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Sri Krishnaprem's Visit to Sri Ramana Maharshi, Part II by S. Chakravarti

Many have read Dilip Kumar Roy's description of Sri Krishnaprem's visit to the Maharshi. The following narration appears to be a far more detailed and credible account than any of the others previously published. It was written by the Bengali devotee who arranged Krishnaprem's 1948 South Indian pilgrimage and enumerates the many ways in which Bhagavan singled out Sri Krishnaprem to extend his grace. While engaging, the author presents us with genuine insight into the intriguing personality and devotional character of a Western devotee who embraced orthodox Vaishnavism and yet, by the intensity of his devotion, was enabled to experience the essence of Bhagavan's true nature.

HERE I must relate another incident. We were all sitting before the Maharshi and he said something in Tamil, his usual language. The crowd looked towards Gopalda and started laughing. It happened that Balaram Reddy, an ex-Pondicherry disciple, was present. The Maharshi was joking and saying something like: "How lucky we are today! Look! Both Sri Krishna and Balaram (Krishna's brother) are with us today."

By this time Gopalda was more or less his normal jovial self again. I was much relieved to see that a thaw had set in, but he was still not quite the Gopalda we knew. He would still fall silent from time to time.

If I remember rightly, it was on the second day of Gopalda's stay at the ashram that the unforgettable thing happened. After breakfast the Maharshi was sitting on the stone seat on the verandah, and we were all sitting on the floor before him. Someone produced a small harmonium and requested Gopalda to sing a bhajan. I was sitting just behind him and he turned and asked me what he should sing. I whispered that any song would do.

I must pause to relate my personal experience of Gopalda at Mirtola. When I first saw him I was, naturally,

terribly impressed. For a moment or two I just gazed at him. Then I recollected myself and saluted him with joined palms. My cultural prejudices did not allow me to touch his feet, but after the arati in the temple, when Gopalda would bring the pancha-pradeep to us, I noticed a change in him. His eyes would be half closed, turned to narrow slits. His hand holding the pancha-pradeep would be trembling a little. His steps would be a little unsteady. Yes. Superficially he would appear to be a little inebriated. On the third or fourth day something prompted me to ask him if I could touch his feet. He could not refuse. He just nodded his head. And that was the first time I touched his feet and offered him my pranam.

Later, when we were all sitting outside and gossiping, Gopalda related this change in me and said something like: "Well. I hope this is not what Ma used to say, 'Too much bhakti is the sign of a thief'." We all laughed heartily.

The next thing was his performance as a musician. After the evening arati he would start playing a small harmonium and sing, mostly Bengali kirtan he had learned from his Guru. I could swear that antedeluvian instrument had a few 'dead' notes and I am quite sure he would often play wrong notes

with great dexterity. Lastly, Gopalda sang as he pleased, that is to say there would be open warfare between his voice and the tune. But, believe it or not, he managed to create an atmosphere. Something would happen inside me. Poor, fleeting words can scarcely convey what I felt. All that I can and will say is that one must hear it to know it – to realise what I cannot convey to you through words.

Let us go back to Ramanashram. Gopalda started to sing the well-known Bengali song, *Kanu kahe Rai*. He could sing only the first line and the first part of the second. Then he fell with a bang onto the instrument. I could not and would not dare to speak about the Maharshi's reaction, but every other person there was horrified – aghast. I was at my wit's end – in fact I was petrified. I just didn't know what to do. The upper part of Gopalda's body was lying motionless on the harmonium. I looked at the Maharshi. What did I see? I saw him looking unblinkingly at Gopalda. Everybody else was standing or sitting motionless. Probably none dared to breathe, even. We were all spell-bound. My mind ceased to function. I just sat there, waiting for I know not what. That tableau went on for some time. I fear I am not in a position to tell you how long, for, after a while, Gopalda appeared to get back his senses – consciousness. Slowly, very slowly, he sat up. His face looked flushed, deep red and it glowed. He got up and prostrated himself before the Maharshi. The Maharshi was still gazing at him. And then the Maharshi turned his face and was looking at – well, I know not what – because his sight turned inward, away from the scene before him. There was no sign, nothing to give us a clue. Then Gopalda stood up and started to leave the hall with unsteady steps. We followed him silently. After some time, Gopalda was the same Gopalda, the Gopalda I knew, loved and revered.

Then came the day for Gopalda's intended trip to Pondicherry. After breakfast Gopalda came to take leave of the Maharshi. He brought the wooden case with Radha Krishna's murtis in it and showed it to the Maharshi. The Maharshi took the box in his hands and, as the light was poor in that darkish corner of the verandah, he turned it this way and that and looked at the those murtis. Then he returned it to Gopalda without comment.

Gopalda was kneeling before him and told him that he would be leaving for Pondicherry. He also told the Maharshi of his plan to visit the three religious centres: (1) the Vaishnava centre, Sri Rangam, (2) the Shakta centre,

Meenakshi at Madurai. And (3) the Shaiva centre, Rameswaram. He asked the Maharshi's blessings so that his pilgrimage would be crowned with success. The Maharshi beamed at Gopalda and nodded his head to signify his assent. And then Gopalda asked the Maharshi for his permission to take me with him. The Maharshi smiled his permission again, tilting his head.

The Maharshi instructed the ashram office to arrange to send Balam Reddy to meet us at Villupuram on our way to the South with letters to the Maharshi's devotees at Sri Rangam. Balam Reddy was also instructed by the Maharshi to arrange for Gopalda's stay at the house in Madurai where he had had his realisation. Lastly, Balam Reddy carried letters addressed to the temple authorities at Rameswaram to arrange for Gopalda's reception when he arrived there.

I have decided to record here what Gopalda later told me about his experiences at Ramanashram, with the instruction to relate these to the Maharshi in seclusion on my final return to Tiruvanmalai. Gopalda said that the moment he set foot on the station platform at Tiruvanmalai he found the whole environment surcharged with one persistent 'enquiry-like' mantra, 'Who am I?' Gopalda said there was no getting away from this 'enquiry' which kept repeating itself with 'hammering blows' (these two last words were Gopalda's). He said he could find no relief from this terrible 'contretemps'. He tried several answers, but all in vain. For instance, when he said "I am Krishna Prem," the retort was "Who is Krishna Prem? Who is Krishna Prem?" Then Gopalda said, "I am Sri Krishna's das (servant)." The immediate reaction was the enquiry, "Who is Sri Krishna?" No matter what reply Gopalda gave, there was no escape or respite from that ever-sounding, agonising enquiry. Gopalda went on to say that when he came and sat before the Maharshi that this ever-persistent phenomenon kept on, and he felt desperate. Then Gopalda changed his tactics and asked the question, "Who are you?" And with this question he looked at the Maharshi. He said he was not prepared for what followed. The Maharshi, or the Maharshi's body, just vanished. He was startled, but he said he realised what the Maharshi wanted to convey: the real Maharshi was not that body, possessing mind, life force, etc. But the answer still evaded him.

He told me that he spent the whole of that night walking restlessly; there was no peace for him. He

confided to me that he asked Radharani who Sri Krishna was, but he did not tell me what answer Radharani gave him, though her answer eased the otherwise unbearable situation. And you will remember that the Maharshi sent some flowers next morning, and that Gopalda was a little less tense. But he continued to be harried because he could not find the proper answer to that 'Raktabeej-like' enquiry. (A reference to the legendary story of the asura (demon) Raktabeej, whose every drop of blood, when shed, gave birth to another Raktabeej demon.)

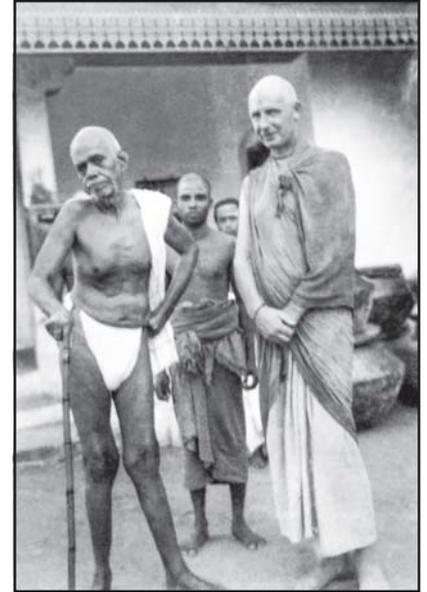
Now we come to the morning that Gopalda started singing. Gopalda told me that as soon as he started singing he lost consciousness. He went into a trance and, for the first time in his life, experienced ananda. Yes, this is what Gopalda confided to me, though I confess that the inept words are mine.

After I got back to the ashram I took the first opportunity to narrate to the Maharshi not only these incidents, but also all the other amazing things that befell Gopalda. There was no one else present except a Telegu friend of mine to act as interpreter if needed. The Maharshi listened without any outward reaction, until I came to Gopalda's version of what happened to him when he started to sing on that fateful morning. Now here I cry 'peccavi'; I confess fully and freely that I just could not utter the word 'ananda'. Why? Well, I was told that Brahmananda was reserved for only those who trod the Advaita path. So I kept fumbling: 'Gopalda said that he felt...' Gopalda thought that he...' And so on. Slowly the Maharshi turned to me and uttered a single word: "Anandam."

I had been staying at Ramanashram for about a year when Gopalda came for the Maharshi's darshan. I have tried in passing to convey the Maharshi's usual – normal – behaviour towards men. Seemingly, he gave the impression that he was not at all concerned with what men did or said or how they acted. But occasionally he did not hesitate to show his displeasure if any gross lapse occurred. So I was astonished beyond words to find the same Maharshi acting like a 'human being' for a change in Gopalda's case. One cannot question the genuineness of the affection and loving care the Maharshi showed for Gopalda. He asked Doraiswamy, one of the oldest disciples of Sri Aurobindo whose pecuniary help sustained the Pondicherry ashram in those early days, if he had met Gopalda. The Maharshi said to him that Gopalda was a

rare specimen of a sadhaka in whom both bhakti and jnana resided side by side.

My friend, the late veterinary doctor, Ananta Narayan Rao, gave me this account: He told me that most of those who were present that morning when Gopalda sang could see that Gopalda was no singer at all, that he could not



even play the musical instrument and, above all, he sang in a language not known to the listeners. But still, Dr. Rao felt moved and tears gathered in his eyes. Dr. Rao told me that the Maharshi's comment was that if three such param bhagavats loudly sang devotional songs, atheists would become theists. Rao did not know why the Maharshi said 'three'.

Swami Viswanathan, perhaps the oldest devotee of the Maharshi, told me that they were all amazed to witness this uncharacteristic reaction of Bhagavan.

Before closing this account of the first leg of Gopalda's trip to South India, I would like to clarify certain points:

(a) Mantu mama (Dilip Roy of Pondicherry) in his book *Yogi Sri Krishna Prem*, states that Gopalda "first came to me," or words to that effect. This is incorrect. Gopalda visited Pondicherry after his stay at Tiruvanmalai.

(b) My attention has been drawn to some stories which are being circulated about what happened at Ramanashram. I have no hesitation in saying that such stories are not correct. In truth, they are just stories – figments of the mind, fictions only. I would like to inform those imaginative persons that such fabrications do not add any extra lustre and glory to the life and doings of such mahatmas as Gopalda. In fact, they serve to detract from their greatness, because, sooner or later, the truth will come out. I would request those who are interested to know the real facts – at times absolutely incredible – wait patiently for the next instalment of this saga. Lastly, I would remind those authors of fairy tales that 'truth is stranger than fiction.'

(To be continued)

A Pilgrimage, Part II

by Dennis Hartel

A Visit to Swami Ramanagiri's Samadhi

ON the morning of March 8th, after our visit to Ramana Mandiram in Madurai, we drove in the van to have a look at Bhagavan's High School. Then all eight pilgrims piled back into the van for the next destination of our journey, a place sanctified by Swami Ramanagiri during the last four years of his life, where his samadhi shrine (tomb) has been erected.

We made our way through the busy streets of Madurai to the main highway to the north and after about half an hour we turned east onto a narrow, paved tree-lined road that took us to the village of Vadipatti. Through a labyrinth of narrow, unkempt streets, crowded with houses, animals, people and the occasional parked vehicle or motorcycle, our driver slowly weaved his way through the village and onto another single-lane road which opened to rice fields and tall coconut trees. Ten more minutes' drive down this quiet road and we saw in front of us the Sirumulai Hills which had first attracted Swami Ramanagiri to this remote location. Then, turning to the right off the road onto a dirt road we soon came upon a thickly-wooded mango grove with branches hanging so low, laden with mangoes, our driver was hesitant to proceed. Kumara Raja told him to park the van, that we would continue on foot, for the samadhi shrine of Swami Ramanagiri was now only a pleasant 5-minute walk under this vast canopy of the mango orchard.

Swami Ramanagiri is not too well known among devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi. That may be because he had only first come to see Bhagavan in 1949 and did not stay on in Tiruvannamalai after his second visit just before Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi. But these facts have little relevance in estimating the depth of his devotion to Bhagavan and the grace which was extended to him.

Swami Ramanagiri's former name was Per Westin and he was born in 1921 into an affluent family related to the King of Sweden. As a young man he read Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and immediately was drawn to spiritual practices. In 1945 he received a two-year fellowship to the Hindu University in Banares to study philosophy which brought him to India, but his natural interest was the practice of yoga, not philosophy.

Not long after he arrived in Benares he met Sunyata, an illumined Danish man whom Bhagavan had called a "natural mystic"; he had visited Bhagavan three times. Per and Sunyata immediately became friends and during Per's first summer vacation from the university, Sunyata invited him to the cool regions of Almora. Sunyata gave him his cave to meditate in and visited him now and then. Per never returned to the university. He had known even before coming to India that his purpose in life was to achieve Self-realization, not to continue his academic career.

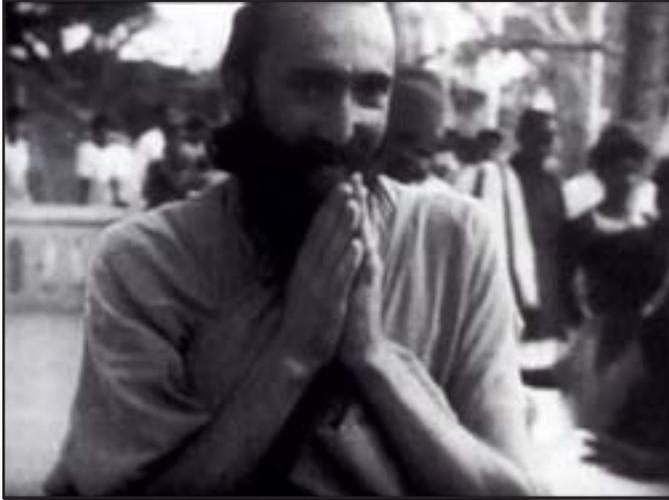
Reading spiritual scriptures in Almora created a desire in him to learn Upanishadic lore from a qualified guru. In Benares he met one such sannyasin, but he would only teach other sannyasins. From this guru Per took initiation into sannyasa and studied the scriptures under his guidance. At the time of initiation, he renounced all his wealth, academic studies and donned the ochre robe.

While on visits to Almora, Sunyata would tell Per about Ramana Maharshi and the path of Self-enquiry. In January of 1949, Per was inspired to make a trip to Tiruvannamalai to visit the Maharshi. He was only 28 at the time but had already made rapid progress in his sadhana. Upon arriving at Ramanasramam, Per immediately experienced a natural attraction to Self-enquiry and wrote to his Benares guru to inform him of this change in his spiritual practice. His guru wrote back encouraging him, saying that Bhagavan was his true guru and he should follow the teachings he received at Ramanasramam.

After forty days of intensive practice of Self-enquiry in the presence of the Maharshi, Per had the exalted experience of the Self. Sunyata writes that Bhagavan conferred on Per the name of Ramanagiri. The Maharshi also gave him a begging bowl that he had himself made from a coconut shell. With this bowl, Bhagavan blessed him with the assurance that thereafter food would always come to him unsought, and it did.

After some time Ramanagiri returned to Almora, but shortly before Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi he had a premonition and left immediately for Tiruvannamalai. He was there on that eventful day on April 14th, 1950 and is seen in the archival film passing before Bhagavan's lifeless body bowing with folded hands.

After Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi, Ramanagiri intended to return to Almora but was persuaded by a friend to first make a visit to Madras. On the very day of his planned departure for Almora, while strolling through the



From the Archival Films of Sri Ramana Maharshi

Theosophical Society in Adyar, he had a vision of Bhagavan who directed him to go to the beach nearby. He did, sat down and was immediately absorbed into samadhi, which went on for some days.

Later he said that in the vision Bhagavan had given him specific instructions and told him that his only duty now was to abide in the Self.

Swami Sureshananda, a longtime devotee of Bhagavan from Palghat, soon joined him; both sat there for a couple of days, unaware of the world. Meanwhile, Ramanagiri's Madras host had been frantically trying to locate him. At that time, a devotee residing in the Theosophical Society had a dream of Bhagavan requesting she prepare food and take it to his two devotees sitting on the beach, which she did. This devotee was none other than the American from California, Eleanor Pauline Noye.*

The local fishermen built a hut over Ramanagiri to protect him from the hot summer sun. His host eventually found him and began providing him with food.

After two or three months on the beach, Ramanagiri said he had another vision of Bhagavan who told him to go to Madurai. After travelling there, he roamed in the remote areas north of the city and ultimately settled down near Vadipatti Village about 20 miles north of Madurai. There, in a quiet grove, at the foot of the Sirumulai Hills, next to a pure, cool water stream Swami Ramanagiri spent the last four years of his life. The intense tapas and neglect he showed to his body must have contributed to the

* I was unable to locate any other references to this incident, though it is documented that Ms. Noye made a second visit to Bhagavan during his last illness. So, it is possible that it was she.

tuberculosis he contracted. At the age of 34, in 1955, in a state of ecstasy he left his body. This was witnessed by some friends at the Perunderai Sanitorium where he spent his final days. For more than an hour before his death he was completely withdrawn in a deep meditative state, with hair standing on end. At his last moment he whispered, "Let us go," and left his body in true yogic fashion through the fontanelle in the top of his head. Blood was seen to ooze out of a hole there.

This is only a brief summary of his noble life, recorded by his friends and inferred from his letters and scant writings.

His samadhi is maintained by a Trust and a full-time guard resides at the small temple built over the tomb. This temple is picturesquely located in the middle of a vast 15-acre mango orchard, speckled with large, ancient trees. Some of the mango trees are large with thick branches that spread out horizontally. The whole area is shaded and cool. The water taps provide naturally

Sri Ramana Jayanti Retreat in Tampa Sunday Afternoon, December 29th – Wednesday Noon, January 1st

This year's retreat will again have periods of meditation, chanting, readings, presentations, satsang and quiet time for reflection and relaxation, and will again take place at the Franciscan Center in Tampa, Florida. Additional programs will be held at the new Old Hall and the Hindu Temple, both located on Lynn Road in Tampa. A program to engage the children in spiritually-oriented activities is also scheduled.

Participants are requested to arrive Sunday afternoon by 3 P.M. to attend the special Arunachala-Ramana puja at the Hindu Temple and a program in the new Old Hall.

For more information and a registration form, please write or call Diana at:

dbatistajimenez@gmail.com / (561) 768-8968

The Franciscan Center's accommodation capacity is limited to 65 guests. The final registration date is November 30th. Details related to the cost for lodging and food will be provided along with the registration form.

The retreat will be held at:

The Franciscan Center, 3010 N. Perry Avenue, Tampa,
Florida 33603

Website: <http://www.franciscancentertampa.org/>

cold spring water year around. A seasonal stream runs alongside it.

A 30 by 25-foot mantap has been erected in front the samadhi entrance. Upon entering the samadhi shrine a palpable stillness is felt. It is that same deep stillness experienced at the samadhi shrine of Bhagavan or the peace one feels standing before a genuine sage or jnani. I was told that sometimes a group of Vipasana practitioners have a retreat there for a few days every year. It is a perfect place for the practice of meditation as one's consciousness naturally becomes clear, still and begins to sink within.

Following footpaths near the samadhi, under the cover of mango and other large trees, we saw a half dozen small shrines with images of different gods and goddesses all within 75 meters of Swami Ramanagiri's samadhi. These add to the spiritual sanctity and charm of Swami Ramanagiri's memorial. Admirers of his, after his death, constructed these shrines. Who can tell, maybe a century from now a large temple and spiritual center will arise on this very ground made sacred by a young, tenaciously earnest, foreign devotee of Bhagavan.

My Heart's Journey – A Pilgrim's Diary

by Evelyn Kaselow

Friday, January 21, 1983 – Our last full day at Sri Ramanasramam

I met Kunju Swami in Ganesan's room; Paul had continued ahead to his own room. As usual Kunju Swami appeared light, happy and completely immersed in Bhagavan. "Kunju Swami has told me what he had told you on the hill. He feels strongly that time and distance have no meaning when it comes to Bhagavan," Ganesan reported.

"In Bhagavan's presence," Kunju Swami narrated, "there were always those who tried to sit very close to him, as close as possible, for meditation. Others though, without being particular, might sit some place in the back of the Hall. Bhagavan ever had a far-off look in his eyes. Now and then he would look on those sitting far-off. Those at a distance were the special recipients of his grace. Really, though, Sri Bhagavan was unique in his unrelenting practice of samatvam. His grace fell equally on all. He was particular in seemingly small matters. For instance, in the dining hall he insisted on being served last." Kunju Swami said further: "On those devotees who made no demands on Bhagavan, on those who asked nothing of him, he showered his grace liberally. We may be destined for greater or lesser roles in life, but in showering his grace, Bhagavan practiced equality."

In Paul's room, Kunju Swami presented Paul with a khadi shirt and an upper cloth which he placed over Paul's shoulders.

We sang "Ramana Sadguru" together. K. Natesan

presented us both with copies of *Sri Ramana Stuti Panchakam*, in English and Tamil. Then Kunju Swami and Natesan taped for us the last four of the five hymns from the book.

While singing Bhagavan's hymns, Kunju Swami's mood was melted. He was intensely indrawn, his eyes rimmed with tears of joy. He looked at no one; though his eyes were open, his mind was sunk deep within. This is a genuinely humble and happy human being, I thought. On this, our last night, Paul and I took the dust of Kunju Swami's feet with great feelings of reverence, gratitude and devotion.

Saturday, January 22, 1983 - Our Day of Departure

I stayed awake late into the night and, consequently, slept right through Paul's alarm. When I woke it was already starting to get light! I sprang from my bed and while running up to Bhagavan's Shrine for the milk offering, I stopped at Ramaswami Pillai's room. I prostrated before him and took the dust of his feet.

"Think of Bhagavan always – before getting up, before sleeping, before eating, before doing any work and so on," he said. "This will help you greatly in your present active life," he told me.

I went into Mother's Temple. Appuchi the priest was sweeping the outer room of the shrine and Kittu [another priest, now deceased] was standing nearby. I climbed the steps to salute Appuchi. "Please remember us when you do Sri Chakra Puja," I requested.

"And remember us when you listen to the tape of the

puja!” Kittu rejoined.

After breakfast I went to my room, quickly did last minute packing and, carrying my picture of Bhagavan, once again met Ramaswami.

“Please! You must take up Self-enquiry wholeheartedly! Whatever else you may have to do in life, you must do the vichara as if your life depended on it. It is the one thing you MUST do!” Thus he pleaded with palms joined, standing by his door. “We will meet again. Come again soon!” These were his last words to me.

On our way to the taxi Paul and I took leave of our friends and acquaintances, and as we drove out of Sri Ramanasramam a crowd gathered on the steps to wave farewell. Paul and I felt overwhelmed by this touching scene. It was so hard to wrench ourselves away! All were

there – Lucy Ma, Natesan, Kittu, Appuchi, T.R.S. and the office staff; Ganesan stood on the steps with palms joined. How hard it was to leave the love and affection of our friends, and the Mountain Itself! Paul and I felt immersed in the glow of Bhagavan’s Grace. Neither were we inclined to talk until well into the trip to Madras. As our taxi carried us out of the Ashram, my eyes were fixed on Sri Arunachala. Driving out of Tiruvannamalai, we sat looking back as the mountain receded from our view. Only near Gingee did it escape our sight. Yet the warmth of Bhagavan’s love continued to envelop us with a sense of inward elation and jubilation. How blessed we felt, both inwardly and outwardly, by our seven-week stay.

Again and again I kept thinking, only the body leaves - this body is not I. *(concluded)*

Ramana Satsangs in the USA and Canada

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.

AL, Birmingham — Sai Kand (205-441-6859 / kandsai@yahoo.com)

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

CA, San Diego — Manna Semby (646-342-4585 / mannamoksha@gmail.com)

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

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

Canada, Toronto — Thiru (416-876-1942 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

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

Canada, Victoria — Saibish (250-818-2875 / saibish@gmail.com)

CT, Hartford Area — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)

FL, Ft. Lauderdale — David & Janet Rubinson (954-600-1967 / arunahill@gmail.com)

FL, Palm Coast — Shriram & Rekha (904-347-3434 / ssmarathemd@gmail.com)

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