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A Chakra at Sri Ramanasramam

By Krishna Bhikshu

In our last issue, within the body of the article “Venuammal” we mentioned that Bhagavan had drawn a Sri Chakra for her around the year 1920. We also provided an internet address where this Sri Chakra created by the hand of Bhagavan himself can be accessed (<http://www.ashrama.org/images/sri-chakra/>). As the Sri Chakra of Venuammal was drawn decades before the construction of the Mathrubhuteswara Temple, we can assume that Bhagavan was all along well aware of the importance of this tantric symbol for those inclined toward the formal worship of Devi or toward tantric worship in particular. And, from the fact that he took the time and interest to provide Venuammal with this image and in later years took immense interest in the construction of the Mother’s Temple and the installation of the Sri Chakra Meru at Sri Ramanasramam, there can be little doubt that Sri Bhagavan approved of its use and understood its value for spiritual aspirants.

The following article first appeared in the April, 1965 issue of the Mountain Path. Here, Sri Krishna Bhikshu, himself a Devi upasaka, shares his insight into the rationale for this form of worship and helps us understand why it has become an integral feature of the rituals performed at Sri Ramanasramam today.

IN THE sanctum sanctorum of the Mathrubhuteswara Temple at Sri Ramanasramam, established by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, in a small niche in the western wall stands an object of worship two feet square and proportionately high cut out of a single piece of granite and resting on a base of gold plate on which is etched a particular symbolical geometric figure. This object has been worshipped ever since its installation by Sri Bhagavan in 1949, the year before he laid down the body. In technical terminology it is a *Sri Chakra Meru* standing on a *Sri Chakra Bhuprasthara yantra*.

It may seem incongruous to some that Bhagavan who all his life taught the philosophy and path of *Advaita* or Identity should at the same time inaugurate this other mode of worship or *sadhana* which is to all appearance far removed from it. But since he did so it behoves us to

try to understand why, and for that we must investigate the significance of the *Sri Chakra Meru* and *Sri Chakra yantra* and of the *sadhana* based on them. While doing so it is well to remember that they are a symbolism and a *sadhana* that go right back to *Vedic* times and are said to have been originally instituted by the Lord Himself.

The object of all *sadhana* taught and practised at Sri Ramanasramam is only to realize the ever existing identity between the worshipper or individual self and the Worshipped or Supreme Self. *Advaita* itself is based on the *Vedic* text:



Sri Chakra Meru

Sarvam khalvidam Brahma, “All this is Brahman.” To realize this is the purpose of any type of *Advaitic upasana* or teaching. The teaching is succinctly set forth in another verse: *Isavasyam idam sarvam, yatkincha jagatyam jagat*, “Whatever lives and moves in this phenomenal world is to be clad in the luminosity of the Lord.” To put it more simply, we have to realize as a result of *sadhana* (and not merely know theoretically) that everything, visible and invisible, is a manifestation of the Supreme Brahman. This is technically termed *Brahma atma aikya siddhi*: realization that the Brahman or Supreme Self is the same as the *atma* or individual self.

The Supreme Being is called the *Brahmanda* or ‘Egg of Brahma’ and the composite personality of the individual, the *pindanda* or ‘egg of flesh’. The embryonic form of the individual self or the basic form out of which it is evolved is called the *andanda* or ‘egg of life’. From the *pindanda* the successful *sadhana* rises to the *Brahmanda* or limitless Beyond. Successful *sadhana* results in a blissful (*ananda*) conscious (*chinmaya*) existence (*sat*). In that state there are neither ‘I’ nor ‘others’, neither self nor phenomena, but only the all-embracing *Satchitananda*, Being-Consciousness-Bliss. However, even this, the texts say, is only the mode of Brahman called *Saguna* or ‘Conditioned’. Beyond it is *Nirguna Brahman* or ‘Conditionless Brahman’ to which no words or attributes can reach.

The *Sri Chakra Meru* type of *sadhana* instituted by Bhagavan at his Ashram aims at this same ultimate objective through concentration on a symbol called the *Meru*. The method is known as *tantra* or *tantrism*, being based on the ancient *tantric* texts. These are coeval with the *Vedas*. The *sadhana* based on them is worship of the power aspect of *Brahman* which is called *Tripurasundari*, the same as the *Saguna Brahman* we referred to above. Of course, it must not be supposed that *Saguna Brahman* is anything different from the ultimate *Nirguna Brahman*; it is only another aspect of it.

Tantric sadhana proceeds by worship of a form, or perhaps concentration on a form might be a more apt description. This is usually a geometrical figure called a *yantra* although, as will be explained later, it may also be an icon. The *sadhana* involves the utterance of *mantras* and the use of the requisite

dravyas or supports at the right moment and in the right manner. It can only be validly performed by one who has been initiated into it by a guru. The *tantras* declare that the *devata* or god worshipped, the *yantra* or symbol used, the *mantra* or words uttered and the *mantri* worshipper are all one and the same; and therefore the purpose of this worship is to rise from the state of creature to the state of Creator.

Probing into the meaning of this mode of *sadhana*, we find that it is a method of concretising concepts in a material form and, by working through the material form, rising above it to the level of concept and then above even that to the finer and more subtle level of its Source. The material form through which one works may be a *prathika* or icon or a *prathima* or geometrical symbol. This last is known as a *yantra*. *Tantrikas* use both types. Both are described in detail in the *agamas* or *tantric* texts; and it is important that they should be exactly as laid down, because there is no fancy or imagination in the prescription but precise symbolism. The object of this article is not to describe this symbolism at length but to explain the basic concept underlying *tantric* worship.

How do we represent the entire cosmos with its phenomenal manifestations in a geometrical figure? Its causal or embryonic state, the *andanda* referred to above, is represented by a minute circle called the *bindhu*, round which the *yantra* is built. This point or minute circle represents the unevolved essence or germ of being, the virtual *Satchitananda* known in the individual as the *antaryami*. To counterbalance it the fully evolved and perfected manifestation or actualised perfection is represented by an infinitely large circle. This is the *Brahmanda*, and since it has no limitation the limits of manifestation are represented by squares within it.

Out of the *bindhu* or causal state of the individual, which is the causal body or *karana sarira* of the cosmos, are manifested *kala* and *nada*, light and sound, which appear on a formal plane as form and name. That is on the level of formal manifestation, but prior to that, on the causal plane, first arise desire and action, *ichcha* and *kriya*. These are the first two expressions of the Prime Power or *Shakti*. Thus, the whole process of manifestation is dependent on and governed by the *Shakti* who is (1) *Chit* or Consciousness, (2) *Ichcha*, wish or desire, (3) *Kriya* or action.

Kriya is the combined result of the first two and is represented as the apex of the triangle of which they form the base. Although one says 'base' and 'apex' the triangle is actually inverted, with its apex pointing downwards, since it represents the descent of the Divine into the manifested world. The *sadhaka* is represented by another triangle with its apex pointing upwards. The two triangles interpenetrate and in the heart of them is the *bindhu*. The *ichcha* of the individual leads him to action and from the two of them combined arises consciousness, aspiring upwards. The descent of the Divine and the ascent of the aspirant are thus interlocked, and this is the simplest form of the *yantra* or symbol. Between the *bindhu* and the Beyond the power of the *Maha Tripurasundari*, or Supreme *Shakti*, has now built for herself a *pindanda* represented by the six-pointed star, and out of this emerge the microcosm or individual and the macrocosm or cosmos. This is also called the first *pura*, body or abode in which the *Mulashakti* or Original *Shakti* abides.

All the geometrical figures used in the *chakra* are variants of circles and triangles. A *bindhu* surrounded by a triangle in a circle can represent the entire creation; but all the manifestations of power have to figure in the completed *yantra*. According to *tantric* teaching, the *Mulashakti* or Original *Shakti* manifests as three different *shaktis* at each node of the triangle. These are *Sri Maha Saraswati*, *Sri Maha Shakti* and *Sri Maha Kali*, the three primary forms of the Mother. They are the first deities to be worshipped by every manifestation of form and name in the universe. Each of them has various aspects which are manifested in the larger triangles. The powers of the *Shakti* are legion. Cosmically, each larger triangle represents a wider and grosser manifestation. The *tantric* texts give the names of the presiding deities at each of the nodes of each of these triangles. This diagram of manifestation is surrounded by two concentric circles, of which the inner represents the centrifugal forces and the outer the centripetal. The various types of force are represented by the petals of a lotus. Outside the circles there is still grosser manifestation represented by squares which surround the *pura* or abode of the Devi. Every type of matter, metal, tree and living creature, is given a place in these ramparts. The deities which preside over each rampart are mentioned and

have to be worshipped by the aspirant. It is said that the *Sri Puri* or place in which the Mother manifests herself is surrounded by twenty-five ramparts of different materials and that beyond these is the unmanifest power of the *Shakti*.

For the individual the order is reversed. What is in seed form in the first upright triangle has to be expanded by *sadhana* into the larger triangles which represent wider powers latent in him. Ultimately he has to overleap the ramparts and merge in the all-pervading Unmanifest. I have purposely not given the details of the *chakras* mentioned in the texts, since *Tantrism* is a secret tradition not to be revealed in its operative details except to those who are initiated into it. It is enough to say that each figure represents some *tattwa* in the cosmic creation which is the second *pura* or abode of the Mother. And the Beyond, *i e.* the *Brahmanda* of the cosmos, is the third *pura*.

Tantrism teaches that in worshipping the deities at each point of the diagram one acquires their Grace and develops the power they represent. Thus, what begins as the mere worship of an outer form becomes a *samskara* on the mental plane, and these *samskaras* can actualise powers in the individual which were hitherto merely virtual or potential. Finally they lead the individual back to the amplitude of power, consciousness and bliss which is the essential nature of the Divine Mother.

Tantriks believe in the manifestation of the Mother in form and name, which means that for them creation is a fact and not just an illusion, as it is for the pure *Advaitin*. The *Advaitin* works for the elimination of ignorance or illusion, whereas the *tantrik* works for the development of cosmic power and consciousness. The ultimate goal of both is the same, that is, identity with *Saguna Brahma* and further eventual transition into the *Nirguna* beyond.¹

Tantrism teaches that there are a number of worlds on different planes, controlled by different powers of the Divine Mother. The ultimate result of *sadhana* is identification with the formless and nameless Power

1. It is to be noted that these two viewpoints are not mere theories, after the style of Western philosophy, of which one must be false and the other true. Rather, each is a theoretical basis for a practical discipline or *sadhana*. They are in ultimate agreement not in the theoretical plane but because the *sadhanas* based on them lead ultimately to the same goal. (Editor)

above them all which is *Maha Tripurasundari*, the Supreme *Shakti*.

Now to return to the specific case of Sri Ramanasramam. The *yantra* called *Sri Chakra Bhuprasthara* is etched on a gold plate and forms the base of the *Meru* worshipped there. To the normal *Sri Chakra* form thus etched Bhagavan added some *bija aksharas* of the *mantra* of Kumara or Subramanya.

The *Meruprasthara* is the *Sri Chakra* in conical form, its apex representing the highest point of realization attainable to the aspirant as a result of his *sadhana*. The mind becomes one-pointed and merges into the indescribable Beyond that is the Mother. Through this *chakra* the deities or *devas* are to be worshipped. It is taught that the universe is in three stages: the causal, subtle and gross. For the *Tantrik* all this has to be symbolised, whereas for the *Advaitin* it is not necessary. The ultimate result aimed at is the same for both.

That is why Sri Bhagavan, who prescribed Self-enquiry for those who could follow it, also instituted this type of temple worship for those who are helped by it. Thus the beneficent power which he brought on earth is infused into the *Sri Chakra* sanctified by his touch. Some of his devotees believe that when he felt that the time was approaching for him to give up the body he instituted this as a means of canalising and continuing the Grace he had brought to them. He infused his Divine Power into the *Sri Chakra* and *Meru Chakra* so that those drawn to the more elaborate path might continue to receive his Grace even after the disappearance of his body, as well as those who practised Self-enquiry. He was present at the installation and took a great interest in the *pratishtapana*, personally adding some details to the forms of the *Chakra* and supervising the entire construction of the temple. He inspected every stone of the temple carefully during its construction and told the workmen to eliminate every defect, and at every stage he was the final authority both on form and on the ritual to be adopted and the deities to be worshipped. It is through his Grace that the Matrubhuteswara Temple is now *Rishi pratishtapita*, radiating his Light, which is the Light of the Mother. Its very name signifies that it is Ishwara (God) who has become the Mother, pointing to the identity between *Ishwara* and Mother or between Siva and *Shakti*. Thus the *advaitic* doctrine of identity is not

negated by this act of Bhagavan's, but, on the contrary, it is reinforced so as to be available for those who require a more ritualistic path.

As a fitting conclusion to this article we add a note on the installation of the Sri Chakra left by Alan Chadwick. (Editor)

Bhagavan took a personal interest in the cutting of the *Sri Chakra Meru* of granite which was installed in the temple and is regularly worshipped. At the time of the *Kumbhabhishekam* or consecration, on the penultimate night before the holy water was poured over the images, he personally supervised the installation in the inner shrine. It was an extremely hot night, with the charcoal retorts melting the cement inside to further add to the heat and it must have been intolerable inside, but he sat there for about an hour and a half telling them what to do.

On the last night before the final day he went in procession, opening the doors of the new hall and temple, and passed through into the inner shrine where he stood for some five or ten minutes with both hands placed on the *Sri Chakra* in blessing. I happened that night to be at his side the whole time. This was unusual as I usually avoided taking a prominent part in such things but liked to watch them from a distance. However, something made me stay by him and on account of that I am able to testify to his deep interest in the temple and especially in the *Sri Chakra*. It was because of this knowledge that I was instrumental after Bhagavan's passing in persuading the Ashram authorities to start the *Sri Chakra Pujas* six times a month. The explanation of this unusual show of interest by Bhagavan is probably to be found in the necessity for the *Shakti* always to accompany Siva. It is not enough to have Siva alone. On the only occasion when such a *puja* was performed in Bhagavan's lifetime he refused to go to his evening meal at the usual time but insisted on staying to watch it to the very end. When someone² remarked how magnificent it had been and what a good thing it would be if such *pujas* could be performed regularly, Bhagavan replied: "Yes, but who will see to this?" As I have already said, it is now being done and undoubtedly has the blessings of Bhagavan.

2. Actually it was Alan Chadwick himself who said this and who undertook to see to it. (Editor)

Who Sees the Truth?

Vasistha continued:

O RAMA, he sees the truth who sees the body as a product of deluded understanding and as the fountain-source of misfortune, and who knows that the body is not the self.

He sees the truth who sees that in this body pleasure and pain are experienced on account of the passage of time and the circumstances in which one is placed; and that they do not pertain to him,

He sees the truth who knows that the self, which is as subtle as the millionth part of the tip of a hair divided a million times, pervades everything.

He sees the truth who sees that there is no division at all between the self and the other, and that the one infinite light of consciousness exists as the sole reality.

He sees the truth who sees that the non-dual consciousness which indwells all beings is omnipotent and omnipresent.

He sees the truth who is not deluded into thinking that he is the body which is subject to illness, fear and agitation.

He sees the truth who sees that all things are strung in the self as beads are strung on a thread, and who knows 'I am not the mind'.

He sees the truth who sees that all this is Brahman, neither 'I' nor 'the other'.

He sees the truth who sees all beings in the three worlds as his own family, deserving of his sympathy and protection.

He sees the truth who knows that the self alone exists and that there is no substance in objectivity.

He is unaffected who knows that pleasure, pain, birth, death, etc. are all the self only.

He is firmly established in the truth who feels: "What should I acquire, what should I renounce, when all this is the one self?"

Salutations to that abode of auspiciousness, who is filled with the supreme realization that the entire universe is truly Brahman alone which remains unchanged during all the apparent creation, existence and dissolution of the universe.

— from *Vasistha's Yoga*, Translated by Swami Venkatesananda

Advent at Arunachala

You, your friends and family are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 117th Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala. The program will include parayanams, bhajans, talks and puja, followed by prasada (lunch).

In Nova Scotia, Canada

Sunday 1 September — 11:00 AM

Arunachala Ashrama

1451 Clarence Road, Bridgetown,
Nova Scotia B0S 1C0 / Tel: 902.665.2090

In Queens, New York City

Saturday 7 September — 11:00 AM

Arunachala Ashrama

86-06 Edgerton Blvd., Jamaica Estates,
New York 11432 / Tel: 718.560.3196

In California, San Francisco Bay Area

Saturday 14 September — 11:00 AM

40086 Paseo Padre Pkwy, Fremont, CA 94538

Letters and Comments

Billee and I just wanted to offer our thanks to Bhagavan, through you, his instrument, for the most recent issue of “The Maharshi”. I suppose different issues strike different people; this one had a strong impact on both of us.

First, the Arthur Osborne article on the value of the ashram being a continuing offering of Bhagavan’s teaching for the different kinds of spiritual aspirants – it is classic Osborne, an expression of true clarity. He patiently explains what the ashram is for and that for which it is not designed. If one is seeking liberation, then Bhagavan’s teaching and healing balm are available for use and all who are so oriented are welcome.

There was the article about the lovely surprise of the Siva Temple in London. I have some friends in England that might also be interested to know of this temple; I will send this on to them.

Billee and I were both moved by the beautiful story of Venuammal – a lady we had not heard of before. Echammal’s moving story is somewhat familiar to us, but it turns out her sister is ‘of the same mold’ – a true devotee, tested in the fire of personal tragedy and then completely surrendered in her seva, whether in her family life or to Bhagavan or Alagammal. Surely, Echammal and Venuammal – these two amazing sisters – are an inspiration to so many devotees!

At the end, is the little piece “Does Distance Matter?” Many of us go to Sri Ramanasramam as often as we are able and we, no doubt, receive great benefit from these visits. It does help us “to recharge the batteries,” as Arthur Osborne has put it. But we do always need to remember that the Guru is wherever we are. The issue is not the location, but that the Guru is “pleased with him only who gives himself up entirely, who abandons his ego forever,” as Bhagavan himself is quoted in the article.

What a wonder our modern technology brings us this wisdom and nourishment from just a few clicks of our computer mouse! It is just another blessing that we have been privileged to receive. We are very grateful.

om namo bhagavate sri ramanaya
Martin & Billee Wolff, NJ

P.S. It was so nice to see all of you last night and to bathe in the peace and community of the Ashram.

I had gone to see a Henri-Cartier Bresson retrospective here in Tampa. No, they did not have any photos of Bhagavan. But they did have a photo of a white peacock with Arunachala in the background – and that must have been taken at the Ashram. Anyway, upon returning, I was browsing the Internet and found an article which included the following interesting description:

“Among his dearest friends in India, with whom he lived and travelled, were the dancer Chandralekha and the artist/designer Dashrath Patel, with whom he had an extraordinary photograph taken in an Ahmedabad studio, both of them sitting on the plywood façade of a Vespa scooter and waving their respective Leicas.

“Cartier-Bresson’s special bonding with Chandralekha dates back to that moment in 1950 when both of them were in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, during the last days of Ramana Maharshi. They were among the hundreds of thousands of people who were witness to the meteor of light that streaked across the sky as Ramana Maharshi breathed his last. Chandralekha gasped: ‘Look, look, look!’ Poet Harindranath Chattopadhyaya shouted: ‘Mark the time, mark the time!’ Henri Cartier-Bresson bellowed: ‘Thirteen (minutes) to nine!’

“They continued to meet sporadically. Many years later, in 1996, when Cartier-Bresson and his photographer wife Martine Franck came to watch Chandralekha rehearse her production of *Yantra* at the Avignon Festival, he wrapped his arms around her and told the assembled group of dancers, musicians and festival directors: ‘We have a special friendship; we saw the “light” together.’ About Chandralekha’s work itself he was effusive: ‘Slowness is the only luxury we have left. What I have seen today is a total rejection of the Western world. Your work will cleanse the eyes of the people who see it.’”

Here is the link to the article:

<http://www.newint.org/columns/essays/2004/10/01/cartier-bresson/>

In Sri Bhagavan,
Rohit Vaidya, Tampa, FL

The Two Windows

By A. Rao

Two windows are there: one looks on to space,
The other on the world, both blurred by thought
Of I and mine. This stopped; now not a trace
Through that first window still was seen of ought,
And none to see, no seeker and no sought.
And yet no blankness this,
But unimagined bliss,
Its gateway not through terror but through Grace.

“The world and dissolution, day and night,
Both are eternally.” “All things join hand

In cosmic dance,” all things now seen aright
The gnarled and sombre northern pine-trees stand,
And star-shaped jasmine of this sun-baked land
Through the breached ego-wall
Pure love flows out to all,
Even a stray dog draws love as a child might.

Is and Is not both at once are true,
“Although to sight they seem to alternate.”
Life, death, pass over, but they are not you
Fate fashions life, while you, immaculate,
Remain unchanged beyond life, death and fate.
You feel love outward flow
Towards others, while you know
All otherness a dream, the Truth not-two.

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 — Prashanth & Shobana (860-691-1862 / vprashanth@msn.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)

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