

The Maharshi



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Conversations with Swami Viswanathan

This is Part II of the transcribed conversation between Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat and Swami Viswanathan was recorded while on a giripadakshina in August of 1973.

SPEAKING of the time that Ganapati Muni was requested to translate Sri Aurobindo's book, *The Mother*, into Sanskrit, Swami Viswanathan said:

"When he began to translate it, in the very first sloka he wrote:

वन्दे श्री रमणमहर्षे राचारस्य पदाब्जम्।
यो मे ऽदृश्यदीशं भान्तं द्वातमतीत्य॥

vande śrī ramaṇamaharṣe rācārasya padābjam।
yo me 'darśyadīśaṁ bhāntaṁ dvātamātītya॥

"I bow to the lotus feet of the sage Sri Ramana, the great teacher who helped me to see the Supreme Lord, self-effulgent, transcending nescience."

"Later he explained the reason for composing this verse first: 'So that people in the future might not think that I (Ganapati Muni) also went to him (Sri Aurobindo) in search of light. I wanted to say it as it is: that my guru is Sri Ramana Maharshi, I have received his full grace and there is nothing further to aspire for.'"

"When Ganapati Muni read the verses out that he had translated to Sri Aurobindo and asked him if he had properly conveyed the ideas, Sri Aurobindo burst out in laughter and said, 'Oh, it far excels the original!'"

"After that, Ganapati Muni did not feel the urge to translate more and he stopped there. They requested him to stay on in Pondicherry, but he did not feel inclined. [He was even offered a house for his family with all living expenses provided. When this news reached the

Maharshi's ears he commented, saying, 'Ganapati Muni is moving into Aurobindo Ashram? It will never happen.']"

"The great ones are so humble and act quietly behind the scenes. Wherever Ganapati Muni was, he manifested such a power in him that no hostile or negative forces could come near. For this reason all of the sadhakas felt very happy to have him near. He was requested, for the benefit of the Aurobindo Ashram sadhakas, to stay on there, but it was not to be."

"Mahatma Gandhi once said of Vinobha Bhave: 'So many people come here to get the blessings of the ashrama. He has come here to bless the ashrama.' It was the same with Ganapati Muni. When he came back from Podicherry he narrated all his experiences to Bhagavan."

Swami: Have you ever been to Pondicherry?

Bhagawat: No. We never feel the urge, or the attraction. That is the thing.

Swami: So many people who come here feel only drawn to Bhagavan, They feel more at home here.

Bhagawat: Right.

Nearly the whole book of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* has been underlined [by me] in pencil. That happened ten years ago. After that I thought of writing my own impressions of the book, but that desire did not remain long. With the passage of time, and with Bhagavan's grace and mercy, it completely vanished. (All laugh.)

Swami: You can read in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam* about the greatness of Arunachala. The devotee that related the greatness of Arunachala also told it to the Divine Mother, at Her request. The Mother came here and asked that bhakta. The bhakta said, “What am I to tell you? You are the Shakti itself.”

“No, no, said the Mother. I want to hear of the greatness of Arunachala from a devotee, and from the devotee’s standpoint.”

In verse 26 of Bhagavan’s ‘Marital Garland of Letters’ there is a reference to Gautama:

Gautamar pōttrum karunaimā malaiyē
Kadaik kanit tālvai Arunāchalā.

கௌதமர் போற்றிந் கருணைமா மலையே
கடைக்கணித் தாள்வா யருணாசலா.

“O, Hill of Grace, adored by Gautama! Give me your grace of Jnaana.”

Swami: In the fleeting interval between two thoughts, there is the sparkle of the atman.

A, RU, NA – these three letters, he (Bhagavan) interprets as Sat, Chit, and Ananda – not arbitrarily. ‘A’ is the beginning of the alphabet, the very first sound. What is at the beginning is at the middle and in the end. That is everything. That is the origin, ‘A’ (Sat). ‘RU’ or ‘RA’ is agni beejam, the root sound of fire. Here, it is the fire of consciousness. ‘NA’ in Sanskrit is ananda. It attracts all human beings – ananda swarupa. So Bhagavan says Satchitananda is ARUNA. ‘ACHALA’ means not moving. That which is finite can move. There is no movement for the infinite – satyam, jnaanam, anantham, brahma, Sat Chit Ananda. That is the meaning of Arunachala.

Bhagawat: Can we go right to the top of Arunachala from here?

Swami: No, it is inaccessible. Ascension is possible only from the front side. It will take, if we do not strain ourselves too much, about three hours to reach the top.

Bhagawat: [He talks about his home in Bihar] In Vaishali, where Bhagavan Gautama Buddha hails and in Mithila, home of Sita, the Buddhists could not make any headway. His doctrine could not penetrate this land. That spiritually charged land of my home, Mithila, was the home of Janaka. Even now one can see an unassuming pandit, barely able



Swami Viswanathan and Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

to earn a living, but well-versed in all the shastras, astronomy and scriptures. Mithila has produced plenty of scholars and saints too.

The Story of Vidyapati

Bhagawat: Vidyapati was a great poet whose poetry is very much like Jayadeva’s, the composer of “Gita Govinda”. Chandidas of Bengal was influenced by Vidyapati. For a long time the Bengalis claimed Vidyapati to be a Bengali. The Bengalis were academically more advanced than we so they could write and claim anything. Later on those claims were refuted. The power of Vidyapati’s compositions is very great because he was such an exalted devotee. When he was old and knew his end was near he left Mithila on foot to bathe in the river Gangaji. Because of his advanced years he could only walk so far, and then he stopped and prayed, “O Mother Ganga, I have come so far, but I can’t go any farther. Can’t you come here?” At that very spot he left his body and Mother Ganga turned her course several miles north and enveloped his body. To commemorate this event a Shiva temple was built on that spot.

Vidyapati was also a great devotee of Shiva and composed beautiful poems in His praise. The story goes that Lord Shiva himself took the form of a boy-servant, an attendant of Vidyapati, so he could be close to him and enjoy his compositions. One day Vidyapati, with this servant, was walking to a distant place, passing through an arid land. There was no water for miles around. Vidyapati cried out to Ugna (the servant's name. Ugna means 'to write') and said, "Hey Ugna, my life is going out. Can you find water somewhere?" Vidyapati waited as Ugna went a little farther in search of water. Behind a tree Ugna poured a kamandalu of Ganga water from his jata (hair). Vidyapati looked at it, tasted it and said to Ugna, "This is gangajal, water from the Ganga. From where did you get it? There is no water here. Tell me or else I will not drink it." Ugna said, "I will tell you only if you don't divulge to anyone else this secret."

"Yes, certainly," said Vidyapati. Then Ugna took the form of Shiva and appeared before Vidyapati and said, "Sir, you write such beautiful poems that I always want to listen to them, so I have become your servant. But I will only continue to stay with you under the condition that if you divulge this secret to anyone else, that very moment I will go away."

Taking again the form of Ugna, Shiva continued to stay on as the servant of Vidyapati for a while until one day while Vidyapati was performing worship, Vidyapati's wife asked the servant to bring some item. Somehow or other he did not bring it and while cooking she flew into a rage, picked out a large piece of burning wood from her stove, cursed him and ran after him with that burning wood. Vidyapati looked up, saw what was going on and shouted, "What! What are you doing? That is Lord Shiva himself! What are you doing!" (All laugh.)

Swami: At once he disappeared?

Bhagawat: Ugna immediately disappeared.

Swami: So, Vidyapati in his excitement forgot about Shiva's condition to stay with him?

Bhagawat: Yes, he forgot when seeing his wife run after him with the burning wood. And then he wrote the poem (Bhagavat sings): "Hey Ugna, where have you gone away? Where have you gone away? Where have you gone away?..."

These poems and stories have been passed down orally, generation to generation. They are not in print. With Bhagavan's grace we will go to our village which is near the Ganga, in Mithila, to collect them and put down on record these stories and poems. Vidyapati was a very powerful poet.

Also, from my childhood I wanted to build a temple in our village for my mother – a Shiva temple. The occasion has not yet come, the opportunity has not yet arisen. My mother passed away in 1955. My father died in 1929 when I was 16 years old. My mother died in 1955 when I was in Washington D.C. I was all set, ready to fly to India to see my Mother. It was in September. Then one night I saw a vision of Mother. From my childhood we used to walk to the river Ganga from my village to take a bath on the full-moon day, the new moon, the solar and lunar eclipse and other special days of the year. Two miles south of my village is a railway station. After we crossed the tracks there, we would walk three miles more to the bank of Ganges. In the vision I see that near the railway station my Mother was walking towards the Ganga. It seems I am walking in the opposite direction towards my village. We meet face-to-face. (Silence.) Then I prostrate before her and the vision ends. After a few days, early in the morning on Tuesday, September 27th, I was in the Indian Embassy where I worked. As soon as I arrived there at 9:30 I found a Western Union Cablegram. In the United States, Western Union was a telegraph agency. I didn't have to read it. I knew that Mother had passed away. Earlier I had told my brothers that they should send me a cable right away whenever anything happens. On Friday, she passed away. The plan to fly to India...

Swami: Was cancelled.

Bhagawat: Yes, was cancelled. Then the thought came of writing a book, which I knew that I might not write, but in my heart it began with: "Yes, so she left the body." This is the way the first sentence began. I never put it down on paper or typed it, but still it remains.

Bhagawat: It was 1941, Friday, the 10th of October, that Sri Bhagavan's name and form first came into my life.

Swami: What date?

Bhagawat: 10th October, 1941. I was a teacher in Darjeeling Middle School and I saw the advertisement for the Hindi translation of the book *A Search in Secret India* in a Hindi magazine, called *Gupt Bharat ki Khoj*. This title attracted me and I ordered the book. The book came and I immediately read it from beginning to end. When the story came to Sri Bhagavan, I didn't have the slightest doubt that I already knew Bhagavan...

Swami: Already?

Bhagawat: All my life.

Swami: You feel so at home, as if you have come to your own place.

Bhagawat: Yes. From my very childhood I would say that he would be my guru from whom I need not ask any questions. I was never in favor of taking this guru or that guru. By my family guru I was given initiation at my sacred thread ceremony. But beyond that I had no idea of anything. Temple worship and other rituals or observances never attracted me, though from my boyhood I was always indrawn and felt as if I was from a different world. In my youth, when Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa came into my life, I read the Hindi translation of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. That really put me on a firm footing. It saved me from all the pitfalls, all the lectures, all the book-reading, all such things. "Practice, don't preach! Only he can preach who has received a commission from God. No one else can teach," he said. These things remain indelibly impressed upon my heart. And then came *Swami* Ramathirtha and also *Swami* Vivekanda, Goswami Tulsidas, the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad Gita* – all these things I have written about, *Swamiji*, in manuscripts that we have brought here for Bhagavan's blessings. We had offered them to Bhagavan in the old meditation hall. Later I will pull them out and show you the pages and many other things.

When I read in that book, *Gupt Bharat ki Khoj*, the chapters on Bhagavan, I immediately wanted to fly through the air to Sri Bhagavan at Arunachala, but at that time I had a little interest in astrology, so I went to Ujjain instead. I always say that Sri Bhagavan never wanted me to come to him while he was in body, because if I did I would also think

of him as a body. He wanted to teach me that he was beyond the body. It is immaterial whether I saw him in the body or not. It never made the least difference in my life.

Swami: Those who have come back after his passing away feel the same way. When some of the people here express to visitors that how nice it would have been if you had come a few years ago when he was alive, and all that, they say, "No no, we are not in need of your sympathy at all. We feel Bhagavan's presence now. It is so powerful."

Bhagawat: Three years ago a piece started, [Bhagawat wrote a manuscript] titled *Bhagavan, Thou Art the Self!* I always like to give some heading. Bhagavan always makes me write very flowery, very catchy words, which to me are very moving, like "Thou art the Master. Thou art the mighty magnet of the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light," and many other things. *Thou Art the Self!* is written as a prayer manuscript, every day I write it as a prayer – nothing else.

Swami: Thou art the Self – yes, and Bhagavan has accepted it.

This verse is from "Subramaniam Bhujangam":

न जानामि पद्यं न जानामि गद्यं
न जानामि शब्दं न जानामि चार्थम्।
चिदेक षडास्य हृदि द्योतते मे।
मुक्कहान्निःसरन्ते गिरश्चापि चित्रम्॥

na jānāmi padyaṁ na jānāmi gadyaṁ
na jānāmi śabdaṁ na jānāmi cārtham।
cideka ṣaḍāsya hṛdi dyotate me।
mukahānniḥsarante giraścāpi citram॥

"I know neither prose nor verse. I don't know the meaning. It is very difficult for words. Some light with six faces ever shines within my heart. What are those six faces? The five senses and the mind. And words come out of my mouth."

He is saying that he does not know where the words come from! Wonderful are the expressions that come out of his mouth. And there is Subramaniam riding on the peacock. The peacock represents the mind. The spear which he holds in his hand, that is Jnaana-shakti.

(To be continued)

Remembering Robert Paul Saphier

After a decades-long illness, on Thursday, 5th June, Robert Paul Saphier was absorbed into the Eternal. Paul was in close association with Arunachala Ashrama for forty years. On Sunday, 15th June a well attended memorial service was conducted in the Ashrama. The following piece written by the one who knew him best, Evelyn K. Saphier, was read out by her during the program.

I WOULD like to begin with a message of condolence sent to me from India last Sunday by our good friend and fellow devotee T.S. Vaidyanathan, who wrote: “Paul had a remarkable devotion to art. In *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* we see reference to the spiritual ideal of beauty as follows: ‘If, however, the aspirant is not temperamentally suited to Vichara Marga (the introspective analytical method of meditation), he must develop devotion to an ideal - God, Guru, humanity in general, ethical laws, or even the idea of beauty (Paul’s ideal)’. *May his soul ever rest in Peace.*”

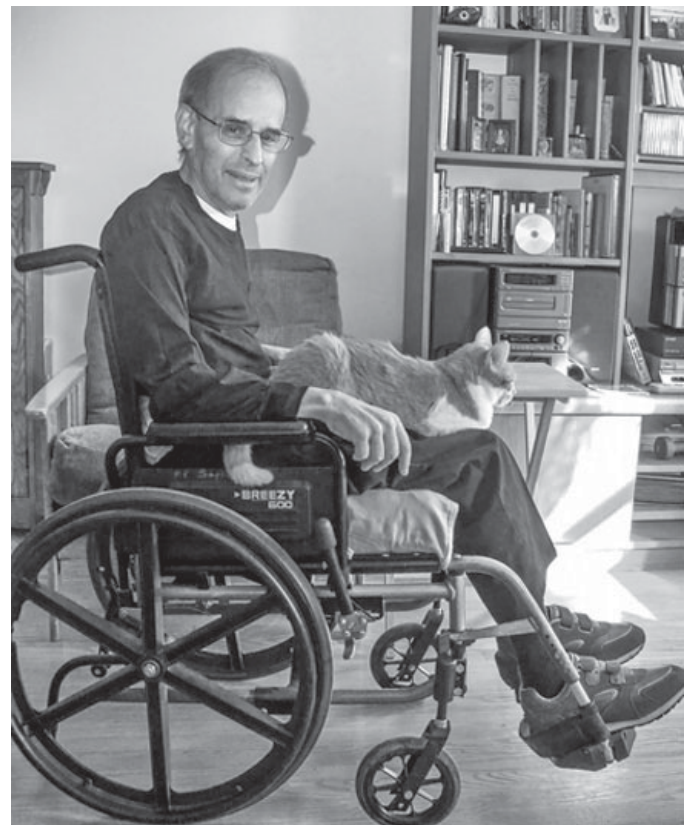
It is true that where painting and drawing were concerned, Paul was absolutely one-pointed. He would fall out of bed and go to his drawing table and work for hours only coming up for air for ablutions and meals. His nature was that of a mystical solitary. As long as he could paint, he was never restless, he never had a creative block, nor did he ever repeat himself. He would work on two projects and have the next percolating in his mind.

Paul also loved and was gifted in Classical music, having received instruction on the piano from his father from the age of three and full encouragement from his parents. His mom Lil was a very gifted pianist in her youth also. Paul would tell how he got in big trouble as a boy for leaving a baseball game when he told his teammates he wanted to go home to practice the piano. His taste gravitated toward music full of life—Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, interpreters Glenn Gould and Horowitz; however, he also enjoyed listening to occasional youtube videos of Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Louis and other pioneers of early Rock. Paul is well-known for his love of the zany and irreverent movies of Mel Brooks which he (and therefore I) had seen so often that a mere look or allusion would tell me what gag he had in his mind

Paul was culturally Jewish, but also a lover of Jesus. For almost a year he had me read to him from the *Gospel of Thomas* at bedtime and would remind

me if I forgot. His favorite quote was as follows: The disciples said to Jesus, “Tell us how our end will come to pass.” Jesus said, “Then have you laid bare the beginning, so that you are seeking the end? For the end will be where the beginning is. Blessed is the person who stands at rest in the beginning. And that person will be acquainted with the end and will not taste death.”

It was January 18, 1975 when Robert Paul Saphier, heretofore known as ‘Bob’, stepped across the threshold of the storefront incarnation of Sri Arunachala Ashrama on East 6th Street in Manhattan and in the guest book he wrote the name of ‘Paul’. Did he know it to be a moment of fate or did he just do so on a whim? Whatever the case, Paul began a new life on that evening when he met for the first time, Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, Margo Martin



and me. For nine years prior to our marriage Paul traveled nightly to the Ashrama, drawn by the peace that he found in the regular evening practice of chanting and silence, and the friendship of Bhagawatji. He said to me: “Bhagawat was my guru; he taught me how to meditate.”

Sometime during this period, Paul had a dream that he was desperately struggling up a mountain path; one-by-one he discarded his burdens and he was finally led by Bhagavan into a place of infinite light and freedom at the Mountain’s summit. It may be that Paul was alluding to this dream in the watercolor that we have reproduced as a small gift to you all in his remembrance.

During the two months that Paul spent at Sri Arunachala in 1982-83, he sat all around the hill in ecstasy, painting and drawing the holy mountain from different vantage points. Paul received the kind blessings of Sri Ramaswami Pillai and Kunju Swami during that visit. On return from a trip to an Ayurvedic physician in Chennai, at the time Madras, Ramaswami Pillai told Paul: ‘Once you have been to a doctor, you must carry out all his instructions with faith. But ...

you should have no sankalpa or wish. You must remember you are already in Bhagavan’s treatment!’ To me he said with all exuberance, “He is worried about his health. I have been praying for him. I pray and pray, and then I leave it to Bhagavan. If we keep grasping, then He can’t take ahold! We must let go... with both hands!”

As Paul’s meditative life deepened, his artwork gained a gentle, focused, luminous and visionary quality. He was set aflame by his time working directly from the untamed beauty along the shores of the St. Lawrence River, bordering Canada.

Paul’s understated spirituality became more apparent to those friends near enough to appreciate the detachment, patience and gentle humor with which he bore the loss of his physical independence. Indeed, the loss of his outward mobility seemed to drive his creativity inward, so that his artwork partook of ever-deeper reaches of his inner spirit. He has brought the depth of his being to light. His soul is in his work.

But of course there was Paul, my companion and soul mate. I shall give thanks every day for the gift of such a one.

Sri Ramana Retreat in Florida

Since last year’s retreat was such an immense inspiration to all who attended, again this year the Ramana Satsang group in Tampa, Florida is inviting all seekers and devotees to another 3-day retreat of meditation, chanting, readings, presentations, etc. It will coincide with Bhagavan Sri Ramana’s 135th Jayanti. The retreat is planned for December 26th to the 29th.

To insure that the retreat will be viable we need to hear from everyone who is seriously interested before the end of September. There will be some cost involved for the rooms and food. Details will be provided upon request. If you would like further information and/or a registration form please contact the following:

rohithk vaidya@yahoo.com / 813.766-0145 or dennis@arunachala.org / (718) 560-3196

The program will be held at:

The Franciscan Center

3010 N. Perry Avenue

Tampa, Florida 33603

Website: <http://www.franciscancenterertampa.org/>

The Franciscan Center was founded by the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, New York. The center is located on seven acres of property overlooking the beautiful Hillsborough River in Riverside Heights, Tampa, Florida. It is 10 minutes east of the Tampa International Airport, 40 minutes east of the Gulf of Mexico (St. Pete and Clearwater Beaches) and 10 minutes from downtown Tampa. Photos and descriptions of the accommodations and facilities are available on the Franciscan Center’s website.

New Satsang Groups

Chicago, IL



A devoted couple from the Chicago area, Jean-Luc and Rita, have bought and dedicated a house to use as a meeting place for devotees interested in the practice of the teachings of Sri Ramana Bhagavan. They invite all devotees and seekers for daily satsang and Vedas in Elgin, IL, about 40 miles from downtown Chicago.

719-480-3530 / blueskyvalley@mac.com)

Seattle, WA

Sunil Bala has now started regular satsangs at his home in Sammamish, WA. Please contact him for the time and location of the next program at sunil.n.bala@gmail.com / 425.996.4144

Renewed Satsang Group

The Toronto Ramana satsang group has benefited by the infusion of new devotees in the area and are increasing their programs and alternating the venues. For more information please contact Thiru (416-876-1942 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com) or Saibish (saibish@gmail.com)

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)

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)

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

Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Robinson (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)

New Jersey, Pennington — Nandini (609-730-8447 / nandinikapadia@yahoo.com)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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