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# Advaitic Sadhana

By S. S. Cohen

## CHAPTER IV: PITFALLS

WHILE on the subject of meditation it will be worth our while to draw the attention of the *sādhaka* to the variety of sensory experiences which some beginners obtain, or imagine they obtain, in meditation. The case of the gentleman who had heard an explosion inside his skull and had run out of the meditation room all atremble, is exceptional, no doubt, but by no means unique. The number of visions is certainly legion, but less in the ordinary state of consciousness than in meditation. Super-sensuous hearing and seeing are frequent to those who expect them and even pray for them, mistaking them for signs of Divine Grace. In this *sādhana* they are condemned: they harass only beginners, or the mentally immature who entertain wrong, fantastic notions of the yogic practice. The world, we have seen, is but the shadow-play of the senses, to suppress which we take to *sādhana*, so that falling victim to the senses in the very attempt at destroying them is admitting *Māyā* by the back door. Yogis must be warned against these fraudulent experiences: whatever is seen, heard, or smelt in meditation is pure fancy and, therefore, must be mercilessly ignored; it will eventually give way before a determined practice. A very large section of humanity equates miracles and visions with holiness, and the common folk in this country (India) likewise view them with undisguised awe, so that millions flock to him who can exhibit a pennyworth miracle. Vedantic India abhors them, and has a profound contempt for the conscious display of

*siddhis* (psychic powers), except by the *jñāni-siddhas* on special but very infrequent occasions, for it detracts from the realisation of the Truth, which is the sole aim of this yoga. These *siddhas* must be distinguished from the so-called "Occultists" who claim to have *siddhis* but have no *jñāna* (knowledge of the Reality), nor specifically aim at achieving it.

Those who claim and work for miracles and *siddhis*, by whatever name they are known, have no place in the path of the Absolute. The seekers of the Absolute have to guard against these lures and traps of the senses, and against the fables that circulate about the dangers of yoga. *Dhyāna* yoga must be purified from these excrescences and, being safe and simple, it can be practised by anyone, at any time, and in any healthy and clean environment and circumstance without the slightest fear or hesitation.

## CHAPTER V: SAMADHI

THE word *samādhi* has often been translated as "trance" in English, which is highly misleading. Trance has a bad odour, and can by no means convey the idea of *cinmātra*, the pure consciousness which is vividly experienced in the heart in *samādhi*. *Advaitic samādhi* has no resemblance whatever to the cataleptic trance which the mysteries of ancient Egypt and Greece were said to induce, or to the contemplation of the religious mystic. Hence I have left *samādhi* untranslated throughout this essay. The terms *Nirvāṇa* and Mind (not

*manas*) used by Zen Buddhists and Mahāyānists seem to have the same connotation as *samādhi*.

*Samādhi* is therefore the experience of the pure, formless consciousness in the heart, which, once experienced, is never lost. The seeking will then end, and the consolidation of the experience into the permanency of *sahaja samādhi* alone remains to be achieved. With rare exceptions the early experience of *samādhi* is vague and shaky, but it acquires firmness by practice, which is no longer the same as the pre-*samādhi* practice, which has been one of searching for the Heart. Henceforth meditation is effortless to a degree, and free from the strain and doubts of the past.

If the *samādhi* continues to be disturbed by thoughts, it is called *savikalpa*, in which, though peaceful, the world, as thoughts, is still feebly present. It has not yet become firm enough to free itself from thinking, which is the characteristic of the next higher *samādhi*, the *nirvikalpa*, wherein the mind stands poised in the stillness of the Heart. This is the *Svarūpa* (the very nature) of existence and of all things, the Being or Self absolute. When by constant practice *nirvikalpa samādhi* is turned into *sahaja*, Self-realisation or *Jīvanmukti* — the state of Liberation-in-life — is said to have been achieved. The *Jīvanmukta* is permanently aware of his reality as consciousness-bliss.

I have given these details in the hope of dispelling some of the myths which have been woven by imaginative writers around *nirvikalpa* and around *samādhi*. The mysteries which are said to shroud them do not exist at all. *Samādhi* is the state of one's own true Self, in which all human endeavours find fulfillment. Love for power, wealth, fame, country, service of humanity or religious worship has *samādhi*, or Self-discovery, alone for its objective. For him who has achieved it there remains nothing more to do or aspire for in life: he has realised his own truth, as the all, the soul of all, dwelling ever and ever in the hearts of all. And because his state is beyond common experience, it has been subject to so much speculation and unintelligent guesswork. Hence is the need for the above details.

## CHAPTER VI: THE SĀTTVIC FOOD

IN every country in this wide world there are a good number of people who lead a virtuous life and

attempt to tread the path of true religion and piety, each according to his light. Of these not a few aspire to follow the Vedantic tradition, and are eager to know the kind of diet they should adopt for this purpose. Their eagerness is quite understandable, considering the distinct effects of food and drink on our physical and moral well-being — effects which can be by no means minimised. Who has not been a witness to the injuries of strong liquor to oneself and one's near and dear, or to the suffering caused by certain articles of diet to a constitution which is not suited to them? And when the body is struck down by a disease, or becomes upset, the mind, which is our most precious asset, goes down the same slope. This is what caused the ancients to prescribe a regimen for the yogi and to warn him against indiscriminate feeding.

To perform *sādhana* a sound health is of paramount importance. We cannot be too careful to avoid anything which is likely to disturb the balance of our physical economy. The quantity of food we ingest is not of less importance than its quality. And no food can be expected to yield the desired nourishment but the simplest, which is easily digestible, prevents accumulation, fermentation and general discomfort. This food we call *sāttvic* (harmonious, compatible, agreeable) and is of much help to the *sādhana*. No hard and fast rule can be made for the articles which should be used in the diet. Constitutions differ; so do climatic conditions. What is good for one person and in one part of the world may not be good for another and in another part of the world. The question of availability must also be considered. Yet so much can be said about the diet in general, namely, that animal food is discouraged in this path, especially if the animal concerned is developed in bulk, or low and loathsome in habits. One need hardly specify. He who has chosen this spiritual line will not fail to distinguish between the clean and the unclean, and between what is good for him to eat and what is not.

In India the food served in ashrams and temples as well as in most brahmin houses consists of some of the following: rice, wheat, pulses, milk, butter, ghee, fresh vegetables, nuts, etc., cooked in simple style, in addition to fruits and moderate quantities of tea and coffee. There are also very large non-brahmin communities all over the country which consider it a sacrilege to feed on flesh, so that a very high percentage of the Hindu population is pure vegetarian

and, notwithstanding, keeps a robust health and sturdy constitution. As for drink, nothing can be healthier than pure, fresh water. Intoxicants are strictly prohibited, for they fuddle and muddy up the mind which with extreme care we are preparing for the supreme experience. It is only when the body is healthy and in perfect ease, and the mind clear, happy and alert that this yoga can succeed.

Yoga killeth all pain for him who is regulated

in eating and leisure, regulated in working, regulated in sleeping and waking. When his subdued mind is fixed in the Self, free from longing for desirable objects, then he is said to be harmonised.

*Bhagavad Gita*, VI: 17,18

—from S. S. Cohen's 1975 publication, entitled *Advaita Sadhana*. (*To be continued*).

## The Voice of Thayumanavar The Silent Sage - Part III

### How Did He Escape?

Where was Thayumanavar? How did he escape the guards and the spies? Silent, aloof, meditative, Thayumanavar had watched the play of the egoistic forces in the royal court since the sudden death of the king. Opportunists and sycophants thought the honest saint a stumbling block on their way to power. How can the blind know the sun? They knew that the queen loved him. They made her believe that Thayumanavar was an impostor. Influential talebearers, wicked slanderers, double-tongued flatterers who won her favour poured gentle venom into her ears. "O Queen, I sounded his heart today; it is flaming with passion for you. He closes his eyes just to adore your image installed in his soul. Meet him alone; He will fall at your feet; he is your slave; see that today!" Thus the cunning courtiers calumniated the saint and induced the queen.

The saint knew the nature of the worldly; he heeded not the dagger-look of jealousy, the frown of insolence and the nuisance of talebearers. With a calm self-gathered inner strength, he was prepared for the coming events. Daily he made himself ready to leave the capital. He had two trusted disciples. Arulayya, the first disciple, had the gift of clairvoyance: "Master, the talebearers are working out a plot that would cost you either your sainthood or your life. So, I am removing the family property to Vedaranyam. It is under the Maharatta king of Tanjore. These people cannot go there." The saint nodded his assent. Arulayya quietly removed all valuables to Vedaranyam along with a merchant. Everything was kept ready for the saint outside the fort. That particular night, the saint dressed himself as a Naik soldier and escaped the watching eyes. The horse

was ready; Arulayya was there to do everything. They quickly crossed the boundary of the kingdom. And then, Thayumanavar, in the robes of a wandering *sannyasi*, joined a party of monks bound for Rameswaram. In those days, the Maravas of Sivaganga and Ramnad raised the standard of national independence against alien powers that usurped the throne of Tamil Nadu. Even to the end of the Eighteenth Century the brave Maravas fought for national freedom and gave shelter to political refugees. It so happened that the party which opposed Rani Minakshi hatched its plot in the Marava territory, from Sivaganga and Ramnad. So Thayumanavar made haste to reach Ramnad where he could live unmolested by the Rani's men. The king of Ramnad received the saint with due reverence and gave him a garden home for the practice of his yoga.

### The Silent Sage

Thayumanavar went to Rameswaram and there dedicated thrilling psalms to the Universal Mother who saved him from the dangerous lust of the Rani. He still had to be guarded from spies and traitors.

Thayumanavar remembered the words of Sadasiva Brahman, and he practised both inner and outer Silence. The mouth would not open for words nor his mind for thoughts. At this juncture (1743) he met again near Manamadurai the Silent Brahman, Sadasiva, and received his blessings. The Brahman wrote a famous book called *Atmavilas* which pleaded for perfect silence, solitude and aloofness in utter renunciation. This book was explained to Thayumanavar. Thayumanavar wrote many poems in the light of *Atmavilas*. Sadasiva said in it:

"Live not in the crowd of men; run away to solitude.  
Shun the lure of the opposite sex as if you were a eunuch.  
Treat sense pleasures as poison.  
Seek lonely places for self-reflection.  
Wander freely in the hall of God, sky-roofed.

Thayumanavar steeped himself in meditation and in writing his spontaneous hymns, which Arulayya copied and gave to the world.

Silence opened psychic centres and meditation absorbed cosmic energy and awakened Divine knowledge so that the Sage lived in tune with the Self and wove his realisations into sublime verses.

He scarcely saw people. The few that sought him were satisfied with hearing his hymns sung by Arulayya every evening. The garden where Thayumanavar lived is marked today by a small temple where his image is adored. There too an offer came to him from the Royal Court, but he refused it. "I have seen enough of this political and social drama. I have watched the world and I prefer silence all the more. Silence is my book of Knowledge," wrote the saint. He forgot the past in self-immersion. He opened his heart to Divine Love. He entered inner solitude, plunged into inner silence, and settled in the deeper Self. He kept his self-level, even like the ocean which overflows not by the inflow of rivers and which dries not by evaporation.

### **The Sage as a Householder**

In meantime, the political turmoil in Madura and Trisirapuram ended in a tragedy for the queen. Rivals joined the Nawab and brought about her downfall. Chanda Sahib ravaged her kingdom and imprisoned her. She drank poison and died. Thayumanavar saw the tragedy of selfish pride, greed, vanity, ambition and treachery that made a hell of human life. He saw the fate of passion. He saw how rival forces endangered kingdoms. His way was now free from the Queen's spies.

Just at this time, his elder brother, Siva Chidambaram, came to Ramnad and persuaded him to return to Vedaranyam where he could live conveniently and carry on his yoga. Thayumanavar started with Arulayya, visited Madura and other pilgrim centres on the way and reached Vedaranyam. The village received its sage with temple honours. Thayumanavar entered his ancestral home. A bride awaited his arrival. His relatives entreated him to marry her and to show the world how one can be a yogin and a householder at the same time. There was the word of his Master too. The *brahmacharya* life of Thayumanavar was so disciplined, he was physically and spiritually so strong that he could live in communion with God, wherever he might be. So the saint married the chosen bride, the fair and chaste Mattuvarkuzhali meaning 'lady of flowing fragrant tresses'. Both lived together like life and body. They got a child who was named Kanakasabhapati. After the birth of the child, Thayumanavar initiated his wife in yoga and meditation.

Thayumanavar and his wife lived a life of purity and meditation. He read to her ancient books of wisdom. He dedicated song-flowers to the Divine every day and explained them to his companion in life. They lived a simple life and gave liberally to the needy. Thayumanavar, like his father, supervised the local temple. He made it thrill with the songs of saints and Vedic hymns.

Unexpectedly, Thayumanavar's wife passed away, saying, "Lord, renounce the world after educating my boy and placing him well in life and not before. Let my soul rest in Thee!"

The sage Thayumanavar was faithful to his duty as a father. He educated his son, placed him with his elder brother and waited for the next command from his Master.

### **Thus Spake the Master**

Thayumanavar was now soul-free; he kept himself aloof from home affairs. He gave away a part of his wealth to his son and another part to charitable endeavours and a third part to the temple, keeping for himself the wealth of Divine Grace. The time was ripe; the Master came one day when he was meditating before the vast sea near Vedaranyam. Thayumanavar fell at his feet crying, "Master, by Thy Grace I am free to follow thee. Bless me with Thy Grace. Let me enter the high plane of superconscious trance. Let my being thrill with the nectar of immortality."

The Master graciously looked at the ripe soul and said, "You are now ripe to receive that yoga. My son, hear from me the ancient wisdom taught by Sri Mula and Satyadarsi and sing it to humanity."

The words uttered by the Master were woven into hymns and became the Philosophy of the Silent Sage:

The world of manifold appearances is the multiplicity of one Divine Energy.

It is a play in five acts: creation, preservation, destruction, self-absorption and salvation.

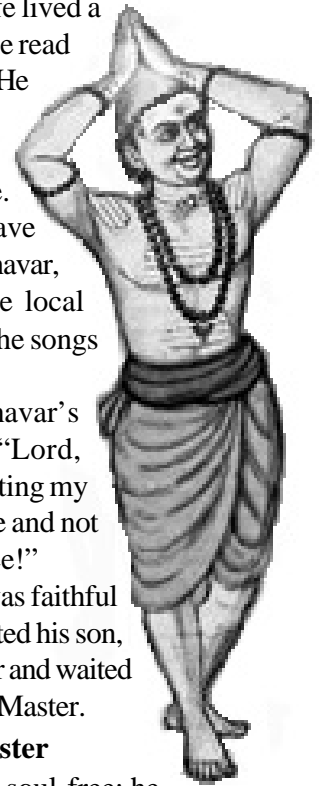
The play is kept going by the Cosmic Force, at the Will of the Witnessing Lord.

God is All-in-all,

all-blissful, all-containing and impersonal.

Grace is His personality.

He is omnipotent, omnipresent.



He is the Life of lives,  
 the Thinker in the brain,  
 the Feeler in the heart,  
 the Seer in the eye,  
 the Hearer in the ear,  
 the Breather in the lungs,  
 and the Speaker in the tongue.  
 He does everything through His Grace  
 and remains an unattached Witness,  
 far beyond the world of modes and dualities.  
 He is as He is.

Just as rays spread from the sun and give light and warmth to the world,

Grace radiates from the Divine and plays as the world.

There is no language without the first vowel 'A';  
 there is no world without God's Grace.

He is the unique One;  
 there is nothing to be compared with Him.  
 He has no birth, no death.

His Grace descends into purified souls.  
 Such souls are lights that lead us Godward.

Embodied creatures have the taint of egoism, lust and delusion.

They are tied to the results of good and bad acts.

The mundane world emanates from the Divine Will  
 and evolves from the lowest inertia to the highest  
 superconsciousness according to the results of acts.

The soul which is conscious of the Divine Grace,  
 enjoys peace, bliss and freedom.

The soul identifying itself with the mental-vital-material  
 body suffers bondage and the pangs of birth and death.

The mirror cannot reflect forms without light.

The soul cannot act without Grace.

The soul by the force of the Grace behind it,  
 rules as a king over the body,

with the mind, intellect, emotive mind and egoism as  
 its ministers.

Waking, dream, deep sleep, trance, supertrance  
 are the five states of soul-consciousness.

In the superconscious trance, the soul feels its  
 identity with the Divine and attains divinity.

The Jiva then enjoys Shivahood.

The sun causes seasons, day and night;  
 but it is quite separate from them.

Even so Atman is separate from the mind and its  
 modifications.

The soul must feel this and be conscious of its

eternal unity with the Divine.

This conscious living in the Divine is Life Divine.

The Divine Grace transforms life into love and love  
 into bliss.

That Grace descends in the form of  
 Consciousness.

The ordinary physical eye cannot see the Divine.

The inner eye alone can subtly feel the Divine  
 presence in the soul.

The mind internalised and concentrated in  
 meditation,

With unflagging patience, forbearance, faith and  
 constancy must the aspirant practise meditation.

Purity of the heart and one-pointed fixity of the  
 mind enables meditation.

As the soul detaches itself from mental  
 modifications, it approaches the Divine Centre.

Then Grace takes possession of the pure soul and  
 reveals the Divine presence.

The soul must become red-hot in the Divine flame.

Then it becomes shining gold  
 and at last a crown of Divinity.

The first step is mental purification and  
 concentrated devotion.

The next is constant meditation and inner fixity.

By this the soul feels its at-one-ment with the  
 Divine, the Quintessence of its being.

Then it sees the same Divine essence in the  
 universe of beings.

From self-consciousness, the soul widens into  
 cosmic consciousness.

Dear one, keep these in mind and renounce  
 everything for the sake of Divinity.

Take a pearl-divers's plunge into the heart.

Be centred in there and the Divine Light will lead  
 you on.

Go hence to Chidambaram:

Meditate upon Lord Nataraja, the symbol of perfect  
 Divine Truth.

Worship Him daily, with hymns and he will lead you  
 on! Shivoham!

The Divine Master then initiated the faithful disciple  
 in superconscious trance, poured his energy into him and  
 watched his progress for a few days before he disappeared.

Thayumanavar received the words of the Guru with  
 all the sincere devotion of a true seeker, expressing his  
 deep gratitude in sublime verses. Then he went to  
 Chidambaram. *(To be continued).*

## Letters and Comments

### Do We Create Our Diseases?

*I would like to thank you for the newsletter. I always look forward to receiving it and it brings me great comfort.*

*I have read many books by Ramana and for many years have looked into that loving face with tears of joy and love. It is difficult to say if I am a devotee, but if He were alive today, I would go to the ends of the earth just to sit in His presence. I would be most grateful if you could answer a question for me. It is something that I have struggled with for many years and do not even know how to put in words – but will attempt to do so.*

*The question has to do with positive thinking and the popular belief that WE manifest all that happens to us, and yet according to Ramana (to my understanding at least) this is not so. I know in my heart that Ramana was enlightened, and yet he got cancer and suffered (although he did not identify with the body). So the question I have struggled with for many years is, do I really manifest my world? If I am physically ill, did I cause it and can I heal myself, as many people say they have done, although Ramana didn't heal himself of cancer.*

*Because I have several physical challenges, I feel people around me think I have caused them through my thinking. A friend of mine said to me that she "created" her cancer. You can see that this is a difficult dilemma for me and I would greatly appreciate any insights you might have.*

*I do hope that you don't mind the questions being so complex, and thank you in advance.*

California Devotee

Does our thinking – or wrong thinking – create our problems, disease being just one of them? This is what I understand your question to be. And to this question I can say with a certain amount of confidence that Sri Ramana Maharshi would straightaway give a "yes" pronouncement. But this "yes" needs to be understood in the light of his life and teachings.

It is true that the book of events to take place in our lives is delivered at the time of our birth, and the only freedom we have, according to Sri Ramana, is to turn our mind inwards and abide in the Self. This truth is only fully understood when we ourselves become Self-realized. Until then it is only a theory from which to draw comfort from in

our failures and humility in our successes.

But the fact remains that our wrong thinking, or thought alone, is the cause and creator of all our problems.

God, the Ordainer, manifests this creation. We are not the Creators; God is. Can we cure our bodily diseases by thought power? Perhaps. Can they be cured by allopathic treatment? Perhaps. All this depends on destiny. Even if we cure our present disease, is it a permanent cure? No. Some illness, some unexpected event or other will come along and make this body unfit for occupation. We will die. Of all the things uncertain in this creation, this is the most certain.

Until the time comes when we cease to identify ourselves with this perishable body, we will continue to suffer. Bhagavan says the bodily identification itself is the real disease:

"The body itself is a disease. If the body gets a disease, it means that the original disease has got another disease. If you really want this new disease not to trouble you, you must first take the required medicine for the original disease so that the latter disease – that is, the disease of the disease – does not affect you. What is the use of worrying about the secondary disease instead of trying to find out a method of getting rid of the primary disease? Therefore allow this new disease to go its own way, and think of a medicine for the original disease."

So we have no alternative but to direct our efforts towards turning our minds inward and abiding in the eternal Source of our being. Only then we will be perfectly free from disease and suffering. As Bhagavan says, "What is the use of worrying about the secondary disease instead of trying to find out a method of getting rid of the primary disease?"

The problem is that we are so accustomed to looking outwards through the senses for satisfaction and happiness. We continually confuse the state of our physical well being with our true Being, which is always pure and perfect, immortal and free. This outlook has to be shifted inwards, and to do this spiritual practice is essential.

Bhagavan Ramana has given us the simple, direct method of Self-enquiry of "Who am I?" to overcome all 'dis-ease'.

If people believe that you caused your ill health by some sort of ill thinking, you need not be concerned. We are not what people think, nor are we what we think ourselves to be. When all this process of thinking comes to an end, we experience what we are, and words cannot express it. That is the meaning and purpose of this human birth. If your ill health has brought you to this understanding, then we can

thank the Almighty for it. Understanding will lead to transcendence. And this can happen by your sincere effort and the Grace of God or the Guru.

Why didn't Sri Ramana Maharshi cure the cancer that afflicted his body? From his state of consciousness this desire would not arise at all, as he did not consider himself to be that body, a body separate from all other bodies in the world. It is true that Self-realization permanently immunizes us from all diseases. It makes us immortal. But the body is a different matter. It will go through birth, growth and death. A sage or mahatma will assume that *upadhi* or limitation for the salvation of humanity. If the sage made his body immortal, without sickness, what kind of example would that be for us mere mortals who are striving for deliverance from the cycle of births and deaths. He shows us how to rise above the I-am-the-body idea and rest in the pristine peace of our true Self, free from death and disease. This he does by putting on the same physical limitations as ordinary humans.

Could Ramana have cured his cancer if he wished? I have no doubt he could have. But what is the ultimate experience of existence? It is Self-realization. He shows us how to attain it and how a Jnani functions in the world in spite of the normal bodily afflictions, of which he was hardly aware.

You can cure your cancer. You can live longer, perhaps. But if you do not connect with your true Self while in this body, you will have to take on more bodies, suffer, become totally disgusted with bodily existence, turn inward with perfect detachment and one-pointedness and realize who you are. That is the purpose of this suffering, and it won't

end until our attachment to the body is snapped. That is what Sri Ramana teaches us. *Editor*

## An Invitation

You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating

### JAYANTI

127th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi  
in  
New York City

Saturday, 6 January 2007

11:00 a.m.

at

ARUNACHALA ASHRAMA

86-06 EDGERTON BOULEVARD

JAMAICA ESTATES, QUEENS, NEW YORK 11432

The program will include recitations, bhajans and puja, followed by prasada (lunch).

For more information call:

(718) 560-3196

Note: Programs will be conducted at other venues in the USA and Canada. Call the phone numbers below for details.

## Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in 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 (678-423-7324 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

**Ann Arbor, MI** — Mohan & Gayatri (734-623-7199 cedararbor@yahoo.com)

**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@earthlink.net)

**San Francisco Area** — Swaminathan & Sangeeta (510-979-1679 / nachiketas@hotmail.com)

**Washington, D.C. Area** — Prakash & Mamtha Adishesan (703-257-5589 / adishesan@worldnet.att.net)

**Ottawa, Canada** — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / padmanabhan\_ananth@hotmail.com)

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

**Vancouver, Canada** — Zoya / zoyaonline@yahoo.ca)