard the following blessing ring out: "Look here! Look here! The city of Lanka I have given! I have given! The king's crown I have given! I have given!"

About the middle of that year, Yoga Swami went on a solitary pada yatra to Lanka's numerous shrines and holy places, meeting on the way many saints and ascetics from various traditions – Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi and tribal. When he returned to his old haunts after a year or so he was recognised by the people as Rajarishi. Revering him as a "King of Yogis", they began to call him Yoga Swami. The name stuck.

In 1915, Yoga Swami heard of Chellappan's impending death and went to Nallur to visit the dying Guru. Chellappan was then being nursed in the hut of a relative. Quietly approaching the gate of the compound, Yoga Swami heard Chellappan shout from within: "Stand outside and see!" Typically, this was not a rebuff but rather the Guru's final blessing to a beloved disciple. While colloquially meaning "outside", it also means "open space", "void" — akasha, shunya. To ever abide in the plenum void that is Brahman is the ultimate state of realisation; truly a great parting benediction.

The farewell on the external plane pulled Yoga Swami more deeply than ever within the Heart:

"It is as It is." "You are I! I am you!"

On the nakshatram of Aswini in the month of March, 1915, Chellappa Swami, aged about seventy, attained mahasamadhi.

From 1915 onwards, Yoga Swami led the life of a renounced recluse, remaining in *unmatha avastha* like his Guru. He could be seen frequenting the Nallur Chariot where Chellappan had spent most of his life, the Thundi Crematorium, one or another ashram, and the Grand Bazaar, but most often he was to be found sitting under an iluppai tree at the School Junction in Kolumbuturai, immersed in samadhi. He would sit there for months at a stretch, totally indifferent – or oblivious to – his surroundings and the inclemencies of weather. The 1921 flood in Jaffna came and went without disturbing his repose. It was only in 1923, when he accepted the invitation to live in a simple coconut-thatched mud hut in the compound of a householder devotee near the tree under which he had been living, that his *unmatha avastha* came to an end and Swami entered the more approachable state in which he remained till his mahasamadhi. Though always terse and often enigmatic, ever-spontaneous in words and actions, Swami nevertheless led from then on a normal life of regular habits, and devotees found it possible to come to him for guidance. But it was only in 1934, when he gave his permission to a group of his devotees to publish the *Sivathondan* (Servant of Siva), a religious journal in Tamil with a small section in English, that his teaching became known to the world at large. Typically, however, as long as he lived Swami forbade his name or photograph to be printed in the magazine.

Between 1934 and 1940 Yoga Swami undertook a number of trips to India, during one of which he went to see Sri Ramana Maharshi. The following are Swami's

words about his meeting with Sri Bhagavan:

“We did not go with any desire. We simply [summa] went. We stayed for about an hour. He did not speak at all. He is a great hero.” Ever-spartan with words, Yoga Swami has nevertheless condensed into these five aphoristic sentences a glowing tribute to the Sage of Arunachala. In saying, “Summa we went” – the accent is on the word ‘summa’, as important a word and concept in Yoga Swami's teaching as in Sri Bhagavan's. In its metaphysical sense, the word indicates a state of unruffled inner poise and stillness: “Be still and know that I am [is] God” – a quotation much used by both Yoga Swami and Bhagavan. That stillness is the state of being summa. Brahman is summa, and summa iruttal – abiding in stillness, the real Silence or maunam – is to abide as Brahman, our true nature and being. In the entire hour that Yoga Swami spent in the presence of Sri Bhagavan, no words were spoken. They were both summa. Their communion was like that of Dakshinamurti – of whom Sri Bhagavan was the living embodiment – a communion in Silence. And Yoga Swami, who never overtly praised anyone, came away calling Ramana a “maha viran”, a “great hero”.

The rest of Yoga Swami's life is really a description of his influence on his devotees and disciples, and can best be told through their impressions and anecdotes. Like Sri Bhagavan, Yoga Swami never accepted the title of Guru, but, as Arthur Osborne has said of Sri Bhagavan, those who were his disciples nevertheless knew so unerringly.

–From the *Jayanti, 1994 Mountain Path*

68th Mahanirvana of Sri Ramana Maharshi

You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in observing the 68th Aradhana Of Sri Ramana Maharshi

At Arunachala Ashrama
Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center
86-06 Edgerton Blvd., Jamaica Estates,
New York 11432 / Tel: 718-560-3196

Sunday 13 May – 11:00 AM

In California, San Francisco Bay Area
40086 Paseo Padre Pkwy
Fremont, CA 94538
Tel: 510-656-2752

Saturday 19 May – 11:00 AM

The programs will include parayanams, bhajans, talks and puja, followed by prasad (lunch).

My Heart's Journey

A Pilgrim's Diary

by Evelyn Kaselow

Sri Ramanasramam, December 14, 1982:

This evening Ganesan took Paul and me to meet Sri Balarama Reddiar. He spoke of the beauty of a mother's selfless love. He told us, "For spiritual life, infinite patience is needed - not just for one lifetime but for many lifetimes.... The sense of time should disappear."

December 16, 1982: This morning I departed for pradakshina at 5:15 a.m., well before dawn. However, I soon discovered hundreds of people had the same idea, for it is the first day of the new Tamil month. I felt as one with the stream of women dressed in their most festive saris and men in their fresh dhotis. Many women appeared to walk the entire eight miles with a child in their arms! In the dark before dawn, the temples and lingams were lit up with images bedecked with flowers, turmeric, etc. The faces of the villagers, filled with faith as they gazed upon the images, impressed themselves on my heart. Dawn broke on the dirt road to Adi Annamalai. In the tiny rural hamlet fresh rangoli (white-powder designs) were at each door, and at the center the women had placed bouquets of fresh, bright yellow flowers, resembling daffodils. Naturally, the recitation of Mother's Names (Sri Lalita Sahasranam) formed the background from which I viewed all these charming sights. The cup of tea I stopped to have at Adi Annamalai tasted like the sweetest nectar. During this pradakshina I went around almost all the Siva Lingams.

Returning, I found Ramaswami Pillai sitting outside in the sun. I took him some homeopathic pills for his congestion which he accepted like a meek child and sat with him for a while. He inquired about my parents' occupations and the size of our family; whether I lived in a house or apartment; whether I was married. When I told him I was single, he said, "It is all right. When a person is unmarried he remains fresh. After marriage reality takes over, imagination is absent. Then, the partner becomes a possession, a part of one's self. Also, there may be fear of losing the person - though not in Hinduism, especially among Brahmins. Yet, tastes change. When a person is a child he may want a tricycle, then a bicycle. Later, that

will have no meaning and he'll want a motorcycle. So, it is with the mind."

Ramaswami went on to speak of the beauty of selfless love which springs from a pure and one-pointed mind: "In its pure state the Self is indivisible, it cannot be split. You see, Sri Bhagavan's teachings is totally separate from religion. In religion there is still ego - 'I am a Hindu'. For Westerners, they need not become Hindus. Within their own religion, in the context of their own society, they may practice it. In reality, Sri Bhagavan's teachings is not religious - it is more scientific than religious. Religion is not required to turn the mind back on itself."

He also spoke about attachment, especially the strong attachment of a child to its mother. As a boy, Ramaswami's strong attachment to his mother prevented him from dying and taking another birth: When he had become very sick the thought of his mother helped him survive. "Even great saints may ultimately have to serve their parents," he commented.

He spoke at length on the uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan's teachings and about how, once a person is established in the Self, sacrifice is no longer painful but becomes a great pleasure. Then he said, "I think I'm exhausted - not physically tired - but my supply has run out." He joined his palms and as I saluted him he gently chanted, "Om, Om, Om." I took his leave.

December 18, 1982: In Ganeshan's room at 5:00 a.m. I had found Kunju Swami sitting on a folding chair. With a broad smile he motioned me to take the chair beside him. Ganeshan finished his ablutions and we three took off, going around behind the shrine for the path leading out to Palakothu. Walking beside Kunju Swami I began to feel lighthearted as a child. His very presence uplifted us.

We followed a path quite near to the base of the mountain, obviously familiar to Kunju Swami as one taken with Bhagavan. The tall trees gave way to low lying bushes and thorns and a panoramic view of Sri Arunachala in its majesty opened up before us. We talked while walking.

Kunju Swami expressed concern that I had not worn sandals.

“I need all the merit that I can get!”

“Then you are a true dacoit!” he replied.

Ganesan explained that Kunju Swami uses the term “dacoit” especially with reference to devotees of Arunachala Ashrama who, coming for short periods of time, plunder all of the wealth of Sri Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala, and then take it home with them.

I said that I was thinking of extending my stay, although I had my work to return to in New York.

Kunju Swami said in an ecstatic mood, that during Sri Bhagavan’s time some with exceptional devotion, living away from Tiruvannamalai, would begin to find excuses to extend their stay. In such cases, Bhagavan would send Kunju Swami with the devotee to the station to make sure he got on the train.

“Sri Bhagavan was particular that women going on pradakshina should be accompanied,” Kunju Swami said. But rather than say, “Don’t go alone,” he would ask, “Who is accompanying you?” After a woman devotee had left, he would ask, “Who went with her?”

We passed the spot where only the foundation of S. S. Cohen’s home in Palakothu remains, and Kunju Swami described how Cohen would cook some rice and vegetables in the early morning and then go to Bhagavan. Half he would take at noon and the other half at dinner. In the afternoon Bhagavan would walk about Palakothu and inquire about everyone’s welfare like a father. All would be delighted at his solicitude and personal care for them.

One day Bhagavan asked Cohen what he had eaten. “Oh, nothing much, Bhagavan, a little rice and vegetable,” he replied like a poor man. “Rice and vegetable! How fortunate!” was Bhagavan’s rejoinder. “When we were on the hill we had only rice, sometimes even without salt, and now you are eating like a king!” In this way Bhagavan would encourage and console them.

During his walks to Palakothu, Bhagavan would sit on Cohen’s stone verandah. Cohen began to feel bad that Bhagavan had to sit on the hard stone. One day he put out a chair and Bhagavan never returned. So considerate to all, he never wished to cause inconvenience or to receive special attention. Cohen lamented this as his life’s greatest mistake.

Ramana Balachandran’s Offering to Bhagavan

On April 25 in Arunachala Ashrama, Ramana Balachandran, a 16-year-old devotee of Bhagavan performed a Veena concert before a gathering of devotees.

Ramana, a recognized musical prodigy, has already toured throughout India and is presently on a two-month concert tour in the US.

Those visiting Sri Ramanasramam over the past 10 years may have seen Ramana chanting the Vedas at Bhagavan’s Samadhi with the Veda Patasala boys. His parents, Sharanya and Balachandran, have built a house at Tiruvannamalai and spend at least half of every year there, where Ramana is home schooled.

At the following web address you will find the dates and venues for concerts in May and June:

<http://carnaticamerica.com/events/category/veena/>

The remaining scheduled concerts are:

May 5 - **San Jose** / May 6 - **Los Angeles** / May 11 - **San Diego** / May 12 - **Phoenix** / May 13 - **Houston** / May 19 - **Jacksonville** / May 20 - **Miami** / May 24 -25 - **Madison** / May 28 - **Milwaukee** / June 2 - **Philadelphia** / June 3 - **Raleigh**

If anyone wishes to contact Sharanya and Ramana during the tour, or are having Ramana Satsangs in the cities of Ramana’s concerts when they are there and would like them to participate, they are very eager to do so. To contact them, please call **928.409.3858**.

Also on Facebook you can view videos of Ramana performing:

<https://www.facebook.com/ramanabalachandhran/?ti=as>



Arunachala Pancharatna

Bhagavan Ramana Explains Stanza Five

THE stanza says that one should completely surrender one's mind, turn it inwards and see 'you' the Self within and then see the Self in 'you' in everything. It is only after seeing the Self within that one will be able to see the Self in everything. One must first realize there is nothing but the Self and that he is that Self, and then only he can see everything as the form of the Self. That is the meaning of saying, 'See the Self in everything and everything in the Self', as is stated in the *Gita* and other books.

It is the same truth that is taught in Stanza 4 of the "Reality in Forty Verses". If you have the idea that you are something with form, that you are limited by this body, and that being within this body you have to see through these eyes, God and the world also will appear to you as form. If you realize you are without form, that you are unlimited, that you alone exist, that you are the eye, the infinite eye, what is there to

be seen apart from the infinite eye? Apart from the eye, there is nothing to be seen. There must be a seer for an object to be seen, and there must be space, time, etc. But if the Self alone exists, it is both seer and seen, and above seeing or being seen. — *Day by Day with Bhagavan*

Offering up the mind to you, always seeing all things as your form, worshipping only you, that one triumphs, O Arunachala! becoming absorbed in your bliss!

— *Arunachala Pancharatna*, v. 5

If Self has form, the world and God likewise have form. If Self is without form, by whom and how can form (of world and God) be seen? Without the eye, can there be sight or spectacle? The Self, the real Eye, is infinite. — *Reality in Forty Verses*, v. 4

Ramana Satsangs in the USA and Canada

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)

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

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

Canada, Ottawa — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / madhupaddy@rogers.com)

Canada, Toronto — Thiru (416-876-1942 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

Canada, Vancouver — Akash (778-321-4499 / eternalshiva@hotmail.com)

Canada, Victoria — Saibish (250-818-2875 /saibish@gmail.com)

Chicago Area — Jean-Luc & Rita (719-480-3530 / blueskyvalley@mac.com)

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

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

Detroit, MI Area — Murali & Kalpana (248-210-7543 /

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

Florida, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Rubinson (954-600-1967 / arunahill@gmail.com)

Florida, Tampa — Rohit (813-766-0145 / rohitkvaitya@yahoo.com)

Florida, Palm Coast — Shriram & Rekha (904-347-3434 / ssmarathemd@gmail.com)

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

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

New Jersey, West Windsor — Gurunath & Leena (609-273-6216 / gsnetravali@hotmail.com)

Austin, TX Area — Sriram Vaidyanathan (vsriram_prasad@hotmail.com / 512-695-4444)

Puerto Rico — Rosa & Scott Mathewson (787-531-5295 / rosilnm@hotmail.com)

San Francisco Area — Karthik & Sunita (510-656-2752 / sunita_parasuraman@yahoo.com)

Seattle, WA Area — Sridevi & Prabha (425-605-0041 / pravish87@live.com)

Washington, D.C. Area — Uma & Santosh (301-528-5526 / uma_santosh@hotmail.com)