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Sri Kunju Swami's Recollections - Part 3

Sri Bhagavan's Frugality and Glance of Grace

Sri Kunju Swami here concludes his inspiring interview by describing the circumstances under which Sri Bhagavan, after his mother's samadhi, came to stay permanently at the foot of the Hill. He shares several instances that highlight Sri Bhagavan's well-known frugal habits. The grandeur of Sri Ramana's glance of grace, which Sri Kunju Swami experienced directly, stilled the minds of his devotees, human and animal alike. This entire interview in Tamil, conducted in 1989, is available on Arunachala Ashrama's YouTube channel.

Sadaiappa Chettiyar, the trustee of the Draupadi temple and younger brother of the lady who had built the thatched shed over Mother's shrine, came to know that Bhagavan had come down from the hill. His sister was an old lady and could not climb up to Skandasramam to visit Bhagavan. Sadaiappa Chettiyar wanted to bring his sister here for Bhagavan's darshan. He went to town to get her. She came with a cartload of provisions, and pleaded with Bhagavan to stay and accept her *bhiksha* (offering). Ganapati Muni, who was at Skandasramam, heard about this and came down after lunch. Whenever he came, he would have at least an hour's discussion with Bhagavan on various subjects. Upon hearing that Nayana had come, others also came and seated themselves in front of Bhagavan and Nayana.

It soon became dark. As there were no torch lights and as Bhagavan did not go up the Hill through the town, it was decided he would spend the night near the shrine and go up the next morning. In the morning when we were ready to go, Bhagavan's sister, Alameluamma, and her husband, Pitchu Iyer, arrived with provisions and wanted to offer *bhiksha*

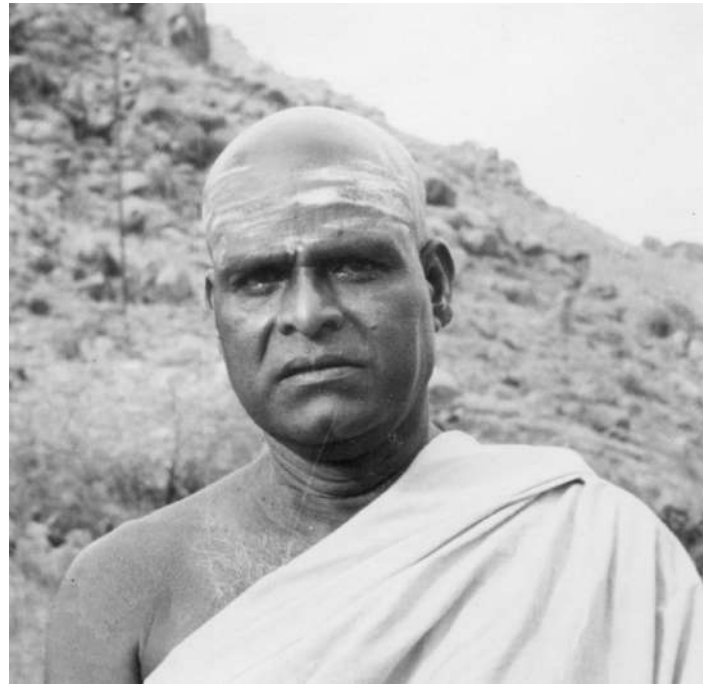
to Bhagavan. So he stayed on. Ramakrishnaswami, realizing that Bhagavan must not be returning, brought Bhagavan's kaupina and other things down from Skandasramam. Bhagavan took a bath in the stream. He used to bathe in cold water in those days. For the next six to ten days, someone or the other was offering *bhiksha*, so Bhagavan stayed on at the foot of the hill. Chinnaaswami wanted Gopala Rao and me to stay at Skandasramam to guard the property saying he would send us food. We stayed up there for eight to ten days. Then it occurred to me that I had come here to be near Bhagavan and not to guard some property. I came down that very evening. Chinnaaswami wanted to know why we had come away. I told him how I felt, but also agreed to go back the next morning. The following day, before I could go up, someone came down and said that all the things at Skandasramam had been stolen. Bhagavan said, "Now there is no more need for anyone to go and protect the place." This remark told us that Bhagavan approved of staying on at the foot of the Hill. Thus, there was no question of Bhagavan's being invited to stay on. It all happened in the most natural way.

Bhagavan's Frugality

Yes, Bhagavan's frugality must be mentioned. He was very particular that we should not ask anyone for anything. When we were at Skandasramam, kerosene oil used to cost only one anna. Even then, Bhagavan would insist that we all eat at 5 p.m. so that there would be no need to use the kerosene lamp. Even the spinach that we used would be cut in three parts by Bhagavan. The leaves would be used as curry or vegetable, the stems would be put in sambar and the roots ground, extracting the juice for rasam. Nothing should be wasted. This was Bhagavan's principle. He used to explain to us that it is the root of the spinach that contains the essence and gives strength. When using eggplant, he never discarded the top, which was thrown away by others. Instead, he would make use of them and show us how we should be frugal and also show us how it would be good for our health.

I'll tell you one incident. It is very difficult to grind the roots of spinach. So one day, we took the roots and buried them near the *goshala* (cow shed). Bhagavan had gone that way, and on his way back, he noticed something sticking out of the ground. He dug it up with his stick, picked up all the roots that we had discarded, washed them clean and then started grinding them himself. When Bhagavan started grinding those roots, I volunteered that I had buried the roots since we felt that grinding them was too much work. He smilingly mocked my cleverness. We never did anything like that again. Bhagavan would never ask somebody why he had done something. He would never reprimand anyone. He taught us a more powerful lesson through his actions.

Bhagavan used to come into the kitchen through the storeroom. If there was even a grain of rice or dal on the floor, he would bend down, pick it up and put it back in its container. By demonstration he taught us the importance of frugality. This was an everyday occurrence and it was practical teaching for us about the importance of perfection and frugality. In those days, tooth powder used to be made in the Ashramam, and even in that he taught us a lesson. If we gave him too much tooth powder, he would make use of a little and give the rest back in a packet with the instruction that it should be given to him the next day.



Sri Kunju Swami

It was a sight to watch Bhagavan apply *vibhuti* (sacred ash) to his forehead without spilling anything on the ground. He would tilt his forehead back and then apply the *vibhuti* so that even if some *vibhuti* fell, it would fall upon his shoulders, and he could then reapply it. It was very illuminating to see Bhagavan teaching us in this practical way.

While writing with a pen or pencil, Bhagavan would not use a pad or a notebook on which to rest the paper, but use his own thigh instead. It was a glorious sight to see Bhagavan write, using his thigh as a table. He had a small pencil. Even if we kept it away, he would ask for it specifically and not allow us to throw it away. If he were offered a new one, he would not accept it. Such was his attitude, not only with the pencil, but also with ink-filled pens which would last a long time with Bhagavan. He would use the flashlight only when absolutely essential. If we put the beam far ahead of us, he would say, "Why do you waste the flash, we need only two or three feet of light." He used the flashlight sparingly, so that batteries lasted him 8 or 9 months.

Bhagavan's Glance of Grace

Everyone knows that Bhagavan would bless his devotees through his glance of grace. He himself has written that the guru's grace flows through three channels – look, thought and touch. Initiation by look, thought and touch has been described in all

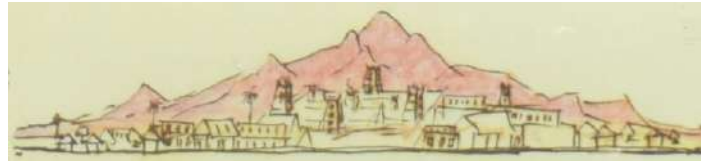
our scriptures. In *Kaivalya Navaneeta*, this is described with the analogy of a tortoise, hen and fish. The tortoise, after laying eggs on the shore, returns to the water and, standing on its head, thinks continuously and relentlessly about the eggs on the shore and hatches them. This is how the thinking process works. The hen, after laying the eggs, sits on them and by touch hatches them. The fish lays the eggs and then just looks at them and hatches them. The baby fish then swim towards the mother fish. These are the three types of initiation. As Bhagavan never touched or thought about anyone, He conveyed his powerful instructions only through his glance of grace. This is the glory of his *divya drishti* (divine look).

Those who moved with Bhagavan know the power of this look. Even animals became peaceful when they came near him. Bhagavan's grace flowed through his eyes and those who received it were very fortunate. Muruganar has sung it in a verse, which is literally true.

There are a number of photographs of Bhagavan. Have you seen even one with closed eyes? He was

pouring his grace through his eyes. There would be a number of people sitting in the hall and each one felt that Bhagavan was looking only at him or her. Bhagavan's *drishti* concentrated only on space. His *drishti* was turned inwards, so that everyone felt in their heart that he was pouring his grace upon them. Since Bhagavan was not looking at any particular person, everyone felt that he was looking directly at them. Bhagavan cared about everyone, and his look pierced each one's heart, dispelling darkness, giving peace, and for some even liberation.

Sri Kunju Swami concluded the interview by singing verse seven from *Sri Arunachala Navamamalai*: "Annamalai! As soon as Thou didst claim me, my body and soul were Thine. Can I then lack anything? I can think only of Thee (hereafter), not of merit and demerit, O my Life. Do as Thou wilt with me, then, my Beloved, but grant me only ever-increasing love for Thy dear Feet!"



Surrender

God will bear whatever burdens we put on Him. All things are being carried on by the omnipotent power of a supreme God. Instead of submitting ourselves to It, why should we always be planning, 'We should do this or that.' Knowing that the train carries all the load, why should we, traveling therein, suffer by carrying our small bundle on our heads instead of leaving it on the train and being happy? The story of Ashtavakra teaches that in order to experience Brahma Jnana all that is necessary is to surrender yourself completely to the guru, to give up your notion of 'I' and 'mine'. If these are surrendered, what remains is the Reality.

There are two ways of achieving surrender. One is looking into the source of the 'I' and merging into that source. The other is feeling, 'I am helpless myself, God alone is all powerful, and except by throwing myself completely on Him, there is no other means of safety for me,' and thus gradually developing the conviction that God alone exists and the ego does not count. Both methods lead to the

same goal. Complete surrender is another name for jnana or liberation.

Bhakti is not different from mukti. Bhakti is being as the Self. One is always That. He realizes It by the means he adopts. What is bhakti? To think of God. That means only one thought prevails to the exclusion of all other thoughts. That thought is of God, which is the Self, or it is the self surrendered unto God. When He has taken you up, nothing else will assail you. The absence of thought is bhakti. It is also mukti. Bhakti is Jnana Mata, i.e., the mother of jnana.

To a devotee who was praying that she should have more frequent visions of Siva, Bhagavan said, "Surrender to Him and abide by His Will, whether He appears or disappears, await His pleasure. If you ask Him to do as you like it is not surrender but command to God. You cannot have Him obey you and yet think you have surrendered. He knows what is best and when and how to do it. His is the burden; you no longer have any cares. All your cares are His. Such is surrender – that is bhakti. – *Gems From Bhagavan*

“What a Beautiful Place!”

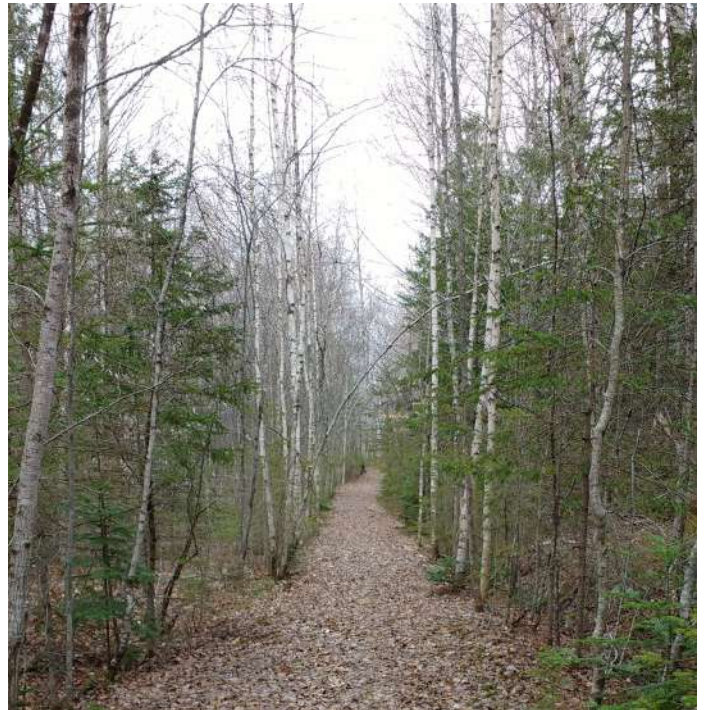
“What a beautiful place!” This is a thought that comes to mind when we find ourselves in locations that seemingly fill us with a sense of profound peace and joy. This experience is common to anyone who has, for example, wandered through the forest and admired the wildlife, the bird songs filling the air and the sound of a running brook with water cascading over the rocks as the sunlight filters through the foliage. Sri Bhagavan agrees that there is happiness when we are in such situations. But what is the source of this happiness? Is this happiness something apart from us?

“M.: Again, there is happiness at agreeable sights, etc. It is the happiness inherent in the Self. That happiness is not alien to us. One is diving into the Pure Self on occasions considered pleasurable. That diving reveals the Self-existent bliss. But the association of ideas is responsible for foisting this bliss on to other things or happenings. In fact, it is within. On these occasions you are plunging into the Self, though unconsciously. If you do so consciously it is Realisation. I want you to dive consciously into the Self, i.e., into the Heart.” (Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 254)

This experience of happiness is similar to the experience that many have when visiting a place of pilgrimage, or the ashrama of a great saint, where every particle is charged with the divine presence of the master and our mind naturally stills, suffusing our being with peace.

Oh, how wonderful it is to be in such places. And, “How wonderful it would be to reside permanently in that place which is surcharged with such vibrations!” is a thought that arises in many of us. The peace that we experience in such places is a world away from our usual environment and from the concerns that burden the mind during our regular waking hours; concerns of work, relationships, finances, bodily health, etc.

It is of course no wonder that when we set foot in places like these, we feel so drawn to the holy atmosphere that it is difficult to pull ourselves away. We compare our workaday life to what we experience in these new environs and we attribute the peace that we feel there to our change in surroundings. We can imagine then how devotees felt when they entered the



The forest path at Arunachala Ashrama, Nova Scotia

Old Hall at Ramanasramam and sat in front of Sri Bhagavan. In fact, we don’t have to imagine it, because even now when we enter the Old Hall, the same presence of the guru is experienced. That divine grace of the guru pushes us inwards and enables us to bask in that still, silent state. How fortunate are those who have had the opportunity to sit in the divine presence of Sri Bhagavan! Their words ring forth like a clarion call, inviting us to share that divine bliss which is no less than our own real nature.

Many devotees here in the West have expressed their wish to visit Ramanasramam, and those who have been able to do so describe the profound effect that it has had upon them and the deep, abiding peace that they experienced during their stay there. That is but natural. Due to various circumstances such as barriers to travel during the pandemic, other devotees have expressed their regret in being unable to visit there at this time. However, Sri Bhagavan consoles us by explaining that our inability to travel there in no way diminishes the power of the grace of the Self, which is always and everywhere present. When a devotee asked why he felt unhappy in his native place, and felt happy in Sri Bhagavan’s presence, he replied, “*Can this feeling in this place be bliss? When you leave the place you say you are unhappy. Therefore this peace is not permanent; nay, it is mixed with the unhappiness felt in another place. Therefore you*

cannot find bliss in places and in periods of time. It must be permanent in order that it may be useful. Such permanent being is yourself. Be the Self and that is bliss. You are always That.” (Talk 653)

When devotees spoke of the joy of arriving in India and visiting the Ashram, or perhaps compared and contrasted the situation in India where they felt a sense of peace to Europe or other parts of the world, Bhagavan stated:

“Are you in India now? Or is India in you? Even now this notion that you are in India must go. India is in you. In order to verify it, look to your sleep. Did you feel that you were in Europe or in India while asleep? You were nevertheless existing then the same as now. Space is in you. The physical body is in space, but not you. (Talk 304)

Not only is space in us, time is in us also! Because without us, there is no time or space, as he states in *Ulladu Narpadu*, verse 16:

Without us there is neither time nor space. If we are only bodies, we are caught up in time and space. But are we bodies? Now, then and always, – here, now and everywhere – we are the same. We exist, timeless and beyond space.

Bhagavan clearly reassures us that *we are not in the place but the place is in us*. The place is within us, as is the peace that we experience there! In response to a request of a devotee to leave his place and the accompanying responsibilities therein in order to obtain this peace, Sri Bhagavan gave the following response:

“You should stay just where you are now. But where are you now? Are you in the house, or is the house in you? Is there any house apart from you? If you get fixed in your own place, you will see all things have merged into you, and there will be no cause for such questions as these.” (Talk 634)

To another young devotee who was looking for a job

but did not want to leave the Hall due to the peace he found there, Bhagavan replied resoundingly that this peace found in the Hall is not actually in the Hall, but is to be found only in the stillness of the Self, which is all-pervasive.

“He says he finds peace in the Hall and he also wants a job. Evidently the job must be found in the Hall itself so that his peace may not be disturbed. Peace is not in the Hall. It is in the repose of the Self. It can be gained anywhere.” (Talk 300)

Bhagavan clearly demonstrates that the real peace we are striving for lies not in the place, location or circumstances, but lies within our Self as our own true nature. When we experience that profound stillness, we are diving into the bliss of our very Self, the atman. Through *atma-vichara*, (Self-enquiry) and firmly abiding as our Self, free from the limitations of body, mind, time and space, we can experience that peace no matter where we may be.

As he states in *Who Am I?*: *If only the mind is kept under control, what matters it where one may happen to be?*

This is the great consolation Sri Bhagavan has given to his devotees who may be, for whatever reason, unable to visit his abode directly. It does not matter where we may be, at all times and places we can experience his grace, which is ever-flowing and ever-accessible. – *Editor*



25. Holding a form, it arises; holding a form, it stays; holding and feeding on a form, it thrives. Leaving one form, it takes hold of another. When sought, it takes to flight. Such is the ego ghost with no form of its own.

26. When the ego arises, all things arise with it. When the ego is not, there is nothing else. Since the ego thus is everything, to question ‘What is this thing?’ is the extinction of all things.

- *Ulladu Narpadu, Forty Verses on Reality*

What Do I Need? (Enna Vēṇḍum?)

by Sri Sadhu Om

Recitation by Ranjani Ramanan

On July 6th, 1946 in the company of Sri Janaki Mata of Tanjavore, Sadhu Om had his first darshan of Sri Bhagavan. He describes it thus:

“When I entered the hall I wanted to see Bhagavan (Ramana) but I only saw a sofa and no one sitting on it. I was surprised to see, however, that everyone else was doing namaskarams towards that sofa. When I was hesitating whether to do namaskarams, I began to notice the vague outline of a human figure sitting on the sofa. At once I prostrated. When I got up, I saw that vague figure slowly solidifying and becoming clear. Then only was I able to recognise it as Sri Bhagavan.” (From an interview in *Arunachala Ramana* magazine)

During his second visit to Sri Ramana about two weeks later, while sitting across from him in the dining hall, Sri Bhagavan repeated the phrase “Vanda veleye paar.” (Attend to the work for which you have come.) a total of 3 times to Sadhu Om. He took this as Sri Bhagavan's upadesa.

Being gifted in poetry, Sadhu Om worked in close collaboration with Sri Muruganar, Sri Bhagavan's great poet-devotee. His knowledge, devotion and unfailing assistance endeared him to Sri Muruganar, so much so that he felt that Sadhu Om was the only one to whom he was able to entrust the work of editing and compiling his divine outpourings to Sri Bhagavan. In addition, Sadhu Om wrote many compositions in praise of Sri Bhagavan that have been published in a collection entitled *Sri Ramana Gitam*, as well as commentaries on Sri Bhagavan's works and explanations of his upadesa, in books such as *The Path of Sri Ramana*.

Sri Bhagavan's devotees are indeed indebted to Sri Sadhu Om, who was absorbed at his holy feet on March 17th, 1985.

The following is a composition of Sri Sadhu Om entitled “What Do I Need?” in which his total surrender to Sri Bhagavan is clearly evident.

The translation is by Sri M.V. Ramanachalam.

We are pleased that Smt. Ranjani Ramanan has shared her beautiful rendition of this song in the original Tamil (*Enna Vēṇḍum?*), which can be listened to by following this video [link](#). Also included in the video are the Tamil text and transliteration.



Sri Sadhu Om

1. What do I need, what do I not need – my Lord is the one who knows better than I! As he is both Father and Mother to those votaries who need him, after whom else need I, his son, run?

Refrain: What do I need, what do I not need – my Lord is the one who knows better than I!

2. If he were to give me whatever I want, would it be proper?! Can there be anything better than what Sri Ramana wants? He will give whatever he wishes! Can one who asks be his slave? Can the deed of him who is all-knowing be wrong? (Refrain)

3. The happiness of a desireless life – that alone is happiness! The consciousness free of thought – that is the greatest happiness! I proclaim that he who gives me the fearless life is my Father alone! On the other hand, whatever is given by others is misery! (Refrain)

4. He makes me see whatever is good for me to see! My ears, nose, skin and tongue he likewise ties! He is ever protecting me lest the ego rise! According to the occasion, he makes me act! (Refrain)

5. Where and when and what I need do, there and then and in that way he makes me act – need I ask (what I should do)? Nothing wrong but only good can touch me, can it not? What is there for me to gain except Sri Ramana?

Refrain: What do I need, what do I not need – my Lord is the one who knows better than I!

Vasiṣṭha's Yoga

Translated by Swami Venkatesananda

The sage Vasiṣṭha describes to Sri Rāma the four gate-keepers to Self-knowledge that are the means for crossing over the ocean of samsāra.

VASIṢṬHA continued:

In order to cross this formidable ocean of samsāra (repetitive history) one should resort to that which is eternal and unchanging. He alone is the best among men, O Rāma, whose mind rests in the eternal and is therefore fully self-controlled and at peace. He sees that pleasure and pain follow and cancel each other, and in that wisdom there is self-control and peace. He who does not see this sleeps in a burning house. He who gains the wisdom of the eternal here is freed from samsāra and he is not born again in ignorance. One may doubt whether such unchanging truth exists! If it does not, one comes to no harm by enquiring into the nature of life; seeking the eternal will soften the pain caused by the changes in life. But, if it exists, then by knowing it one is freed.

The eternal is not attained by rites and rituals, nor by pilgrimages or wealth; it is to be attained only by the conquest of one's mind, by the cultivation of wisdom. Hence everyone – gods, demons, demigods or men – should constantly seek (whether one is walking, falling or sitting) self-control and the conquest of the mind, which are the fruits of wisdom. When the mind is at peace, pure, tranquil, free from delusion or hallucination, untangled and free from cravings, it does not long for anything nor does it reject anything. This is self-control or conquest of mind – one of the four gate-keepers to liberation that I mentioned earlier.

All that is good and auspicious flows from self-control. All evil is dispelled by self-control. No gain, no pleasure in this world or in heaven is comparable to the delight of self-control. The delight one experiences in the presence of the self-controlled is incomparable. Everyone spontaneously trusts him. None (not even demons and goblins) hates him. Self-control, O Rāma, is the best remedy for all physical and mental ills. When there is self-control, even the

food you eat tastes better, else it tastes bitter. He who wears the armour of self-control is not harmed by sorrow.

He who even while hearing, touching, seeing, smelling and tasting what is regarded as pleasant and unpleasant, is neither elated nor depressed – he is self-controlled. He who looks upon all beings with equal vision, having brought under control the sensations of pleasure and pain, is self-controlled. He who, though living amongst all is unaffected by them, neither feels elated nor hates, even as one is during sleep – he is self-controlled.

VASIṢṬHA continued:

Enquiry (the second gate-keeper to liberation) should be undertaken by an intelligence that has been purified by a close study of the scripture, and this enquiry should be unbroken. By such enquiry the intelligence becomes keen and is able to realise the supreme; hence enquiry alone is the best remedy for the long-lasting illness known as samsāra.

The wise man regards strength, intellect, efficiency and timely action as the fruits of enquiry. Indeed, kingdom, prosperity, enjoyment, as well as final liberation are all the fruits of enquiry. The spirit of enquiry protects one from the calamities that befall the unthinking fool. When the mind has been rendered dull by the absence of enquiry, even the cool rays of the moon turn into dreaded weapons and the childish imagination throws up a goblin in every dark spot. Hence, the non-enquiring fool is really a storehouse of sorrow. It is the absence of enquiry that gives rise to actions that are harmful to oneself and to others, as well as to numerous psychosomatic illnesses. Therefore, one should avoid the company of such unthinking people.

They in whom the spirit of enquiry is ever awake illumine the world, enlighten all who come into contact with them, dispel the ghosts created by an ignorant mind, and realise the falsity of sense pleasures and their objects. O Rāma, in the light of enquiry there is realisation of the eternal and unchanging reality; this is the supreme. With it one does not long for any other gain nor does one spurn anything. He is free from delusion and attachment; he is not inactive nor does he get drowned in action; he lives and functions in this world and at the end of a

natural life-span he reaches the blissful state of total freedom. The eye of spiritual enquiry does not lose its sight even in the midst of all activities; he who does not have this eye is indeed to be pitied. It is better to be born as a frog in the mud, a worm in dung, a snake in a hole, than to be without this eye. What is enquiry? To enquire “Who am I? How has this evil of samsāra come into being?” is true enquiry. Knowledge of truth arises from such enquiry; from such knowledge there follows tranquility in oneself; and then there arises the supreme peace that surpasses understanding and the end of all sorrow.

VASIṢṬHA continued:

Contentment is another gate-keeper to liberation. He who has quaffed the nectar of contentment does not relish craving for sense-pleasures; no delight in this world is as sweet as the contentment that destroys all sins. What is contentment? To renounce all craving for what is not obtained unsought and to be satisfied with what comes unsought without being elated or depressed – this is contentment. As long as one is not satisfied in the Self, he will be subject to sorrow. With the rise of contentment the purity of one's heart blooms. The contented man who possesses nothing owns the world.

Satsaṅga (company of the wise, holy and enlightened persons) is yet another gate-keeper to liberation. Satsaṅga enlarges one's intelligence, destroys one's

ignorance and psychological distress. Whatever be the cost, however difficult it may be, whatever obstacle may stand in its way, satsaṅga should never be neglected. For, satsaṅga alone is one's light on the path of life. Satsaṅga is indeed superior to all other forms of religious practice, like charity, austerity, pilgrimage and the performance of religious rites. One should by every means in one's power adore and serve the holy men who have realised the truth and in whose heart the darkness of ignorance has been dispelled. They who, on the other hand, treat such holy men disrespectfully, surely invite great suffering.

These four – contentment, satsaṅga (company of the wise), the spirit of enquiry, and self-control are the four surest means by which they who are drowning in this ocean of samsāra can be saved. Contentment is the supreme gain. Satsaṅga is the best companion to the destination. The spirit of enquiry itself is the greatest wisdom. And, self-control is supreme happiness. If you are unable to resort to all these four, then practise one: by the diligent practice of one of these, the others will also be found in you. The highest wisdom will seek you of its own accord. Until you tame the wild elephant of your mind with the help of these noble qualities, you cannot have progress towards the supreme, even if you become a god, demi-god or a tree. Therefore, O Rāma, strive by all means to cultivate these noble qualities.

Updates

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

The Nova Scotia Ashrama (see our [home page](#)) will be open to those living in Canada only, beginning July 10, 2021. Our overnight guests will need to show proof of full COVID-19 vaccination completed a minimum of 2 weeks prior to their date of visit at the Ashrama. Kindly request accommodations at nova-scotia@ashrama.org Please allocate two hours on the last day of your stay for cleaning your accommodations prior to departure.

As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. We ask that groups call ahead of time to avoid exceeding our limit based on NS COVID-19 restrictions. Tel: 902-824-2297

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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