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Ramana Yoga Sutras

By Sri Krishna Bikshu

Sri Ramana Maharshi wrote these Sutras at the request of some devotees to benefit their sadhana. Sri Krishna Bikshu (Voruganti Venkata Krishnaiah) was one of the early and ardent devotees of Bhagavan. He lived in the Ashram with Bhagavan for many years and wrote Ramana Leela, the life of Bhagavan in Telugu.

After the talks on “Ramana Yoga Sutras” were given by Sri Krishna Bikshu at the Ramana Satsang, Hyderabad, these Sutras were published in Telugu in 1973 and then in English in 1980. We continue in this issue with sutras 3 and 4, along with their commentary.

III

“pavana chalana rodhat”

By controlling the movement of the breath

1. Bhagavan explains how one can enter the heart or the state of thoughtlessness. He says it can be done by controlling the movements of the breath. It is said that the word ‘pavana’ here is used in a technical sense. It means ‘prana’ or the vital force. The vital force in the body works mainly in five ways, and also in another five ways that are subsidiary. The first five movements are called the pancha pranas. The first force makes one breathe in and the second enables one to talk. Another enables one to expel things out of the body. Still another aids digestion, and the fifth spreads all over the body, keeping it alive. The pavana of the vital force here intended is that which makes one breathe in and out. It is called the ‘mukhya prana.’

2. When the breath is held, it is observed that the thoughts also decrease and finally, when the breath movement is brought to a standstill, the thoughts also completely subside. This is a practical tip given by Bhagavan. He explains this rationale in a couplet of “Upadesa Saram” where he says, “Force divides into two branches. One is

the mind and the second is the prana.” [Verse 12] They are like two horses harnessed to a carriage. When the reins of one are held tight, it naturally has to stop, thereby rendering the other unable to proceed.

Contrary to what medical science says, stoppage of breath does not result in an increase of carbon dioxide in the blood, which should weaken one. Yogis have been said to prolong their lives for hundreds of years by completely stopping their breath (by adopting what is called ‘lambikayoga’). Now, completely stopping the breath is not possible in the beginning; it is a matter of practice. Certain other things are helpful (such as remaining fixedly in an asana) for effecting control of breath.

By controlling any one prana it is seen, in practical life, that you control the other pranas also.

3. When the movements of the vital force are controlled, this vital force no longer gives any scope for the sense organs to reach out towards worldly objects. Consequently the vital force fills the body and returns to its source, the Atman, where the mind also dissolves at the same time. It is, so to speak, as if a dam were raised across a rushing torrent, which would inevitably reverse the direction of its flow.

4. It is said that if one stops talking for a dozen years the mind will be rendered fairly calm, at which time the silencing of the thoughts altogether can be practiced. With a dozen years of practice of the latter variety, the silence attained will be profound and deep, and that is the state of samadhi. Sri Rama Yogi, a well known disciple of Sri Bhagavan, practiced the silence of the first variety and the progress he made is described in Paul Brunton's book, *A Search in Secret India*.

IV

“satata pratyavekshanat”

By constant watching (of the breath)

1. There are several methods advocated in the practice of breath control. The method the Maharshi teaches is a rare one: if one merely watches the breath and no attempt to control it is made, the breath of itself slows down almost to the vanishing point. This is a practical tip and is the essence of several types of yoga sadhana.

2. Normally in hatha yoga the nostrils are closed and opened with the fingers for definite intervals. Some say that if the time taken for inhalation is one unit, the retention of the breath should be for four units and breathing out for two units. The sadhaka practicing in this way is fighting a battle, as it were, with the force of the breath. Were this battle to be conducted the wrong way, dangers or disasters might follow, particularly if it were to be lost. Forced effort may end in various kinds of diseases; it may even cause madness, and in some cases, if the kundalini or life force rises uncontrolled, the body gets almost burnt up and death can result. So this practice needs to be done with great care and circumspection under the personal supervision of a Master, adopting easy techniques from time to time and different restrictions as to diet, time and posture. The Maharshi bids us strictly to avoid this method of hatha yoga.

Do not fight with the natural flow of the breath. Only watch it as if you were a witness to a process. This is called the ‘*sakshi bhava*’ in philosophical terminology,

3. The advantages of the Maharshi's method are many. It automatically turns the thoughts away from the ideas and objects of the world, effecting a severance of the world and one's self. The world of affairs will amount to zero for the practitioner of this method. All the tribulations that naturally follow any contact with the world cease, so that all disturbing factors are brought to an abrupt end. Not for him are the emotional surges and fits of despair found in the bhakti marga, nor are the anxieties of the

karma marga present. The dangers of the yoga marga will never touch him; not even the troubles of the path of raja yoga will face him. One is almost the Divine, the kootastha, who is said to be the witness of the three states of consciousness – jagrat, swapna and sushupti.

4. The result will be the slowing down of the speed at which thoughts arise; they become slower. In the end, a thought arises and sinks, an interval ensues, and only then another thought arises. That means, since the thoughts arise in consciousness, the thoughts sink back again into consciousness, and before another thought ensues, there is only the consciousness free from thought. In reality, one is that consciousness, in which there is no idea of the manifested world, either gross or subtle. One is almost in the state of Divinity. It is the ‘hrid’ state of consciousness, which is thoughtless. One has reached the highest possible goal of individual effort in which the little self is not known; it is almost the attainment of the Atman.

5. The practice of this method needs no niyamas (observances); differences in time, circumstances, climate, personality, sex, race and religion are all extinguished. The moment you begin this practice you are taken away from the world's dualities. There, no more sastras, no more discussions trouble you. Others need not even know that you are a sadhaka of this sort. Generally people praise a sadhaka for his consistency, good nature and high spiritual attainment. This praise is the greatest danger to a sadhaka. In “Ulladu Narpadu” [Supplement, Verse 37] Bhagavan has clearly pointed out this danger. In this method, even the vanity of being a sadhaka is given up.

6. Above, I said, “almost the Divine”. The reason for this reservation is that the Self, even in this state, is shrouded by the avarana sakti of Maya. No one can remove this shroud by their own effort. For when one is in the state of ‘hrid’, there is no individual left to make any effort for the removal of this veiling. Then what is the way? Nothing but Divine Grace can help you now. The state of ‘hrid’ contains in itself the unmanifested seeds which later manifest. The force of those seeds is weakened by the efflux of time and by the experience of their results in various worlds, both subtle and gross. When the force of those seeds becomes negligible, the Atman of itself emerges in all its glory. The state of ‘hrid’ is a negative experience. The state of the Atman is a positive one, entirely dependent upon its own Grace. So say the *Kathopanishad Upanishad*: “To him whom It chooses, It reveals Itself.”
(To be continued)

The 61st Aradhana Program at Arunachala Ashrama

*On Saturday, 30th April, Arunachala Ashrama in New York City observed the 61st Mahanirvana anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The program began about 10:30 with the enthusiastic chanting of Sri Ramana Ashtottara Shatanamavali, followed by Sri Ramana Chatvarimsat (40 Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana), Upadesa Saram and Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai. Then followed a Talk by **Sri M. V. Swaminathan**.*

Sri Swaminathan is the son of Sri Venkataraman, who in his youth had the unique destiny of joining as one of Bhagavan's playmates while he was a boy living in Madurai. Because of his father's association with Bhagavan, M. V. Swaminathan, his children and grandchildren (four generations) have been immersed in the grace of the Master all these years.

Sri Swaminthan, his devoted wife Srimati Kaveri and his equally fervent son, Ganesan, flew up from Atlanta for one day to attend the Aradhana program and share their remarkable story with the Greater New York area devotees. Their genuine devotion and transparent sincerity captured the hearts of all present. We thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

Talk by Sri M. V. Swaminathan

Today I would like to thank the devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana who have invited me to speak. I would like to share some firsthand experiences with Bhagavan that my family and I have been blessed with.

My grandfather was a Vedic priest and practiced his profession in Madurai and my father Sri Venkataraman had three brothers.

Around 1892, Bhagavan and his brother Sri Nagaswami moved to Madurai after their father's passing and stayed with their uncle Sri Subbhaiyer in the same complex where my father lived. This was a rented house and it's worth noting that the owner of the house, Sri Gopalakrishna Konar, was a small-time bookseller then, but later went on to become a famous publisher, not only in Tamil Nadu but of the entire country. I attribute his success to Bhagavan's grace.

When Bhagavan and my father were children they went to the same school. Later, when my father was employed, he and my mother used to visit Bhagavan almost every month. He sometimes even went there without getting his leave approved.

During my father's first visit to Tiruvannamalai after Bhagavan had left home, Bhagavan asked him in front of the assembled devotees how was the Ahathi tree that was in front of their compound. When the devotees were puzzled at the question, Bhagavan explained: "We played together and used to sneak out in the night to go to the banks of the Vaigai River to learn self-defense from a trainer. In Madurai, the houses are generally built with a

front patio where people can sit in the afternoon to get some cool breeze and also sleep at night. We boys were not permitted to go down to the river during the night. Therefore, we would make our beds, placing pillows under the covers to make it look like we were asleep, and then slip out to go to the river for training. One day his father came out through the verandah to go to the bathroom and found that the beds were obstructing his way to the door. He asked this Venkataraman to move his bed over a bit to clear the path. When he got no response, he found out that he and all the boys were missing and waited there until the boys returned. He caught them red handed with their bamboo sticks (used to practice self defense). The next morning his father tied him upside down from the Ahathi tree and beat him as a punishment." Bhagavan finished his narration by saying that he felt each and every blow that my father received, as if it were happening to him.

During his visits, my father would not speak or sit in front of Bhagavan out of respect. In His presence, my father would cry uncontrollably. So Bhagavan nicknamed him the "Azhuguni Siddhar" (weeping Siddhar). My father was so devoted to Bhagavan that he stopped worshipping all other deities.





Some of the devotees gathered at the New York Arunachala Ashrama on the occasion of the 61st anniversary of Bhagavan's Aradhana

In all, my parents gave birth to ten children, out of which, sadly, only three survived. My father would communicate each sad occurrence to Bhagavan. Whenever Bhagavan got a post card from my father, he used to say to everyone present, "Venkatraman has lost another baby."

One time my father overheard Bhagavan describing the prasadam (Adai) from the Alazharkovil (Perumal Temple) to other devotees. Immediately he left Tiruvannamalai and went to Alazharkovil and got the prasadam, returned to Bhagavan within two days and offered it to him. My father felt that this was his greatest seva to Bhagavan.

As we all know, Bhagavan only wore a loin cloth. My father would buy raw cotton balls, clean them, spin them into yarn and use it to make a loin cloth as an offering to Bhagavan. My father continued to perform this service until his passing in 1939. Annually, during his lifetime, my father would join fellow devotees, such as Prof. N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer and Attorney Subrahmanya Iyer, and conduct Bhagavan's Jayanthi and other festivals in Madurai. On these occasions they would offer food to the devotees and needy people.

On one occasion, Bhagavan and his devotees went up to the top of the Arunachala Hill. My father and Sri Ramanatha Brahmachari took the responsibility of carrying food from the Ashram to the Seven Springs, near the top of the hill, to serve to Bhagavan and the devotees. Climbing with such a load of food was very strenuous. While they were climbing with great difficulty, all of a sudden Bhagavan with his walking stick suddenly appeared in front of them and guided them to the Seven Springs by way of a shortcut. Before they reached there, Bhagavan had disappeared from their sight. Upon arriving they found Bhagavan calmly sitting among His devotees as if nothing had transpired. My father, on seeing Bhagavan quietly sitting there got disappointed and said to Bhagavan,

"How long are you going to continue with this Maya? You showed us the short cut but left us at the end, and here you are sitting as if nothing has happened; I don't understand it and I can't take it anymore!" Everyone, including my mother, was shocked to hear my father's outcry before Bhagavan. It must be remembered that my father never opened his mouth in front of Bhagavan. But Bhagavan told my mother, smilingly, not to bother and that everything will be all right in a few minutes. When Bhagavan said this, my father realized that his outburst was not warranted. He then concluded that Bhagavan was, in fact, at the Seven Springs with his devotees the whole time, but by his grace he had guided them in the form of Bhagavan to reduce their burden.

My Brother's Days with Bhagavan

I had two brothers and the oldest was Sri Ramanachalam (the 4th child of my parents who was originally named Arunachalam). He used to accompany my parents to visit and pay respects to Bhagavan. Out of devotion to Bhagavan he renamed himself as Ramanachalam. During one of his visits, when he was 14, he started crying when it was time to go back to Madurai. When asked by Bhagavan why he was crying, he said that he did not want to leave Bhagavan and preferred to stay in the Ashram. When Bhagavan asked him what he could give him to make him stop crying and go back home, Ramanachalam asked for his walking stick. Bhagavan told him to return in the evening and gave him a replica of his walking stick. Ramanachalam took it home and kept it under Bhagavan's picture and daily offered prayers to it till the day he died. His son continues to do the same.

On another visit to Bhagavan in his youth, when he was reluctant to leave, Bhagavan told him that when he turned 18 he would return and stay at the Ashram. When he turned 18 we lost our father, and my brother being the oldest son had to leave the family to seek employment. He could not get a proper job and wrote his grievance to

Bhagavan in a letter. Within a couple of weeks, he got a job at Polur, near Tiruvannamalai. On the weekends he visited the Ashram and offered his service. This continued for about four years. Later he moved near Thiruchuli to work in the postal department. He visited Bhagavan's birthplace frequently. Until he passed away in 2003, he visited Tiruvannamalai several times a year.

My Mother and Bhagavan

During her visits to the Ashram my mother had the good fortune and grace to associate with Sri Azhagammaiyar Thayaar (Bhagavan's Mother) and perform seva, including cooking. She also joined in singing bhajans. At home she would always offer prayers to Bhagavan before serving food.

During one of her visits to the Ashram she was grinding rice in the stone grinder, sitting on the floor. Bhagavan sat down besides her and began to help by adding his hand to rotate the stone. While grinding, accidentally, Bhagavan's and my mother's head bumped up against each other. Bhagavan laughed loudly and said to my mother that the bumping made his head swell. Also, Bhagavan would often ask her to sing the bhajans that she had learned from Azhagammaiyar Thayaar while engaged in chores.

Whenever my father visited the Ashram without my mother (as when they might have had a disagreement or fight), my mother would pray to Bhagavan to lessen my father's anger. In a day or two, my father would return home and ask my mother why she complained to Bhagavan about his anger issue and the particular incident that had made him leave the house and go to Tiruvannamalai. He would say that Bhagavan had ordered him to return home without asking him what had happened and why he was angry with my mother. Bhagavan had heard my mother's prayers and she appreciated his divine response each and every time.

Upon my father's passing, my mother took my younger brother and me to the Ashram to have darshan of Bhagavan who was, as usual, very busy with the devotees. He looked at us and did not say a word. My mother immediately started crying, introduced herself and asked Bhagavan why he did not recognize her. Bhagavan immediately said, "Parvatham, as your garb has changed (as a widow, she had her distinct dress code and shaven head) it was difficult to recognize you." We do not have an explanation for His statement.

Ladies were not allowed to stay in the Ashram after 6 p.m. So my mother would stay at Sri Pavazhanathan's house in town. He was a devotee of Bhagavan. As you know, in the early days, Bhagavan would sometimes get up early in the morning and go for giri pradakshina. Devotees would accompany him. On one of those pradakshinas my mother came a little late and was unable to join Bhagavan and the devotees. So, she waited at the entrance of the Ashram to receive Bhagavan when he returned. On seeing her there, Bhagavan called her by her name and asked her why she was standing at the entrance. My mother very sadly explained to Bhagavan that she had missed the opportunity to go along with him for giri pradakshina that day. Bhagavan said that he did not notice her absence and consoled her by stating that all the credit (punyam) that he got on that giri pradakshina would go to her. She felt that this was the greatest blessing from Bhagavan.

During Bhagavan's Jayanti festival, my mother would prepare all the prasadam, and distribute it to the devotees gathered at the Madurai Ramana Mandiram. From the time my mother was married she remained a staunch devotee of Bhagavan and passed away while chanting Bhagavan's name.

My Days with Bhagavan

My mother used to take my younger brother Sabhapathy, my cousin Pattu and me to the Ashram during our half yearly school vacations. During one of the half yearly vacations, I distinctly remember the following: One day we had our shower at Sri Pavazhanathan's place and went to have Bhagavan's darshan. Bhagavan was in a reclined posture on the sofa. Devotees were sitting in front of him. Then the meditation hall was a thatched shed with a grass roof (the Jubilee Hall). Next to Bhagavan there used to be a small coal furnace on the floor wherein some sambrani (aromatic powder placed on charcoal to give fragrance) was emitting smoke. Over the head of Bhagavan there used to be a punkha (a fan made of cloth and feathers tied to a long rope). When the rope was pulled the punkha would move back and forth creating a motion, thus producing a considerable breeze. As there was no electricity, the devotees used to pull the rope and bring some fresh air to Bhagavan. As a service, I once pulled the long rope a bit faster than I was supposed to and produced more than the desired airflow to Bhagavan. As it was December, it got quite cold and Bhagavan

immediately told me to go slow. I stopped immediately and stood next to Bhagavan feeling guilty.

During our vacation visits we played in the Ashram and the nearby wooded area. After breakfast we would go with our mother to worship Bhagavan and then go play under the trees. Being very young we did not realize the value of being in the presence of Bhagavan. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were always served on time, and Bhagavan would sit in the middle visible to all, while the devotees would sit on either side of Bhagavan. Just as today, there was no discrimination when comes to serving food. All were treated equally. Sometimes for a snack we were given toasted peanuts with tea, coffee or milk. Devotees would help the kitchen staff to shell the peanuts, but to our surprise no one was tempted to eat even a single nut while shelling. So, as children when we helped in the kitchen shelling nuts, we also followed their example.

While we were in the Ashram, around 10 a.m. every day, one of the devotees would carry Bhagavan's kamandalam (a pot with a handle to hold water) while an attendant would follow a short distance behind. When we were playing outside Bhagavan would sometimes call us and take us along with him for a walk. Bhagavan, whom we called Thatha (grandfather), used to put one arm around my shoulder and the other on my brother's while we walked for about 100 yards or so. After a certain point he would ask us stay back and proceed on his own with his walking stick. We would wait there thinking that he would come back the same way, but he never did, even on a single occasion.

Everyday when we would go with him for a walk, he would alternate among the three of us (my younger brother Mani (alias Sabhapathy), my cousin Padmavathy (alias Pattuand) and me, so that everyone got the same opportunity to have his gracious touch around our shoulders. What an amazing grace that was to have the touch of Bhagavan on a daily basis. Obviously, we did

not realize the significance of it then. During such walks he would ask our names and then he would repeat the name three times and would discuss with us its meaning. During one such conversation he asked us where our home was in Madurai, and my brother told him that our house was near Central Cinema Talkies. Since there was no cinema there during Bhagavan's time in Madurai he said that he could not understand our location. Then I told him that we lived in Gopalakothan Street between two other prominent streets, to which He said, "Oh, that chakkadai sandhu (Gutter Street)" That conversation took place in 1945. Recently when I visited Madurai in 2010, I noticed that that street remains exactly the same, a chakkadai sandhu, with no change to the buildings and street at all. Bhagavan's words seem to have predicted its future also.

Between lunch and tea, around 3 p.m., Bhagavan used to answer devotees' questions. The beauty of it was that Bhagavan would answer in the language of the questioner. For example, a question in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, English, etc. was normally answered in that same language. When my sister in law first met Bhagavan through my brother, Bhagavan started conversing with her in Malayalam, as she hailed from Kerala. We witnessed that even upon animals Bhagavan showered his grace. He used to communicate with all the animals. I saw him conversing with squirrels, monkeys going to him to settle their disputes, birds eating seeds and nuts from his hands. Numerous such incidents have been recorded. He even extended his grace to thieves. By look, by touch, by speech and by silence he extended his grace to all living beings.

During our stay we also met Major Chadwick and Paul Brunton. We would go to Muruganar's residence and listen to his talks on Bhagavan. Paul Brunton once visited our home in Madurai.

In 1950, my older brother went to the Ashram and had Bhagavan's darshan. During a conversation, Bhagavan asked my brother about our uncles. When my brother

"The light of the Self travels from the heart to the mind and from there to various parts of the body. Then one beomes identified with the body. The discriminating one must, through incessant effort, turn the light back to the heart wherefrom it has risen. Then one experiences the bliss of the Self. The heart is the support of the entire universe. Though the heart is all pervasive, since the individual identifies himself with the body, a physical location, on the right side, is indicated."

—Sri Ramana Maharshi

talked about our four uncles, Bhagavan said that while he remembered the first three, he did not recall the fourth. When my brother returned to Madurai and told our fourth uncle about Bhagavan's enquiry, he immediately left for Tiruvannamalai and sought Bhagavan's blessings.

Like many thousands of devotees, our family has been very blessed to receive Bhagavan's grace all along the way. My three sons are well educated and settled in the USA for the past 25 years, while my daughter is settled in India with my son-in-law who holds a very high position in Bombay. My nephews (brother's children) are well off, and health wise, my wife and I are doing reasonably well.

As a child, while others paid their respects by doing

pradakshinam around Bhagavan, I would stand outside and watch them. Once when my mother and other elders insisted that I should also do pradakshinam, Bhagavan intervened and told everyone to leave me alone. He said that I am a person who keeps his devotion deep inside without exhibiting it, and that is perfectly fine. When I think of that conversation Bhagavan had with my elders I feel blessed, for I know that he sees right into my very being. In my life I have been fortunate and incredibly blessed by Bhagavan's grace. I have no regrets.

Thank you for your time and kind attention. May Bhagavan's grace be upon us and help us sail this ocean of life with ease and attain Moksha.

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)

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