



THE MAHARSHI

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

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 continue from our last issue with the conclusion of Chapter VII, along with its footnotes, titled "Self-Enquiry, Competence and Constituents," which is the same title used in Sri Ramana Gita, chapter 7, published by Sri Ramanasramam.

CHAPTER VII

Self-Enquiry, Competence and Constituents

Referring to this discourse, the Maharshi was requested years later by some disciples to make the matter clear as to what is meant by सर्वहर्षनिवृत्ति (removal of all sorrow):

Disciple: Does the Maharshi mean that, as a result of Realisation, there is a feeling of positive pleasure, similar to our pleasures now experienced, or is it a mere colourless negation of pain and pleasure that you refer to by that phrase? All pleasure is known to us only by our knowledge of the contrasted state of pain; and hence, no pleasure is experienced if the pain-idea is not also experienced or remembered to make the pleasure-idea clear to the experiencer at the time of the experience.

Maharshi: You are right in drawing a distinction between the pleasure experienced in the waking state and that referred to in the expression 'Bliss of the Self', *Sat-Chit-Anandam*. You find reference to this distinction frequently in books on this subject, as well as in your own experience.

Disciple: Pray, in what books do we find this distinction discussed?

Maharshi: See the *Panchadasi* and the Tamil

Kaivalyam, Chap. II, v. 116. Also see *Vedanta Chudamani*, reference to *Ashta Vidanantam* (eight pleasures) as being *poli* (false) – reflections or mere appearances or illusory bliss, and *Sat-Chit-Anandam* or *Swarupananda* as the Real bliss. It is however preferable to avoid the use of the term "positive" by referring to the former, and to use the term "relative" for the former, and "Absolute" for the latter. In the latter, Bliss is itself *Sat*, itself *Chit*, itself *Anandam* – the Three, being different names or aspects of the one Reality, the Absolute. The bliss enjoyed in deep sleep is referred to as one of the eight *poli anandam*, illusory pleasures, in the book *Vedanta Chudamani*.

K. V.'s Question: Does Maharshi also apply this सर्वहर्षनिवृत्ति (i.e., destruction of all sorrow) as a result of *Atma Vichara*, in the field of suggestive therapeutics, e.g., in cases of illness (as in William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, page 104) and in the practical affairs of daily life to overcome the various painful experiences met with?

Maharshi: Yes. The truth of the Self is one. Its applications are many. Sugar is one. The clever cook or lady of the house embodies it and presents it in the shape of *payasam*, *halva*, *athirasam*, *jilebi*,

etc. But these are all transformations of sugar and cannot exist without sugar. The Central Substance or Truth is applied according to the peculiar needs or aspirations of each individual and to the purpose at hand. People who come here make use of the Truth for their own affairs. One, for instance, like the lady earlier mentioned, was complaining of dyspepsia and insomnia and, by applying the above Truth to herself and impressing on her mind that she was not the sickly body but the pure Atman that cannot be touched by disease, got over both her ailments. Many others have got over their stomach or other troubles here in the same manner.

K. V.: Was not Vasudeva Sastriar, when deeply afflicted with the loss of his dear child, relieved of his sorrow in this presence in the same manner? Are these all implied in सर्वकेशनिवृत्ति character of *Atma Vichara*?

Maharshi: Yes, such instances here are not infrequent. Maharshi then proceeded to answer K. V.'s next question:

You inquired if the above benefit of *saravakleshana* (the destruction of sorrow, root and branch) can be derived by other means?

What other means are there that secure this result? Are you thinking of *siddhis*, the eight *siddhis* – अणिमा महिमा चैव लट्टिमा गरिमा तथा प्राप्ति प्राकाम्य इशित्वं वशित्वं – which means, the power to assume any shape at will, or dimension, any size or weight, to attain any object of desire, overlordship, influence, etc. What good will these do? Suppose you exercise all these wonderful powers, are you not still desiring and trying to fulfill that desire? And when a fresh desire breaks out and you expend your energy and attention on that, is not the net result more worry to the tossed mind? Happiness is your real goal and aim. You must ultimately come back from your diversion with *siddhis* and try to find yourself by inquiring, 'Who is it that wants happiness?'. You discover that happiness or bliss [which is our true nature] wants happiness or bliss, or rather that the so-called want and desire on the part of an individual is a myth, and that all along there is only the One Real in enjoyment (so-to-speak) of its Self, which is best described (however inaccurately or inadequately) as *Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, Sat-Chit-Anandam*.

K. V. next questioned Maharshi:

Who is the *Adhikari*, i.e., the person competent to launch on this *Atma Vichara*, the Self-quest? Can anyone judge for himself if he has the necessary competency?

Maharshi: This is an important preliminary question. Before *Atma Vichara* is started some antecedent experience, some achievement in the moral field is essential.

People having varied experiences in the world, at one stage develop a disgust or repulsion (*vairagya*) towards sense attractions or, at any rate, an indifference to such attractions, and feel forcibly the miserable transient nature of this body through which these attractions and enjoyments are had. This may be the result of the practice of devotion or some other *upasana* in this life, or of such devotion or other good works performed in previous lives. People with minds thus purified and strengthened are the *adhikaris*, the ones competent to launch on *Atma Vichara* or enquiry into the Self; and these are the qualifications or signs by which one can determine such competency.

K. V.: As for these good works mentioned just now, such as *snana*, *sandhya*, *japa*, *homa*, *swadhyaya*, *Deva puja*, *sankirtana*, *tirtha yatra*, *yagna*, *dana* and *vritas* (i.e. ablution, *sandhya vandana*, or matin and vespers, repetition of mantras, fire-offering, study of holy script, worship of God, singing his praise or name, pilgrimages to holy places, the fire Yagnas,¹ charitable gifts, and holy vows), if these are needed merely to give a man competency for starting on *Atma Vichara*, and if a man has had sufficient *viveka* (discrimination between the Real and the unreal) and *vairagya*, dispassion, is there any use in such an *adhikari* carrying on the above, or are they merely a waste of his time and energy?

1. *Yagnas* are the five offerings which everyone, especially a *grihasta*, should offer daily:

1. *Deva Yagna* – Sacrifice to Gods: e.g. oblations of food, water, etc.
2. *Rishi Yagna* – Study of the Vedas which issued from the lips of the *Rishis*
3. *Pitru Yagna* – Offering of food and water to the spirits of the ancestors
4. *Bhuta Yagna* – Offering of food and water to the lower beings
5. *Atma Yagna* – Study of one's self

Maharshi: When an *adhikari's raga* (attachments) are fading away, these good works (*sat karma*) tend to *chitta sudhita*, further purify his mind. The positive good work done by body, mind or speech destroys the corresponding evil deeds (*dush karma*) he may have

done through these – the body, mind or speech. But if the *adhikari* has no more stain left to work out in this way, his good works endure for the benefit of the world at large. The wise and perfect go on doing *sat karma*, good works.

Symbolism and My First Night

Referring to a narration about an incident relating to keys in Sri Ramanasramam, Louis Buss of the United Kingdom wrote to us the following reflective reminiscence. Louis made his first visit to Sri Ramanasramam in 2009.

I AM reminded of how S.S. Cohen lost the keys to his suitcase on arrival, then forgot all about them on finding himself alone with Bhagavan in the Old Hall.

When after a while I became aware of my environment, I saw him looking at me with large penetrating eyes, wreathed in smiles rendered divinely soothing by their child-like innocence. All of a sudden I felt something fall in my lap and heard the jingling of keys – my keys!

It was only when I read Guru Ramana for the second or possibly third time that the symbolism of those keys landing in his lap finally hit me. The beauty of it is that they were the keys to something Cohen already owned, which he'd thought were lost, far away in the station or the town, but which seemed to materialize from the heavens as he sat staring at Bhagavan. The suitcase was already his, it was never really lost, yet somehow only Bhagavan could restore it to him – it's almost too perfect, and I love the child-like delight Bhagavan seems to have derived from the whole little game.

So many of these symbolic incidents seem to have taken place around Bhagavan, especially when people first arrived.

Have I ever told you what happened to me on my first night? I had somehow become disorientated, and convinced myself that the taxi had deposited me on the other side of the road or in some remote compound, far from the Ashram proper. I had been told that few first-time visitors were allowed to stay in the main Ashram. I thought I would have to wait until morning when the gates opened before I could go and look at all those places I'd looked forward to seeing for so long ... assuming I could even find my way there. Anyway,

unable to sleep, I thought I'd take a wander round in the dark and investigate my new surroundings. Almost at once, I saw up ahead a large, dimly -illuminated building. Intrigued, I went to peer through the window and saw, to my utter astonishment, a black statue of Bhagavan, sitting cross-legged and facing away from me. Only then did I realize that, far from being exiled to some remote corner, I was in the very heart of the Ashram, and that this was the famous Samadhi Hall I'd heard so much about and traveled so far to see. Not only that, but I was all alone there. Having expected this first encounter to happen amidst crowds and bustle, I felt as if I'd been granted a private audience, the eeriness of which only made it all the more beautiful and thrilling. Eventually, I walked round the corner, peered through another window, and had a second shock – for there was Bhagavan's couch. If you'd told me a few years ago that a couch, or any item of furniture for that matter, could assume such mystical significance, I'd have thought you were quite insane. Yet to look through that window in the dark and realize that I was all alone in the middle of the night with that couch was an extraordinary experience.

These little incidents would seem trivial enough if one didn't feel that, like the business with Cohen's keys, they had all been scripted and stage-managed by Him – and perhaps such symbolic communication is all the more poignant and important for us, who have never been lucky enough to see anyone sitting on that couch. I felt He was telling me something in the clearest and simplest terms possible: I had thought He was far away from me, when all the time He was right under my nose. I had assumed I had ages left to wait and many hurdles still to overcome, whereas in fact I only had to take one simple little step before He appeared to announce that my journey was already over. The moment I'd imagined for so long and pictured in so many different ways happened to creep up on me so stealthily that I didn't even see it coming until it was all over...

Gifts from a Friend

by Evelyn K. Saphier

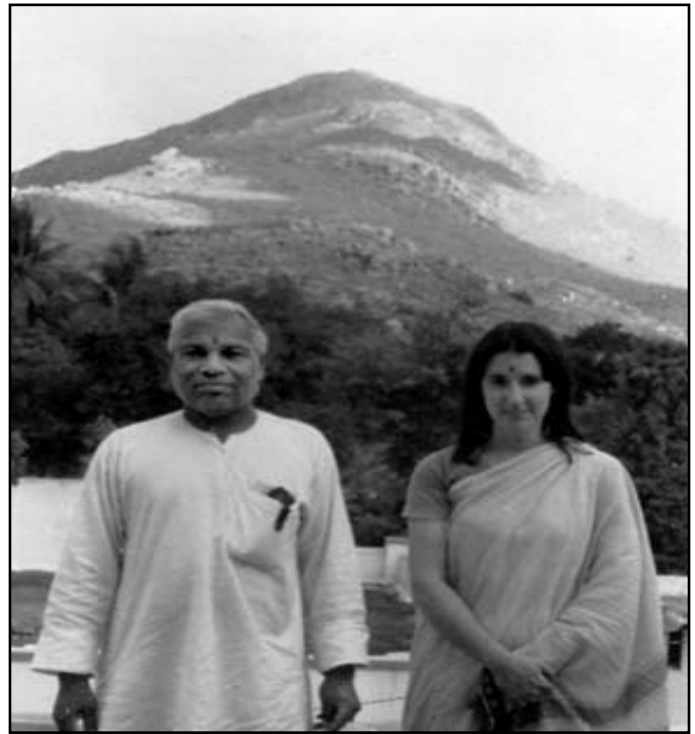
JUST over ten years ago, on April 10th, 2000, the founder of Sri Arunachala Ashrama, Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, merged in the bliss of Arunachala-Ramana and became free from the bondage of human existence. Though no longer among us, I do not believe that he is ever far in thought from those of us who were privileged to know such a unique soul during the formative years of our young adult life.

I think if any of us who knew Bhagawat well were asked what word first comes to mind on thinking of him, the word would have to be “friend”. Friendship was Bhagawat’s first and last gift. There was no time of day that Bhagawat would not run to the aid of a friend, and he would spare no amount of time or energy to offer consolation, encouragement and good cheer. The atmosphere of friendship in the Ashram was one in which Bhagawat, in his unique, humble and often humorous way, conveyed to us the gifts of his company and wisdom.

First and foremost, Bhagawat taught us about abhyasa – spiritual practice. He would compare spiritual practice to ‘digging ditches’, saying it must be done with the same discipline and determination, and must be given the top priority in our lives. The regular nightly practice that began at 7 p.m., which combined recitations and Sanskrit chants followed by a period of silence and a reading from Sri Bhagavan’s teachings, was the cauldron in which we one-pointedly sought, time and again, to take the mind to its source. After the silence, Sri Bhagavan’s words would enter and take root in our hearts! There is no doubt that the cumulative effect of our regular and repeated practice was such that on uttering the very first syllables of the evening recitation we would be carried deep within!

The mornings became time for the sweet and sublime recitation of “Sri Lalita Sahasranam Stotram,” followed by silence and, once again, contemplation of a reading from Sri Bhagavan’s words. One cannot overestimate the power of this litany to still the mind and diminish one’s sense of doership in the succeeding hours.

Thus, the translation of ideas on meditation from theory to intense, one-pointed practice and direct experience was, I would have to say, the primary, priceless treasure offered us by Bhagawat’s influence. It was he who sat and showed us how to chant and follow



Evelyn and Bhagawat at Arunachala in 1979

the sound of a mantra to the heart; how to still the mind; how to practice Self-Enquiry. It was he who created the setting in which the patient daily practice would bring about the flowering of peace. The setting was a tiny storefront meditation center on East 6th Street in Manhattan that contained the universe.

It always amazed me how Bhagawat seemed to have whatever quotation of Sri Bhagavan that was needed or appropriate at his fingertips. In addition, he had many homely wisdom stories from Indian village life in his repertoire. Bhagawat also had some classic sayings of his own which he repeated so often, and all of these stories and sayings became engraved in the hearts of us all. At the time, we used to joke that we could recall them by number and dispense with their narration, having heard them so often. In reality, they became such a part of us that they continue to guide all of our decisions in matters great and small to the present day.

Bhagawat used to humorously call himself “the doorman and doormat” of Sri Arunachala Ashrama. He placed great emphasis on “the personal touch” and wanted all people to be greeted with a warm welcome. His typical telephone greeting was an exuberant: “Sri Arunachala Ashrama! Namaskar! Namaskar! Namaskar!” Now that Sri Arunachala Ashrama has so grown in size, scope and

so grown in size, scope and outreach, I find that “the personal touch” emphasized by Bhagawat is more important than ever!

Among the personal qualities to be desired in a friend or devotee, Bhagawat valued and esteemed an open heart over and above any other qualification. “Coffee, Company and Conversation” were his gold standard, and he would typically ask, “Can you have five minutes of ‘CCC’ with the person?”

Bhagawat also believed in the importance of work, and he eschewed distinctions between the sacred and secular. In this connection, he was fond of proclaiming his love of “four letter words,” and he had a whole list that he would reel off with relish to demonstrate his point. In fact, “work” was one of his favorite “four-letter words,” along with “pray,” and a host of others which he would gleefully count off on his fingers.

One of my own first perception shifts, on meeting Bhagawat, was when I discovered that I had ceased to think of God as something to be ‘believed in’, or not. Concept had become reality.

Bhagawat used to say that, though penniless, he could pay lavish tribute with his words, which in reality he did in the countless pages of the prayer manuscript that he wrote, day after day. Seated at his beloved Hermes 3000 typewriter, Bhagawat would pour forth his devotion to Bhagavan in words, or simply sit at the keys in silence.

He once wrote, which sums up the reason for writing thousands upon thousands of pages of what he called ‘Prayer Manuscripts’, “I have built Thy temple in the Cavity of the Lotus of my Heart so that I can worship Thee with the fruits and flowers of my breath.” Today, when one reads even a page of this prayer manuscript, one can have a glimpse of his state of mind and the extraordinary flow of grace that he enjoyed. Bhagawat intended his writings to be a gift to his friends and, indeed, they are.

Hence, it is appropriate that 10 years after his passing and almost forty years after first meeting our most unforgettable friend that we pay tribute to him in our own meager words. I can imagine Bhagawat in a heaven of friends, seated at his beloved Hermes 3000 in the clouds, singing the songs of Tulsi Das and eating celestial mangos. But truthfully one need not imagine at all, for the primary gift of our beloved Arunachala Ashrama founder and friend to us was the gift of silence...

The Lotus of My Heart

ARUNACHALA BHAKTA BHAGAWAT

JUST to abide in the cavity of the lotus of my Heart is the greatest gift from Sri Ramana Bhagavan to me and how I pray He keep me glued to His Lotus Feet once and for all. His Sri Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Centre and this Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram in the Annapolis Valley of Peace and Happiness are here as a result of His Infinite Grace and Mercy. I must declare to the world that they would not have been brought into existence without His Infinite Grace and Mercy. So I shall have to remember day and night that Sri Ramana Arunachala Dakshinamurty Sachchidananda Parabrahman is looking after all of His loving sons and dear daughters and we have to move on, march on, press on and push on towards the goal that must be reached without any further delay. But we are simply the most infinitesimal instruments of the Mighty Maharshi and He is the Doer behind each and everything in this world. In the bright sunshine of the autumn, the Annapolis Valley is glistening, sparkling and shining with warmth, love and affection and I have no other choice left to me but to turn to the Self within the cave of my Heart in this far-of land.

There has never been the least shadow of doubt within me that my destiny is linked up with my Master and Lord, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and the time has come that I must trudge along, trudge along, to the Holy Hill of the Beacon Light. The unceasing inherence in the Self in the cavity of the lotus of my Heart must remain that focal point of my remaining days. When I close my eyes, I find myself transformed into the ant who knows nothing else in this world but His Lotus Feet. No amount of my efforts and endeavors can be of any avail in this world without His Infinite Grace and Mercy. I beg and beseech Him to cut asunder the knot of nescience from my Heart and melt me into the Holy Arunachala Mountain. I am standing on this sacred soil of Sri Arunachala Ashrama in this Annapolis Valley at the southern foot of the North Mountain and am calling on Bhagavan Sri Ramana to remove the densest darkness of desires and delusions from my life and give me the ceaseless inherence in the Self, once and for all. My breath is merged in my Heart and I feel like doing nothing but remaining calm and quiet all the time. I walk around His Ashram like one possessed and I can now do nothing but abide in the Self, nothing but the Self, within my Heart Cavity.

I am prostrate at the lotus Feet of Sri Ramana Arunachala Dakshinamurty Guru.

Bhagavan Ramana has established His Abode for the sake of all those devotees and disciples who are eager and earnest to profit from His Most Direct and Simple Teaching of 'Who Am I?'. Sri Bhagavan is ever kind and compassionate to me and He gives us the friendship of such persons who are ever ready to sacrifice their life for the sake of keeping His Banner

fluttering in the open air. Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram is standing on the southern side of the field and adding grandeur and luster to the world. Each and every single second of my sojourn in this land is the firmest reminder to me that I must cling to His Lotus Feet. My Heart is unceasingly repeating His most blissful and potent Name "Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya" and this is the be all and end all for me Sri Arunachala Ramana Dakshinamurty Sadguru.

Swami Chidbhavananda

Swami Chidbhavananda (1898-1995) was a well known scholar and sannyasin of the Ramakrishna Order. Later he established his own Asramam near Tiruchi which is flourishing. The following is transcribed from a talk given on All India Radio.

IT WAS in the year 1922 that a few of us religiously inclined college students undertook a pilgrimage from Madras to Tiruvannamalai for a darshan of Ramana Maharshi. The Asramam was then in its initial stage. An august person was seated on a raised platform, and it was evident he was the sage whom we had come to see. Around him on the floor were seated a number of devotees, all intently looking at him, and we found our places among them. Silence reigned supreme. The presiding deity of the Asramam was the author of that silence, hence its perfection. This was a novel experience for us, but we took to this congenial environment quite happily.

There was no such thing as a formal introduction of newly arrived devotees. As others did, we sat quietly. Maharshi turned his penetrating gaze at us off and on. We felt ourselves highly blessed by his benign look. Occasionally he spoke a word or two, which was always pertinent and to the point. But his silence was more eloquent. An occasional smile revealed his bliss.

Visiting devotees often brought packets of sugar-candy or some such thing and offered them to him. He would help himself to a tiny piece from the packet and pass it on to the assembled group. Then and there it would be shared by the entire lot.

I made deeper personal contact with the Maharshi in the year 1928. I had renounced the world in 1923 and joined the Ramakrishna Math. In 1926 I entered the order of sannyasa.

From 1926 to 1940 I was in charge of the Ramakrishna Asramam at Ootacamund. During that period, when I travelled between Ootacamund and Madras, I took as

many opportunities as possible to go to Tiruvannamalai in order to see the Maharshi. I was not inclined to talk much with him; being seated in his presence was more than sufficient. Occasionally he spoke, but his silence was what I sought and prized every time I went to him. A purified enquirer made a rich harvest of the blissful calmness that prevailed in his presence.

The Maharshi occupied a couch in a corner of a middle-sized hall in the Asramam. Barring this corner the entire hall was at the disposal of the visiting public, and anybody could go into the hall at any time of the day or night. Visiting devotees would quietly steal in, sit for a while in quiet meditation and then leave unobtrusively. One day a man following the path of devotion came in and occupied a place very near the sage. Then he unburdened all that lay buried in his heart. His speech was choked with feeling. He poured forth, "I have gone on pilgrimage all over the land. I have been regular in my spiritual practices. Many a sleepless night have I passed in prayer. Still to this day I have had no mercy from the Lord. I am forlorn." He cried bitterly, but Maharshi sat unconcerned. Eventually all his suppressed feelings were worked out, and then in a measured voice the sage said, "Strange man. He cries – what is there to sob about? Instead of being poised in the blissful Self, he goes on wailing." This observation had a telling effect. The man saw that his problem was self-created, and a new chapter in his life started.

On another occasion a talkative man made his appearance in the hall. He chose to sit near the sage and unceremoniously raised a question, "Bhagavan, what is your view on birth control"? There was no answer, so the man explained at length the importance of the topic. Again getting no reply, he continued until he could say no more, and then fell silent. Silence reigned supreme in the hall. In the midst of this silence, Maharshi asked, "Do

you know death control?" There was no response.

One day it was suggested to Maharshi that no spiritual progress could ever be made without sadhana, or spiritual discipline. After a pause he made these observations:

"Mind it is that binds man, and the same mind it is that liberates him. Mind is constituted of sankalpa and vikalpa, desire and disposition. Desire shapes and governs disposition. Desire is of two kinds – the noble and the base. The base desires are lust and greed. Noble desire is directed towards enlightenment and emancipation. Base desire contaminates and clouds the understanding. Sadhana is easy for the aspirant who is endowed with noble desires. Calmness is the criterion of spiritual progress. Plunge the purified mind into the Heart. Then the work is over. This is the essence of all spiritual discipline!"

During one of my visits I was seated at some distance

from Maharshi. There were many devotees in the hall and the usual silence prevailed. I remembered his injunction to "Plunge the pure mind into the Heart," and decided to practise it then. I gazed at him and he gazed back at me. What followed was indescribable. His body seemed a glass case from which a blissful brilliance streamed out. More than half an hour passed this way. It was an experience unique and unforgettable. It confirmed Ramakrishna's statement that spiritual experience can be transmitted from one person to another in the manner in which material things are handed over. Bharata Varsha is ever the bestower of spirituality on mankind. Ramana Maharshi is verily a true spiritual son of this holy land, who spontaneously and impersonally showered benediction on mankind.

– *The Mountain Path, Jayanthi, 1998*

Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in a few places 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)

Miami, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Robinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@gmail.com)

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

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

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

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