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Sadhu Natanananda Going Incognito

Sadhu Natanananda came to Sri Bhagavan as a young man and was guided by him to the highest truth. His unswerving dedication to his guru and his ardent desire to immerse himself in his teachings led him to a single-minded, solitary life. So much so that at times other devotees were unaware that he was still alive and residing in Tiruvannamalai. His scholarship in Tamil is evident in his writings on his guru, such as Sri Ramana Darsanam and Upadesa Manjari. Let us hear how Sri Bhagavan vouchsafed him his grace.

Sadhu Natanananda describes the profound revelation given to him by Sri Bhagavan during his initial visit at Skandasramam.¹

“I was twenty years old in 1917-18 and a school-master. Being naturally of a pious disposition I used to go about from place to place frequently to have darshan of the deities installed in temples. A noble soul who saw this brought to me of his own accord the two books (in Tamil), *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam* and *Sri Vivekananda Vijayam*, and asked me to read them. As soon as I had read them I was seized with an intense longing for obtaining the vision of God and for finding the guru who would show the way to it. While I was engaged in this search, I heard about the extraordinary greatness of Bhagavan Sri Ramana through a holy person whom I happened to meet at Sriperumbudur. On May 2nd, 1918, I saw Sri Ramana for the first time at Skandasramam on Arunachala. I beseeched him fervently thus: ‘It is my great desire that I should actually experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfil my desire.’ In those days Sri Ramana was not speaking much. Still he spoke kindly as follows: ‘Is it the body in front of me which desires to obtain my grace? Or is it the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not now looking upon itself as the body and making this request? If so, let the

awareness first of all know its real nature. It will then automatically know God and my grace. The truth of this can be realised even here and now.’ Besides speaking thus, he also explained it as follows through my own experience. ‘It is not the body which desires to obtain the grace. Therefore it is clear that it is awareness which shines here as ‘you’. To you who are of the nature of awareness there is no connection with the body, the senses, the vital airs and the mind during sleep. On waking up you identify yourself with them, even without your knowledge. This is your experience. All that you have to do hereafter is to see that you do not identify yourself with them in the states of waking and dream also and to remain, yourself, as in the state of deep sleep. As you are by nature unattached, you have to convert the state of ignorant deep sleep, in which you were formless and unattached, into conscious deep sleep. It is only by doing this that you can remain established in your real nature. You should never forget that this experience will come only through long practice. This experience will make it clear that your real nature is not different from the nature of God.’

Sadhu Natanananda’s book *Sri Ramana Darsanam*

1. The Mountain Path, April, 1969

was first published in English by Sri Ramanasramam in 2002.

In the section *The Selfward Look and Words of Grace*, he notes the following:

“The supreme state, which for a long time had been imagined to belong exclusively to divine beings such as *maharshis* and the great *munis*, was bestowed with ease by Bhagavan upon all those who approached him. The mode of teaching adopted by the ancient gurus was to indicate through the ‘I am’ feeling the natural state of man. Bhagavan followed not only this method, but also the modern method by explaining the natural state to those who did not have the capacity to experience it through their subtle intuition. This, in fact, was the reason why innumerable devotees regarded him as their Sadguru.

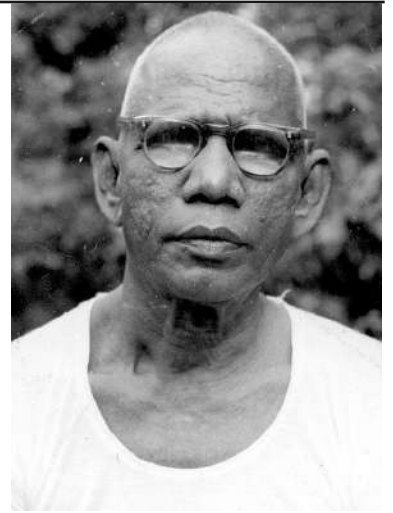
“To those devotees who complained that, despite staying in his presence a long time, they were not able to experience his grace palpably, Bhagavan had the following words of grace:

‘Bhagavan is always bestowing grace. To regard the real as the unreal and the unreal as the real is alone ignorance. You yourself are always shining naturally as ‘I’, ‘I’. Does Bhagavan exist apart from the being-consciousness? It is the attention turned towards the body that causes the distinctions between ‘you’ and ‘I’. If, through Self-attention, it [attention to the body] is itself transformed into being-consciousness, and if one realises that the reality is only one, where then is the scope for saying ‘you’ or ‘I’? Remaining still, having realised the truth as it is, is the guru’s grace.’

“After explaining the real nature of man in this way, Bhagavan would immediately demonstrate the truth of his statement by remaining still with a fixed gaze.” Bhagavan’s life showed all how a true jnani, a knower of Brahman, acts even in everyday circumstances. His kindness extended to all living beings and his natural interactions with devotees inspired them, bringing about transformations that affected all aspects of their lives. One of the traits that Bhagavan displayed and also advised his devotees to cultivate, was humility.

“Bhagavan often advised his devotees that the possession of humility is the only sign of possessing grace, adding that humility should be practiced in all

walks of life. Those who are not humble cannot be *sadhus* even if they are intellectually superior. Bhagavan showed humility in every one of his actions. Although everyone worshipped him as God himself, he was unflagging in his humility. The following incident is an example.



Sadhu Natanananda

“A *sadhu* who found fault with another member of the ashram, once lost his patience and was getting ready to indulge in violence. When Bhagavan saw this, he immediately intervened and stopped, with his gracious hands, the *sadhu* from pursuing this demonic act. He then pointed out his ignorance with kind advice.

“Sri Bhagavan concluded, saying, ‘My aim is not to interfere with your freedom. As it appeared that your act was about to exceed all limits of propriety, for the sake of protecting *sannyasa dharma*, if not for your own sake, I had to intervene, although interference is not my nature. I am not giving you any advice. As you are residing here, I am saying all this affectionately. If there is anything good in these words, accept them. Elders have said that even the words of a child should be accepted if there is merit in them.’

“In this way, Bhagavan kindly explained *sadhu dharma* through his sweet words and calmed the *sadhu*. From that day onwards, the *sadhu* was totally transformed and became lucky enough to worship Bhagavan as God himself. Even when Bhagavan was performing the unavoidable act of stopping the improper act of a *sadhu* who had taken refuge in him, the humility he demonstrated is indeed the very apogee of humility!”

Sri V. Ganesan describes an incident in the Oct. 1981 issue of *The Mountain Path*, in which Sadhu Natanananda, because of his inability to follow a philosophical discussion which was taking place in Sanskrit; and, longing for the actual experience of the

real, began to feel dejected.

“The thirty-two years of contact that Sadhu Natanananda eventually had with the Maharshi brought many interesting experiences. One of the more interesting ones was related by him in the following terms: ‘On one *Vyasapoornima* day, Ganapati Muni, Kapali Sastri, along with a group of Sanskrit scholars, were walking around the mountain, and they stopped off at the Ashram to pay their respects to the Maharshi. When they were seated in the Old Hall they started discussing philosophy in Sanskrit. I was listening to the discussion and I knew that they were discussing philosophy but I could not follow the meaning. Because of this my mind began to wander and I became quite agitated wondering when the day would dawn when I would have the experiences that they were talking about. My longing for these experiences was so intense that I lost all consciousness of the body. I was not sure how long I remained in that state, but suddenly a voice brought back my normal consciousness. All the others had left and only Bhagavan remained in the Hall. ‘Why are you dejected?’ said the voice, ‘If you were really unfit to realise the Self in this life, then you could not have come to this place at all. That power which drew you here will make you realise the Self. If not today, it is bound to fulfil its commitment. There is no reason why you should feel dejected.’ These gracious words brought me back to life, and peace entered my soul immediately.”

What a wonderful reassurance from Sri Bhagavan for us all who at some time or another have been assailed by doubt!

Sri Ganesan continues, describing his visit with Sadhu Natanananda and Natananda's uncompromising devotion to Sri Bhagavan.

“The day he understood his realisation, he went incognito. The outward symbol of his becoming Self-realized was his obscurity. He lived alone, happy to be immersed in the Self all the time. After Bhagavan's mahasamadhi in 1950 and until 1967, many did not even know if Natanananda was still alive. Though he stayed in a cottage in Tiruvannamalai, no one knew where he was. Like most of the old devotees, I too thought that he had passed away.

“I had spent seven years in the ashram when suddenly one day my friend Dorab Framji asked me, ‘Do you know Sadhu Natanananda is alive?’ I jumped with joy because I loved his book, *Spiritual Instruction*, also known as *Upadesa Manjari*. I paid him a visit. He was an austere man with nothing in his room except for a few loincloths. He blessed me and asked, ‘What are you doing? Are you practicing Self-Enquiry?’

“I replied, ‘I am not capable of doing Self-Enquiry. I only chant Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva.’ His face was red with rage. I was taken aback because this was my very first meeting with him and I was accustomed to people indulging me whenever they met me. Not Natanananda! He was a stern and serious man. He raged, ‘What a fool you are! What do you think you have come to Bhagavan for? For what function has he chosen you? It is only to make you like him! Read his *Forty Verses on Reality (Ulladu Narpadu)*, practice Self-Enquiry, be the truth. That is why you have been chosen!’

Sri Ganesan concluded: “I was stunned in disbelief.” Sadhu Natanananda's heart was ever at the feet of Sri Bhagavan. By his guru's grace, he obtained that which is alone worth attaining.

A short video of Sadhu Natanananda speaking to French devotees in 1969 is seen on [youtube](#).

6. The world is made up of the five kinds of sense perceptions and nothing else. And those perceptions are felt as objects by the five senses. Since through the senses the mind alone perceives the world, is the world other than the mind?

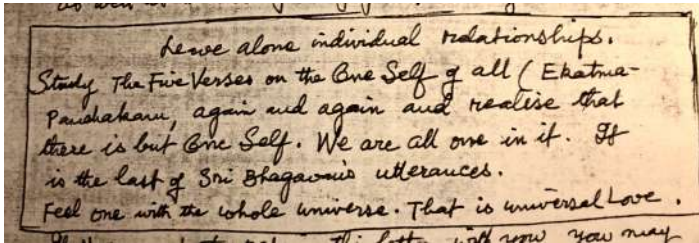
7. Although the world, which stands before us, and the mind arise and subside together, it is through the mind that the world shines forth. That which is the perfection that shines without appearing or disappearing as the place where both the world and the mind appear and disappear, is indeed the Real.

— *Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 6,7

Ekatma Panchakam

by Sri Ramana Maharshi

In 1973, devotees of Sri Arunachala Ashrama were delighted to receive a letter from Swami Viswanathan from Sri Ramanasramam, in which was written the following counsel:



Swami Viswanathan's note to devotees

“Leave alone individual relationships. Study “The Five Verses on the One Self of All” (*Ekatma Panchakam*) again and again and realize that there is but One Self. We are all one in it. It is the last of Sri Bhagavan’s utterances. Feel one with the whole universe. That is universal Love.”

The story of the genesis of *Ekatma Panchakam* (also known as *Ekanma Panchakam* in Tamil) is given by Smt. Suri Nagamma in her book *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, in letters number 95 and number 96. In fact, it was due to the gentle, repeated requests of Suri Nagamma that Bhagavan agreed to write these verses. Bhagavan was initially explaining to devotees about the *venba* meter (a metrical form common in Tamil poetry) and the difference between Tamil and Telugu meters, when she suggested that if Sri Bhagavan wrote these *venba* verses in Telugu, it would be a new treasure for the language.

Sri Bhagavan was hesitant saying, “What am I to write about? What is there to write about?” He then put forth another explanation, saying that he did not have the requisite qualifications to write in the Telugu language. “That is all very well, but am I a pandit?” he asked.

However, the requests, coming as they did from a devotee entirely surrendered to him, were at last fulfilled. He composed a total of five *venba* verses. Suri Nagamma was filled with joy! Sri Bhagavan said to her, “They make five in all. They may be called *Atma Panchakam*. But Sankara has already composed something under the same name. Let us therefore call

them *Ekatma Panchakam*.”

The Telugu verses were translated into Tamil by Sri Bhagavan and connected as one *kalivenba*, in which one word is added to the last line of each *venba* verse. (This composition is named *Ekanma Vivekam*.)

Let us now follow Swami Viswanathan’s inspired utterance and delve into this divine composition of Sri Bhagavan. The following translation is by Dr. K. Swaminathan.

Ekatma Panchakam

Five Verses on the One Self of All

1. When forgetting the Self, one thinks that the body is oneself and goes through innumerable births but in the end remembers and becomes the Self. Know this is only like waking from a dream in which one has wandered about the entire world.
2. One is always the Self. To ask oneself, ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Where am I?’ is no different from a drunken man asking, ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Where am I?’
3. The body is within the Self. Yet one imagines one is inside the inert body, like the viewer who imagines that the screen on which the picture is shown is within the picture.
4. Does a gold ornament exist apart from the gold? Can the body exist apart from the Self? The ignorant one thinks, ‘I am the body’; the enlightened one knows, ‘I am the Self’.
5. The Self alone, the sole reality, exists for ever. If, of yore, the first of teachers (Sri Dakshinamurti) revealed it through unbroken silence, who can reveal it in spoken words?

Thus Sri Bhagavan, in these five verses, destroys the idea that we are the body, says Sri Muruganar.

For devotees who would like to listen to *Ekanma Vivekam*, the *kalivenba* version of *Ekatma Panchakam*, Smt. Lavanya Hari has given a beautiful recitation [here](#).

Silence

by Suri Nagamma

Bhagavan always gave prominence to *mauna* – silence. That is why several devotees regard him as an avatar of Sri Dakshinamurti. “gurōstu maunaṁ vyākhyānaṁ śiṣyāstu cchinna saṁśayāḥ” (The guru taught through silence; the doubts of the disciples were dispelled.), so goes the saying. When highly developed devotees come to Bhagavan for guidance they get their doubts automatically cleared by merely sitting in Bhagavan’s presence.

In 1947 some devotees casually mentioned that representatives of an international radio company had come to record Bhagavan’s voice. With a smile, Bhagavan said, “Oh! Silence is my habit. Silence is uninterrupted speech. How could they record it? What IS, is silence. How can anyone record that silence?” After saying that, he resumed silence. Those who could see his radiant face at that time were really fortunate, for the lustre that radiated from his eyes was so powerful that developed souls, who had the ability to absorb it, got their ignorance annihilated.

Subsequently, someone who was sitting in the hall enquired, “Bhagavan always gives great prominence to *mauna*. Does it mean that speech has no value?”

Bhagavan: Speech is the great grandson of *mauna*. That being so, how could speech have the same value as *mauna*?

Questioner: What exactly is the meaning of saying ‘great grandson’?

Bhagavan: It is like this. Some flash of light must come out of the *antaratma* (inner self); that must assume the shape of *sankalpa* (intention, thought); and it is only after that that it could assume the shape of a word. Has not that word thus become a creature of the fourth generation – a great grandson?

Though Bhagavan gave great prominence to *mauna*, he did extend his abundant grace to ordinary people, imparting his teachings by word of mouth also. He would explain: “If one enquires who it is that hears, eats or sees things, one inevitably gets the reply ‘I’, ‘I’. If one turns one’s mind inward, searches and tries to find out who that ‘I’ is, one realizes that it is one’s own self; the self is omnipresent and omnipotent. This enquiry is very easy.” This teaching used to

please and satisfy all people alike – the theists and the atheists, the religious bigots and the ordinary men.

Once, an atheist came to Bhagavan and said, “Swami, where is He who is called God? So far as I am concerned, He is non-existent.” Bhagavan looked at him with sympathy and said, “All right. Let us suppose there is no God whatsoever. You are in existence, aren’t you?”

Questioner: Yes, I am in existence. How could it be otherwise? Yes, I am.

Bhagavan: Yes, that is enough. You have said that ‘you’ do exist. Who exactly is that ‘you’? Where are ‘you’? Where do ‘you’ end up ultimately? First enquire about that.

Questioner: What about God then?

Bhagavan: Why do you worry about God? Whether He is existent or non-existent, you are sure that “you” are existent. Find out the origin of your self. If you seek and find your self, we will see if the question about God arises thereafter.

The questioner had nothing more to say. At times, when people of different religions came and praised their own religious heads, Bhagavan used to tell them: “That which Is, is only one. Some call it Shakti, some Shiva, some Vishnu, some Jesus and some Allah. People give it whatever names they like. What does it matter if the names they give are different? That which Is, is only One.”

– Ramana Jyoti Souvenir, 1969



Suri Nagamma

My *Darshan* of Bhagavan

by Bart Walton

In his new book American Pilgrim: An Ancient Quest in Modern Times, author Bart Walton describes his first visit to Ramanasramam, where he experienced Bhagavan's ever-present grace.

The Sanskrit word *darshan* literally means a glimpse or sighting and refers to an auspicious meeting with a deity or enlightened sage. The term also suggests a blessing or spiritual energy that is transmitted during such an encounter.

My *darshan* of Ramana occurred in 1994, during my third trip to India. How strange it must sound to hear me tell about having *darshan* of a saint who died before I was born. And yet, for anyone who has spent time at Ramanashram in S. India, such a statement is perfectly understandable.

Having previously visited the northern and western states of India, my wife and I decided to head south to explore Tamil Nadu. Several friends urged us to visit Ramanashram. At that time, I knew very little about Ramana Maharshi and I didn't really believe all the stories about the spiritual power of Arunachala hill. Nor did I see much value in visiting the ashram of a saint who had died some 40 years earlier. But my friends were insistent, so we decided to include Ramanashram on our itinerary.

On the way to the ashram, I became seriously ill and by the time we arrived, I was weak and had a painful cough. As soon as we got to our room, I just wanted to lie down. But for some reason, I decided to go with my wife to the Samadhi shrine and meditation hall.

When we sat down in the meditation hall, I leaned up against the wall and closed my eyes, hoping to get some rest. After a few minutes, I became aware of a light in my face. I opened my eyes but the room was only dimly lit. Again, I closed my eyes and the sensation reappeared. After this continued several times, I left my eyes slightly open, hoping to catch a glimpse of what was going on. This time, I saw a brightness in my peripheral vision, as if the light were behind me. I looked overhead and out the window behind me, trying to figure out what was going on. This went on for about 10 minutes... playing cat and mouse with a strange light that crept over me

whenever I relaxed my attention. And apparently, no one else was aware of it.

I thought to myself, "You've got a fever, you're hallucinating." So, I walked back to my room and collapsed on the cot. I lay there facing a large photograph of Ramana on the wall. He was looking down at me with his head tilted slightly and a beatific smile on his face. Soon the sensation of brightness came over me again. By now I was too exhausted to figure it out, so I just accepted it and let go. Then suddenly I realized that the light was coming from inside of me. I was flooded with peace and the strong sense of receiving Ramana's *darshan*.

When I opened my eyes again, there was Ramana looking down at me from the picture. Unexpectedly, the question arose, "When I die, how will I find you?" I realized what an odd question this was, one that had never occurred to me before. Yet for some reason, it arose with great urgency, as if it were the only question in life. Then I heard a voice ask in return, "How did you find me now?" In that moment, the significance of this exchange appeared in my mind as a clear insight. I could see that love is like a beam of light that connects us all to the spiritual higher dimensions. And this connection is always available, beyond the apparent cycles of life and death.

During the following days, I had nagging doubts about this experience, thinking perhaps it was just a delusion triggered by the fever. But during my stay at the ashram I heard several people relay similar accounts, some even more dramatic than my own. Since then, I've read stories about Ramana appearing in peoples' dreams, even before they knew who he was. Only sometime later they would see Ramana's picture and realize that it was he who had appeared in their dream.

It's a common lament among spiritual seekers that, "I was born too late. All the great masters have come and gone. If only I'd been able to have *darshan* of Ramana Maharshi." How often I've whined to myself like this. But after having this experience at Ramanashram, I now see the mistake in this way of thinking. As fantastic as it sounds, I believe it's never too late to have Bhagavan's *darshan*. He is still very much alive and active on the inner planes.

Tiruvāṣaḡam
*translated by Hari Moorthy**

Tiruvāṣaḡam (Sacred Utterances) is a collection of 51 hymns sung by the ninth-century Shaivite poet-saint Manikkavasagar, expressing his love and longing for Lord Shiva as the Ultimate Reality. These hymns are so touching that it has been said that “He whose heart is not melted by Tiruvāṣaḡam cannot be melted by any vasaḡam (saying).” In the following translation, the author reveals the beauty of Manikkavasagar’s divine poetry.

Sri Bhagavan had great reverence for this work and referred to it often. When reciting from Tiruvāṣaḡam, he was at times overwhelmed with emotion and his face radiated a divine brilliance. The verse begins with the question, “Who Am I?”

நானார் ஂனுள்ளமார் ஞானங்களார் ஂன்னை
யாரறிவார்
வானோர் பிரானென்னை ஆண்டிலனேல்
மதியயங்கி
ஂனா ருடைதலையில் உண்பலிதேர் அம்பலவன்
தேனார் கமலமே சென்றுதாய் கோத்தும்பீ
– திருவாசகம், திருகோத்தும்பி, v.2

nāṇār eṇuḷḷamār ṇāṇaṅkaḷār eṇṇai yāraṇivār
vāṇōr pirāṇeṇṇai āṇṭilaṇēl matimayaṅki

ūṇā ruṭaitalaiyil uṇpalitēr ampalavaṇ
tēṇār kamalamē ceṇṇūtāy kōttumpī

– Tiruvāṣaḡam, Tirukottumbi, v.2

Meaning:

Who am I? Who exists inside me? Who gets wisdom? Who knows me? The Lord of Heavens has made me His own. If He had not ruled me with His presence, my ego would have risen up. I would be begging with a bowl made of skull, hungry for material things. Hold His feet which are like honey and nectar. O Bee, won’t you sing His praises?

Explanation:

The verse starts with a series of existential self-directed questions. Each question puts the focus entirely on the doer or Self, chief among them is, “Who am I?”

The verse continues to describe the godly state experienced by Manikkavasagar, which is the direct experience of bliss otherwise called *turiya* or *samadhi*. This is only when the mind subsides. When the mind is active, it comes out of such a godly state and engages in the pursuit of material things. Such pursuits result in lowering one’s own state. By holding His feet, He continues to guide the individual to be one with Him.

*A link to Hari Moorthy’s inspired presentation on the Tamil works of Sri Bhagavan can be found [here](#).

Updates

Due to continuing health restrictions, Arunachala Ashrama, New York remains closed to visitors until further notice. Please visit our [web page](#) for the latest information. The Ashrama has been having regular satsangs online which can be found on our [upcoming virtual events](#) page. Devotees’ digital offerings are shared on the Ashrama’s [Peace Portal](#).

The Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama will remain open to daytime visitors but will not have any overnight guests for the remainder of the year. We all wish to help keep everyone safe in this time of COVID.

For a listing of other centers that are offering virtual satsangs at this time, please see our [online satsangs](#) .

For Ramana Satsang locations in the USA and Canada, please see [this listing](#).

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