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THE SRI RAMANA GITA OF B. V. NARASIMHA SWAMI PART X

While B. V. Narasimha Swami was residing in Sri Ramanasramam, around the year 1930, he took up the project of recasting Ganapati Muni's Sri Ramana Gita in its original conversational form. For a full introduction to this recently discovered manuscript see the July/August 2009 MAHARSHI newsletter.

In the present issue, we conclude with the last chapter found in the manuscript — Chapter XVI, "Bhakti (Devotion)". All the chapters serialized in this newsletter have been compiled into book form, titled Sri Ramana Gita of B. V. Narasimha Swami and published by Sri Ramanasramam, India. We hope to have copies of it soon in our bookstore.

Chapter XVI Bhakti (Devotion)

अङ्गोलं निजबीजसन्ततिरयस्कान्तोपलं सूचिका
साध्वी नैजविभुं लता विशतिरुहं सिन्धुः सरिद्वल्लभम् ।
प्राप्नोतीह यथा तथा पशुपतेः पादारविन्दद्वयं
चेतोवृत्तिरुपेत्य तिष्ठति सदा सा भक्तिरित्युच्यते ॥ ६१ ॥

As the Ankola seed is attracted to its stem, the iron to the magnet, the wife to her lord, the creeper to its tree, the river to the ocean, so the soul attracted stands ever at the feet of the Lord. This attraction is termed devotion, Bhakti.

—Sivanandalahari, verse 61

Kavyakantha: Will Maharshi please enlighten us on the subject of Devotion (*Bhakti*)?

Maharshi: To everyone the dearest object is himself. He loves himself always, and with the greatest love possible. Such an unbroken current of love, frequently compared in sacred books to a flowing stream of oil, is styled devotion, if

it is directed towards God. सा परानुरक्तिरीश्वरे "Bhakti is the unshakeable attachment to the Supreme God." (*Shandilya Bhakti Sutras*, verse 2)

Ordinarily people regard God as existing outside of themselves and as having a personality like their own. The *Jnani* (enlightened sage) however regards the personal God (also) as none other than himself; and Self-love, in this case, is or becomes the love of God (personal). In his case, devotion is defined as Self-realisation. Others, who treat the personal God as something outside themselves develop deep devotion to such a God and finally sink their personality in Him. The love-smitten chord of Self, trembles and passes in music out of sight. In fact, worship, nay, all intense concentrated thought or feeling, is the merging of the mind in the object worshipped or concentrated on. Intense faith in the personal God, however, carries the devotee easily and naturally to faith in and devotion to the impersonal Absolute (*Swarupa Brahman*). Mostly, the beginnings of devotion to (personal) God are traceable to a desire to avoid sorrows and attain happiness. So, with great

keenness and zest people approach their God, investing Him with name and form, and attain the objects they desire. Even after such attainment, the habit of devotion continues and the mind trained to worship God with form and name develops the power to dwell on the Formless and Nameless. The evanescent objects achieved by the first flow of devotion to a personal God do not fully satisfy the aspiring soul who thirsts after enduring happiness. With this ever new impetus to seek something more than relative happiness, the progressing soul ultimately drops name and form as its object of contemplation and thus attempts to conceive of or realise the Absolute (*Brahman*). Thus devotion to a personal God gets transformed or ripened gradually into devotion to the Impersonal, which is the same as *Vichara* (enquiry) and Realisation.

स्वस्वरूपानुसंधानं भक्तिरित्यपरे जगुः

Investigation into the Self is nothing other than devotion. —*Vivekachudamani*, verse 32

Devotion may at the outset be by fits and starts. That need not depress the aspirant, for it will develop and become steadier and flow finally in an unbroken current. When devotion (personal) is ripe, a moment's instruction (*Sravana*) suffices for the next step in *Jnana*. Faith helps in the development of one's intuition and the attainment of complete illumination – Cosmic Consciousness. Thus, the weak aspirant's first efforts at devotion, through name and form at broken intervals, and for attaining finite or lower ends, ultimately carry him beyond all name and form, into an unbroken current of love to the Absolute. This is Salvation (*Mukti*).

The Elixir of Youth

By Arthur Osborne

The frosty years have in their grip
This ailing body that at last
Into Death's refuse-bin must slip.
Then let it go,
Quick be it or slow,
Like autumn flower in wintry blast.

For I have drunk youth's elixir,
His joy made firm, his follies fled.
Life like a May-day chorister
Throbs into song.
The heart, grown strong,
Dances and sings where grief lies dead.

This world and body are not me.
They are a dream from which to wake.
Whatever in their fate may be
Cannot destroy
The vibrant joy
Or turn to night the bright daybreak,

When even imperfect sight can bring
Such joyful certitude as this,
Who to the seeming self would cling,
In a barren land where no birds sing,
Lost to Awareness, Being, Bliss?

How Can I See God?

A disciple asked his teacher: "Sir, please tell me how I can see God?" "Come with me," said the guru, "and I shall show you."

He took the disciple to a lake, and both of them got into the water. Suddenly the teacher pressed the disciple's head under the water. After a few moments he released him and the disciple raised his head and stood up. The guru asked him: "How did you feel?" The disciple said: "Oh! I thought I should die; I was panting for breath."

The master said: "When you feel like that for God, then you will know you haven't long to wait for His vision!"

— from *Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna*

CORRECTION

In the introduction to the article "Pilgrimage to Arunachala" by Prof. S. Nagachandran, printed in our last issue, we mistakenly associated his academic career with Princeton University, whereas he was a professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Powai, Mumbai, India. We apologize for the error.

— Editor

The Last Meal

THE obituary of Ravi Ramanan, a dear friend and fellow devotee, appeared in our September/October 2010 issue. Ravi's dedicated life continues to be a source of inspiration to many devotees here in the USA, India and elsewhere. Recently, his wife Ranjani told us the following incident about the last meal Ravi ate before his passing.

On Tuesday morning, the 10th of August, Ravi entered the hospital for the last time. The previous evening, in Raleigh, North Carolina, Ravi ate his last meal, and that meal was prepared in the kitchen of Sri Ramanasramam, India. How was it possible for him, living in America, to have Sri Ramanasramam's prasad prepared and served for his last meal? It happened like this.

The day before, on Monday, Ravi received a letter sent from Chennai from his Uncle, Sri V. Ganesan. In the letter there were a number of Bhagavan's Tamil verses that his uncle wanted him to read and meditate upon. Ranjani's Mother read out these Tamil verses to Ravi, who listened to them with full attention. While this was happening, Ranjani recalled a visit that Ganesan had made to them in North Carolina three months earlier. Ganesan gave Ranjani a bag of ready-mixed upma, a dish made with cream of rice, spice and some vegetable. Whenever Ganesan travels to the USA from Tiruvannamalai he has this preparation made for him in Sri Ramanasramam's kitchen. He finds it convenient, as he simply has to add boiling water to the mix and stir it. He gave Ranjani a small bag of this upma mix during his visit, which she promptly stored in the freezer and forgot. This letter from Ganesan reminded her of the frozen upma mix and she brought it out and began to prepare it for Ravi's evening meal.

Ravi was at this time having continuous hiccuph which made swallowing any food item difficult. Ranjani made

the upma preparation with additional water so it would be thinner and easier for Ravi to swallow. Surprisingly, Ravi had little difficulty eating it and his plate was quickly emptied. He asked for more and effortlessly finished the whole pot of upma with apparent relish.

Early the next morning, Tuesday, Ravi developed a fever and, after consulting his doctor, had to be taken to the hospital. That morning he did not even partake of tea or biscuits as usual. He was able to walk himself into the hospital and lay himself on the bed. Soon he lost outward consciousness and remained in that state till his passing on Saturday at 2:46 PM, August 14th.

Hence, through a series of unrelated events, the holy prasadam from the kitchen of Sri Ramanasramam was given as the last meal to our friend Ravi, who had dedicated his life, directed his aspirations and surrendered his heart and soul to his God and Guru, Sri Ramana Bhagavan.

Ravi was moved to the hospice building on Thursday, August 12th. In this facility there is a prayer room in which several religious books were found in a basket. Ranjani's mother was looking through the books, which were mostly Christian, but was happy to find one book clearly left there for Hindu visitors. It was the *Bhagavad Gita* rendered into English by Stephen Mitchell, the famous translator and author of numerous books of ancient wisdom. Later, when Ranjani's brother, Sridhar, arrived at the hospice he also saw that *Bhagavad Gita*, picked it up and opened it. It opened on the dedication page, on which was printed: "In honor of Sri Ramana Maharshi". On seeing this they all felt that Bhagavan was already present there and had preceded their arrival at the hospice.

The many ways Bhagavan Ramana demonstrated his presence to Ravi and all those who gathered around him during his final illness may not be fully known, yet what we do know is truly remarkable.

All that is required of you is to give up the thought that you are this body and to give up all thoughts of external things or the not-Self. As often as the mind goes out towards outward objects, prevent it and fix it in the Self or 'I'. That is all the effort required on your part.

– Day by Day with Bhagavan

Of Love And Death

The author, a Polish resistance fighter in World War II, was caught and condemned to die the following day. For some obscure reasons the sentence was not carried out and the prisoner escaped. While waiting for death she had the following experience.

Everywhere there is life which I must relinquish; how quick, tender and subtle is life, how varied and full of opportunities. The winter sap flows lazily under the bark; with the spring it will speed up, appear as buds and the young green leaves. But I shall not meet the spring. The stream sings under the ice – the ice will melt and deer will come to drink, but not I. The battlefields are thundering and moaning, a tale of cruelty and destruction, of suffering heroic and meaningless, but I shall not be there.

All was to me equally beautiful and dear. It was all my life, the life of my true home, the earth, my beloved earth, so soon to be abandoned.

Have I understood this wonderful and mysterious life of mine, the life of the earth itself? In what strange ways and for what strange reasons was humanity always taking the road of death! I wanted to see it all again, all the killing and dying, to understand its full meaning and purpose. My consciousness, already free from the bonds of personal existence, took flight and I suddenly realized that I can be present at any point in space and time.

I found myself independent of the body. Was it true? I cannot say. But it seemed absolutely real and totally beyond my power of invention. New was the capacity to perceive and experience everything in space and time without the need of a vehicle of perception.

I saw humanity on the march. From its very beginning man was killing man. I saw him slaughtering and dying and I was myself the killer and the killed. I was dying for many reasons, some commonplace, some strange beyond belief.

I died defending my family against a pack of wolves and then helplessly I watched them being torn to pieces. I did not save them, after all. I fought defending my hunting grounds against strangers. In our forests there were many sacred trees in which my ancestors had lived. Dead, yet

present, I saw farmers cutting down my sacred groves with their axes. The holy trees were falling and their sorrow was like thunder, and the people who killed them sang their songs, to them of victory and life, to me - of the death of all I loved. Soon after I entered the life of my former enemies and fought with them the great dark forest and its wild inhabitants. I was building walls of wood and mud round my villages and then was dying in their defence. I saw my native village going up in flames, the entire population slaughtered and a new forest growing from the ashes of the dead. My struggle and death availed nothing.

Again I was born, young and hopeful of a happy life. And I was being offered on the altar of the cruel gods who demanded an offering for the welfare of the tribe. I was willing and ready, standing at the sacrificial stone, looking at the grooves which would collect my young blood into the sacred chalice. I was dying because I loved. I loved the parting songs, the strange wild melodies. I was dying so that those whom I loved might live in peace with their blood-thirsty gods.

My death was in vain, nobody was saved. Demolished were the temples where my blood had been shed; the forest spread again over my villages and towns. The songs that moved my heart were sung no longer. The enemy came and took over. I fought him desperately and hopelessly, perishing again and again in fruitless battles. Nobody was helped, none was saved.

Again I was reborn among my former enemies, moved by new loves, obedient to new loyalties. How many were the causes for which I fought. I killed and was killed, attacking and defending, sacrificing all to my love of the moment. Many times I died to save what I loved, to give it security and continuity. Many times I perished defending my religion, fighting holy wars in foreign countries. My death was needed to protect my culture, to defend my people, enlarge my state. Many weapons have I used in killing and died of as many. Killing, dying, killing, dying – my wars were endless. Always I fought and died for something dearly loved: my family, my people, my land and my religion. My love was growing wider and richer, all-embracing, yet remained as helpless as ever. Whatever I loved had to perish; my families were slaughtered, my forests burnt, my people exterminated and religions

forgotten. Always I died in vain, never could I save anything nor anybody. Those who were killing me loved also and were fighting me for the protection and survival of their own values. But whatever we loved and fought for inevitably perished. We loved in vain, we died in vain. The ancient instruments were broken, the old melodies forgotten. Everything had turned to dust except our infinite capacity to love. For ever we loved afresh and fought afresh. Each time our love, insulted and frustrated, was reborn, ever deeper and wider, yet always fighting other loves, as deep and wide, also growing in beauty and in strength.

It was clear that we fought in vain, that nothing could be saved. Was it all to be condemned? How can one possibly condemn the beauty and the mystery of man's infinite capacity to love? Compared to love death was a petty thing, destruction - an incidental proof of love which was ever new, ever more wonderful. The struggle of mankind in love and death filled me with great silence; I felt myself but a speck of dust in a storm and I was wondering how could I ever give value to my own existence and shirk death. Nothing was left in me but the infinite capacity to love, so absolute that nothing else, however great, beautiful or dear, was of importance. My love overflowed and filled the world completely.

Then I saw the Man Who Loved, not something against something else, or somebody against somebody else, but who loved the whole and completely. He was dying on the cross. My consciousness became one with his and I was carried beyond time and space into the eternal. My longing was fulfilled - I could be the whole of life and also its true meaning.

I was united to an infinite consciousness which embraced everything in perfect harmony. This consciousness was also love, beauty, immense joy and indestructible being. In its light everything on earth was perfect beyond the dreams of the greatest artists. Indescribable beauty pervaded everything giving a peculiar livingness and loveliness to each thing. I was one with every being; I was the pine growing its needles and also felt the zest of the grazing deer. I lived in every being for one lives fully in what one truly loves.

I understood that I was 'I Am', one with the life that flows through a billion worlds and yet is beyond them.

How am I to describe this consciousness? Thoughts come in succession and each takes up some time; how to express what contains all - within a single point of time, like many notes struck in one mighty chord. Though I cannot describe it, there was nothing vague in my experience. Imagination cannot embrace the whole and its infinite contents at the same time; I am trying to convey what cannot be conveyed; to know this state one must be in it.

— *The Mountain Path, October 1972*

The Saviour

By Natanananda

SOMETIMES the Lord Himself appears as *guru*, as He did of yore in the form of Dakshinamurti and in our own age in the person of Sri Ramana, who too taught through silence. On one occasion, however, Bhagavan gave a *mantra* directly to a devotee. And this was as extraordinary as it was touching since the recipient was an 'untouchable' and illiterate!

Not daring to enter the Hall or speak to Bhagavan, this humble devotee had put a picture of Bhagavan on a string round his neck which he used to hold in his hand and gaze at while he circumambulated the Ashram. One day, as he neared the entrance gate of the Hall, he saw Bhagavan coming out and fell prostrate at His feet. Bhagavan stopped and the devotee prayed with tears in his eyes "Save me!" Bhagavan looked with great compassion on the poor man who obviously would not be able to meditate or follow a ritualistic path of worship, and uttered the words: "Go on saying, '*Siva, Siva*'. That will save you."

As a rule Bhagavan advised seekers to go beyond *puja* and *japa*, ritual and *mantra*, and to trace all back to the source. But on this occasion he made a grand exception, and taught a simple *mantra* straight and clear. And what he taught was a *mantra* highly praised by masters, like Tirumular and Thayumanavar, as it spells out and stands for the oneness of '*Si*' and '*va*', of *Brahman* and *jiva*, of Being and Awareness.

— from *Ramana Darshan*

Questions and Comments

There is something I have been contemplating lately and I wonder if you could help. It is basically this: How can I make effort and not be the doer? Bhagavan says we need effort, yet prarabdha determines what happens, so how can my effort change anything? It's a little confusing, could you clarify?

Om shanti.

— Chris Burke

IN the first place, all the saints and sages have told us that it is wrong to imagine oneself the doer. There is an Omniscient, Omnipresent Divine Power that has created this universe and controls it. We are simply infinitesimal specks of dust blown about in this manifested whirlwind of Divine Consciousness. Until we realize that there exists this One Immortal Divine Consciousness and “Thou Art That” we must continue to make effort.

Prarabdha Karma is the seed of past actions sprouting as destiny in the present. It concerns the body and its actions. Everyone feels that almost all actions require some effort. So we must say that it is prarabdha that induces us to make the effort and also this effort itself again produces more karma, more births and more action. As long as we mistakenly identify ourselves as individuals, karma will exist. But the question is ‘Are we the body, are we an individual?’ If we experience that we are not the body but the Self, then alone do we become the actionless actor, the witness transcending body and mind, the non-doer.

Bhagavan says that the work of spiritual effort, of turning our minds inward, is the only freedom we have. Everything else is destined. However hard that is to swallow or imagine, the truth of the statement will be understood only when we transcend the limitations of the body and mind, and for that effort is required.

The Maharshi exhorts us to overcome the mistaken notion that we are the body. Karma is for the body, and the work that the body will do in this life is already determined when we enter into this world. He said it like this: “All the activities that the body is to go through are determined when it first comes into existence. It does not rest with you to accept or reject them. The only freedom you have is to turn your mind inward and renounce activities there.”

So this is where, as sadhakas, our individual freedom lies—“turning the mind inwards and renouncing activities there.” This is the effort, the spiritual effort, recommended by Bhagavan. This is the freedom for which we must apply effort.

But ‘How can we make effort and not be the doer?’ you ask. It is not unlike other spiritual paradoxes: ‘We must destroy the I to know the true I’ or ‘The mind must destroy itself by the mind’ or in this case, ‘Only by effort can we attain effortlessness’.

It amounts to this: as long as we think that we are this mind and body, it is not possible to perform action without the sense of doership. So we are instructed to dive within and realize our True Nature. It is the fruit of that effort alone which ultimately allows us to do action without the sense of doership. As long as the sense of ego persists, we must enquire, ‘Whose is this ego?’ ‘What is it?’ ‘Who am I?’ This is the only way to experience that state of effortless and choiceless awareness, or of not being the doer.

So we must perform our required duties in life and perform them well, with detachment, and as much as possible fix our mind on the Self. That effort should be our sole objective in life. Then, by the Master’s grace, everything will fall into place and we will experience perfect freedom and joy as the non-doers of actions. That is what Bhagavan tells us.

— Editor

Is Everything Predetermined

By A. Devaraja Mudaliar

ONE summer afternoon I was sitting opposite Bhagavan with a fan in my hand in the Old Hall, and said to him: “I can understand that the outstanding events in a man’s life, such as his country, nationality, family, career or profession, marriage, death, etc. are all predestined by his *karma*, but can it be that all the details of his life, down to the minutest, have already been determined? Now, for instance, I put this fan that is in my hand down on the floor here. Can it be that it was already decided that on such and such a day, at such and a such an hour, I shall move the fan like this and put it down here?”

Bhagavan replied, “Certainly.” He continued: “Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it is to pass through was already decided when it came into existence.”

Thereupon I naturally exclaimed: “What becomes then of man’s freedom and responsibility for his actions?”

Bhagavan explained: “The only freedom man has is to strive for and acquire the *jnana* which will enable him not to identify himself with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *prarabdha* (destiny based on the balance sheet of past lives) and a man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions, or to be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities.”

This may not be acceptable to many learned people or philosophers, but I am sure I have made no error in transmitting as above the gist of the conversation that took place between Bhagavan and me. Though this answer of Bhagavan may upset the apple-cart of our careful reason-

ings and conclusions, I am satisfied that what Bhagavan said must be the truth. I also recall in this connection the following lines that Bhagavan once quoted to me from *Thayumanavar* on another occasion: “This is not to be taught to all. Even if we tell them, it will only lead to endless discussion.”

It may be well to remind readers that Bhagavan has given his classic answer to the age-old question ‘Can free will conquer fate?’ as follows in his “Forty Verses”:

“Such questions worry only those who have not found the source of both freewill and fate. Those who have found this source have left all such discussions behind.”

The usual reaction of Bhagavan to any such question would be to retort: “Who is it that has this fate or freewill? Find that out and then this question will not arise.

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)

Boston, MA — David & Anna (617-928-1487 / dklegon@comcast.net)

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)

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

Miami, Florida — Marcelo (786-277-2982 / Marcelo_Addario@hotmail.com)

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

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

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

San Francisco Area — Vijay and Sree Sajja (925-417-0909 / vsajja@evergent.com)

Tampa, Florida — Rohit ((813) 632-7843 / rohitkvaidya@yahoo.com)

Toronto, Canada — Krishnan & Padma Sastri (905-849-6005 / psastri@hotmail.com)

Toronto, Canada — Thiru (905-686-6592 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

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

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

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