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Sri Kunju Swami's Recollections - Part 2

Advice Regarding Sastra Learning and Mother's Samadhi

Sri Kunju Swami next describes the advice that he received from Sri Bhagavan after having proposed a stay in Kovilur Math to study the sastras, in order to suitably reply to philosophical questions posed by scholars. He, of course, took Sri Bhagavan's advice in this matter to heart. The events surrounding Mother Azhagammal's samadhi, with Sri Bhagavan granting mukti to his mother, are also brought to life in this eyewitness account. This entire interview in Tamil, conducted in 1989, is available on Arunachala Ashrama's [YouTube channel](#).

Once I went to a math where there was a congregation, and they wanted to put some questions to me since I was coming from Ramanasramam. That was a very learned and scholarly audience, and I doubted my ability to answer questions to their satisfaction.

One of the questions put to me was, "What is *akhandakaravritti*?" This one word actually has three distinct words in it, *akhand*, *akara* and *vritti* and they all actually mean the same thing, i.e. externalization. I remembered Bhagavan telling me and also my reading about it somewhere, that the three words mean the same thing, much like *samudra akara nadi*. *Samudra* or ocean, *akara* or expanse, and *nadi* or river, that is, when the river merges in the ocean. Similarly, *akhandakaravritti* is an experience and not an expression in words.

The audience and the pandits were very happy, because the scholarly interpretation of this term is very different; I had explained it as the pure experience of *akhand* – expansive experience. This satisfied them so much that they started treating me differently. They said that I had clearly shown the difference between experience and mere theoretical

learning and that, staying at Bhagavan's feet, I had experiential knowledge of the term.

Another doubt raised here was about the teachings received in the presence of a guru. I explained to them that there are three types of benefit that an aspirant receives in the presence of a guru: *viveka gati*, *virakta gati* and *daiva gati*. I further elucidated that *viveka gati* was when the guru resolves the doubts that arise in the mind of a disciple when he reads a text or a scripture. *Virakta gati* is like Buddha's life when a strong experience causes one, by the guru's grace, to abandon worldly life in search of the truth. In *daiva gati*, one comes upon a mahatma by accident, even while not consciously searching for him. The disciple then gets the understanding and the experience simply while listening to the mahatma expound scriptural texts to another person, or even by merely hearing it.

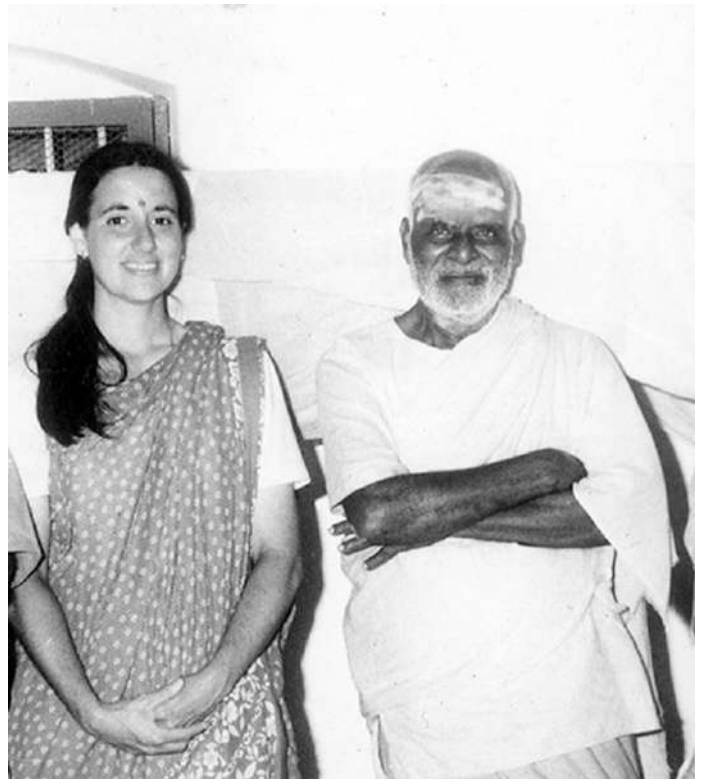
This explanation of mine impressed the audience very much. Seeing this reaction of the audience, I felt I should read more of the Vedantic texts, so that I could give scholarly replies wherever I went, thus bringing fame and praise to my guru, Sri Bhagavan. A person at that math told me that if one mastered

all the sixteen sastras, one would become an encyclopedia of Vedanta. He also offered to teach me all sixteen sastras if I stayed in their math. I told him that I could spare only one month, and that in just 1 month, it would not be possible to master all sixteen. I came back to Ramanasramam to seek Bhagavan's permission to go and live at Kovilur Math and study the sixteen sastras. Bhagavan gave a searching look and said, "Now you are going to read Vedanta. How about Siddhanta? Again you would have read all of them in Tamil, but how about in Sanskrit?" Bhagavan kept adding to the list of things I could learn. I couldn't understand Bhagavan's questions, so I stood there silently. He then said, "What is the use of gaining all this knowledge? If you come to know one thing that will be alright." As I stood motionless, he added, "If you learn to stay fixed in the heart, everything is known." I could not understand even this. Then Bhagavan said, "If you stay in your heart and someone asks you a question, an answer will come to you like an echo from the heart, and that will be the right answer." Since this conversation, whenever Bhagavan saw me in the Hall reading some scriptural text, he would come up to me, and say mockingly, "Are you reading for yourself, or for helping others?" I used to feel ashamed. Also, being a sadhu, I used to wear vibhuti on my forehead, and Bhagavan would say, "Are you wearing all this to impress others?" This had a profound impact on me, and changed many of my assumed attitudes in life.

This was great *upadesa* for me, that whatever I did, or studied, it was to improve my life, and not for attracting others by my *vesha* (dress) and outer attitudes. This has moulded my entire life. What Bhagavan told me is a blessing. Even today, when someone raises a question, I do not intellectually ponder over it, but give the answer that comes straight from the heart. Bhagavan's words, when listened to and adhered to, act very powerfully.

Mother's Samadhi

I will begin with the samadhi day. On that day, from about 5 o'clock, there was a premonition that this would be the Mother's last day. Bhagavan sat by her side, with one hand on her chest and the other on her forehead. Bhagavan advised everybody to go



*Sri Kunju Swami with our Srimati Evelyn Saphier of
Arunachala Ashrama*

and eat as it is considered unclean to eat in the house where a death has occurred. Upon hearing Bhagavan's words, some of the more orthodox devotees had their food, but others who felt particularly close to Bhagavan could not think about having food without him.

Bhagavan continued to sit by his mother's side and kept his hands on her. Different expressions of joy and sorrow were passing over her face. Bhagavan said, "Is Mother in this world? No, she is in different worlds, going through different experiences." We understood it to mean that she was passing through various births and the consequent experiences. It was almost certain that Mother was to pass away, and people like Ganapati Muni, T.K. Sunderesa Iyer and others decided to do the Vedaparayana. On the other side, Saranagati Ramaswami and a Punjabi gentleman started Rama nama japa. Without any forethought we joined them, singing *Aksharamanamalai* (*Marital Garland of Letters*) and Arunachala Siva.

Amidst this loud singing of various scriptures Mother left the body. Bhagavan continued with his hands on her heart and forehead. All of us wondered

why he was still seated like that. Bhagavan said, “When Palaniswami was breathing his last, I did the same thing. I thought that the jiva had subsided in the Heart, and removed my hands. But he opened his eyes, and the *prana* (life force) left through the eyes. So this time I am keeping the hands on for longer than needed in order to be sure.” I learned this important secret from Bhagavan that day.

Then he got up, and we all ate. After food, we gathered again near the body without any feeling of pollution. Nayana had raised a question in the *Ramana Gita* about the possibility of a woman attaining the state of realization. Bhagavan had said that the state of realization does not relate to the gross body. So, we all felt that the mother had attained *mukti* and were very happy. The mother’s face glowed with much lustre. I also remembered reading somewhere about death that happens after one is purified by the purging of all impurities while in the body. In the last days of her physical life, the mother underwent a lot of purging at the hands of Bhagavan, and all the impurities had been cleansed from the physical body. Since Bhagavan had given her *mukti*, her whole body and face were lustrous and it was decided that the body should be given a ceremonial samadhi instead of being cremated, as was customary for Brahmin widows.

We joyfully decorated the body with *kumkum*, garlands, and flowers. We all deliberated, and it was decided that the samadhi would be made near Pali Tirtham. We decided to bring the body down before 5 a.m. because the crowds would become unmanageable if the news spread in the town. Ramakrishna Swami and Perumal Swami went to town and procured two or three cart loads of *vibhuti*, camphor, cement and other materials from the town. A few days before the mother’s samadhi, Ramakrishna Swami and myself had gone up the Hill and had brought back lots of bamboo sticks to Skandasramam. These were used to carry the body to Pali Tirtham.

I was instructed to stay back at Skandasramam as telegrams had been sent to relatives at Tiruchuzhi and other places, and family members were expected to arrive anytime. The body was kept under an asvatha tree and Bhagavan and other

devotees sat near it. Relatives from Tiruchuzhi and other places arrived by 7:00-7:30 and I brought them all down to Pali Tirtham. By this time, the whole town had come to know about the news. Shopkeepers brought supplies of camphor, bananas, etc. Scriptural chanting was begun. It looked like a temple. There were lots of cactuses at the site and some of us busied ourselves in removing them, while Perumalswami and others dug the pit and constructed the samadhi inside it. The construction was completed at around 10:30 or 11:00.

Bhagavan had already marked the passages in the *Tirumandiram*, a text written by the great saint Tirumular, which provided instructions about the procedure to be followed in burying the body of a *jnani*. Mother’s body was placed inside the samadhi pit. Bhagavan was the first one to throw in a lot of *vibhuti* and others followed with camphor, sandalwood, etc., according to the requirement. The samadhi was then closed, some stones placed over it and a small shrine constructed over it. It was a glorious sight.

After this ceremony, we all went to Pallakottu where arrangements had been made to feed about 200 people. Bhagavan started walking with other devotees towards Pallakottu, a distance of a few hundred yards. Leading the procession were musicians playing the *nadaswaram* and drums, so that it took close to two hours to cover this short distance. Bhagavan walked so very slowly and majestically that it was a sight even for celestial beings.

After completing the day’s work we all came back to Skandasramam. Some of those who had assembled there, felt that building a samadhi was not enough, and that a lingam should be installed there, daily worship performed and Mandala Abhishekam (the concluding puja) performed on the 48th day. Accordingly, a lingam was placed over Mother’s samadhi. Chinnaswami and some others would perform the puja in the morning and then come up to Skandasramam for lunch. More construction was completed over the samadhi before the 48th day, the day for Mandala Abhishekam. Bhagavan and all of us came down to Pali Tirtham for that ceremony. Now there was no place to rest

for Bhagavan there except for a small room, at the Ganapati temple. So Bhagavan rested there. Kumbhakonam Rangaswami Iyengar made many different kinds of prasada that day, and the Mandala Abhishekham was celebrated on a grand scale. After this ceremony, some felt that a more elaborate and proper shrine should be built. But at that time, Chinnaswami and Dandapaniswami, a new arrival and an excellent cook, used to do the puja, cook, eat and come away. So the plans for construction were postponed.

In those days, some devotees from town used to send *tapalpeti* (a bag of daily rations) to Skandasramam. Chinnaswami and Dandapaniswami used to take most of it down to the samadhi site, so that we had only a little left for people up at Skandasramam. Vasudevaswami, one of those who used to send this food, came to know about this and sent a written message saying that the food sent up to Skandasramam was intended for Vāsudeva (Krishna) and not for Vasudeva (Krishna's father). Bhagavan, who happened to see this, remarked, "How did Vāsudeva come without Vasudeva?" Bhagavan conveyed through this remark that he wanted the provisions to be sent down, and so all kept quiet.

Soon, Chinnaswami and Dandapaniswami started making elaborate food preparations and the morning coffee at the foot of the hill by Mother's samadhi. So Ramakrishna Swami and others were tempted to

come down. One day Chinnaswami invited me to come down to eat the special *mulagu dosai* that he was making. He told me that he would make enough for me to be able to take some back for Bhagavan at Skandasramam. I came down the same night, thinking that, this way, I could take *dosas* to Bhagavan early in the morning. It seems that Bhagavan had inquired about me that night and Ramakrishnaswami, who was attending on Bhagavan in my absence, told Bhagavan where I had gone and why.

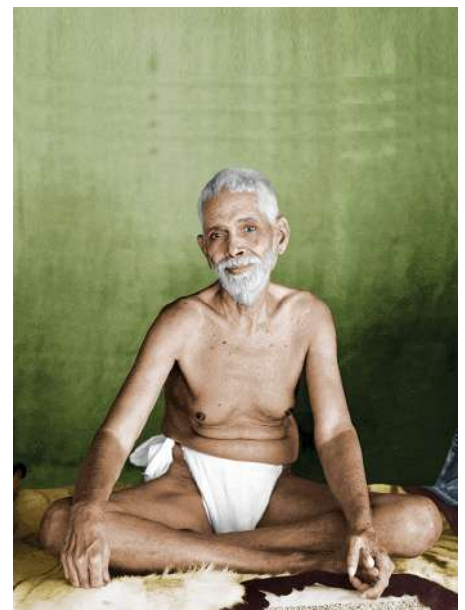
Now it was Bhagavan's habit to come down the Hill early in the morning to answer nature's call, and also to visit Mother's samadhi. That day, Bhagavan came down early in the morning, covering himself with a shawl as it was winter. He came down and said "Is there anything for an *athithi* (guest)?" I looked up and was thrilled to see Bhagavan standing before me. Hearing me, Chinnaswami and the others came and requested Bhagavan to stay and eat the *dosas*, promising to have some sent up for people at Skandasramam.

There used to be a stream running through the ashramam. I gave Bhagavan a neem stick to brush his teeth with. He washed in the stream and then had hot *dosa* and coffee made with goat's milk. He jokingly remarked that he now understood why everyone was tempted to come down from Skandasramam!

To be continued...

Please join us on May 9th, 2021 for the online celebration of Sri Bhagavan's 71st Aradhana Day. This day commemorates Sri Ramana's mahasamadhi on April 14, 1950. The function will be broadcast from Arunachala Ashrama in New York beginning at 6:30 a.m. EST and will include presentations by Ramana Satsang groups from North America and Europe.

The program will be streamed on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com).



ஆனந்தத் தழுந்தல்

Steeped In Bliss (ānandat talundal)

from Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai, Tiruccatakam

Verses 1096 - 1107

Composed by Sri Muruganar

Translated by Sri Robert Butler

Recitation by Srimati Hema Badri

These verses from Sri Muruganar's Sannidhi Murai reflect his complete surrender to his guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi. Apart from Sri Ramana, there is nothing else that exists for Sri Muruganar. He relates how he has been blessed by the riches of that "thoughtless state", granted to him by Sri Bhagavan.

The verses have been translated by Sri Robert Butler, who has translated many of Sri Bhagavan's works such as Ulladu Narpadu and Upadesa Undiyar, as well as Sri Muruganar's commentary on Aksharamanamalai.

We are pleased that Srimati Hema Badri has offered a beautiful, touching rendition of this selection from Tiruccatagam, which is the result of her deep study of these divine verses. Her recitation can be heard on the Ashrama's [YouTube Channel](#).

I vanished not, like ghee upon a flame. At the feet that ruled me, ego-ridden cur, in love I did not melt away. I could not bring my heart, noble Venkatan, to pay homage to your shining form. But now at last in me the desire is born to rest in the shade of those holy feet that cool the three afflictions' searing heat. His love for me is fair indeed. (1)

At the very thought of you, my mind swoons and faints away, my Lord. Yet from the seedling thought you planted, dwelling there, my Lord, these words in praise of you have risen up in Tamil verse, my Lord, O Master, not only of this world but of the gods that toil, my Lord. (2)

Venkatesha, all-transcending jewel, pure, without a flaw! So that my caitiff soul should not wither and be no more, with a voice that like the ocean's clamour roared, you burned my ego to a cinder, made me your flawless devotee, relenting at the very thought of my hunger for your holy feet. (3)

Blithe Venkatan, ruler of this loathsome fool, who consented not to merge with you, but only to the arms of sulking maidens flew! Not dwelling on your feet

divine, I played my mental games. What love was that, that saved me from the burning flames? (4)

Wicked madman as I was, you saw some worth in me, and placed me at your side with your true devotees, who sing your praise with nectar flooding every bone, as love's ambrosia courses through their body and their soul. O Venkatesa, what nature's yours, I do not know! (5)

O Venkatan, sweet ripe fruit and sugarcane combined! Yesterday, today, tomorrow, existing through all time! Not one, not two, your nature fair lies beyond the power of speech. Knowing this, how then might my words your presence reach? (6)

Here there and everywhere, your radiant light abounds. Beyond dark night and bright of day, no time in you is found! Destroyer of the cities three, your shoulders white with holy ash, O Venkatan, adorned with serpents ready for the strike, who then might grasp your perfect nature, unfailing in its light? (7)

Lord, apart from you nothing is. You are 'I', other, and all that is. Lord, apart from you nothing is. Present, past, eternally, you exist. Lord, apart from you nothing is. Here, there, everywhere, you persist. Yet who could ever see you Lord, and if so, where and when is this? (8)

Venkatesa, Lord who ruled me with his gaze of grace! Though deep delight surged and welled up all around, loathsome cur that I was, no drop of it could I drink down, till you gave me life's unfading state, at your holy lotus feet, a place. (9)

Noble Venkatan, with armlets flashing on your shoulders as you dance, with your matchless form, in the heaven of consciousness' supreme expanse. Lord of the ruddy Mount girt by ramparts great, where flutter many flags. The love you give your devotees, may you to me also daily grant. (10)

All pervading, Venkatan, dwelling in the state of peace, all I owned, my very self, as your possession, you did eat. For You, the Holy One whose joy, king-like, knows no surcease, on this wide earth what could be performed as service meet? (11)

Can anything at all in glory match the riches of the thoughtless state? Born of the mind, the joys of kings and others too will pass in time. But our father, Venkatan, will grant to those people of our kind, pervading every corner of the earth, a miraculous delight. (12)

In Memory of Martin Wolff

Memorial Service at Arunachala Ashrama,
February 28, 2021

A long-time devotee and friend of the Ashrama, Martin Wolff passed away on February 26, 2021 at the age of 70. Martin and his wife Billee have been a part of Sri Bhagavan's family at Arunachala Ashrama since the 1990s. Martin and Billee had that unique marriage and partnership, where each supported the other in sadhana, in addition to raising a family and carrying on with their careers. Martin and Billee would often come together to the Ashrama for celebrations and Vedic chanting events. They became cherished friends of many devotees in New York and around the world.

A memorial service for Martin was hosted by Arunachala Ashrama over Zoom on Sunday, February 28, and was attended by well over 100 friends and family. About 20 devotees offered spoken or sung tributes to the memory of Martin.

Many devotees mentioned with much appreciation Martin's chanting of the Vedas and of Sanskrit slokas, whether in Arunachala Ashrama, at New York area satsangs, or in Sri Ramanasramam, India. Martin was blessed to have studied Vedic chanting with one of the most influential teachers of recent decades, Dr. Srinivasa Yejnasubramanian. Martin understood first-hand the profound power of Vedic chant to still the mind, and he offered Vedic chanting in a spirit of deepest devotion and concentration. Martin not only chanted among gatherings of devotees, but he made two CDs of Vedic hymns and Sanskrit slokas. (One of those CDs, *Shakti-Bhakti*, is available on Amazon.) Martin was an excellent teacher of Vedic chanting, and taught students not just in the New York area but even overseas. As a teacher, Martin was patient but demanding, placing great importance on precise pronunciation of the Vedic mantras and on the correct svaras or pitches. Martin was also a skilled photographer. When on pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam he sent back pictures with insightful commentary, sharing the unique atmosphere of the Holy Hill and its environs with spiritual seekers, family and friends alike.

A common theme among the speakers was gratitude



Sri Martin Wolff, in front of the New Hall,
Sri Ramanasramam.

for Martin's friendship, wisdom and humor. One devotee may have spoken for many in attendance when she said that in thinking of Martin she heard his voice – soft, thoughtful, and redolent of kindness. Sri Anand Ramanan, the President of Sri Ramanasramam, spoke about his memories of Martin, noting that he first became acquainted with Martin about 20 years ago when Martin was visiting Sri Ramanasramam. Anand was impressed by Martin's determination to keep making these pilgrimages even as his health started to decline about 15 years ago. On learning of Martin's passing, Anand arranged for a moksha deepam to be lit in Martin's name at Sri Bhagavan's shrine.

Martin's loving family and especially Billee and their two daughters, Elisha and Diana, offered enormous support and strength to Martin as his physical condition worsened. They were with him in Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York as he peacefully left the body in the afternoon of Friday, February 26.

We will miss Martin very much.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

Devotees' tributes to Sri Martin Wolff are presented on the Ashrama's [memorial page](#).

A Devotee's Diary

An Excerpt From the Diary of Dennis Hartel

Tuesday, November 1, 1977 – Arunachala Ashrama, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada.

9:15 p.m. I have just come back from the Temple and found Bhagawat asleep with his head completely submerged under the blankets. This morning, he didn't come to the Temple at 4:30 a.m., but told me tomorrow I should wake him, for he is anxious to recite in the Temple.

I notice that it seems to take him some time to become active in the mornings. From all appearances, one would think that he is lazy or inactive. This thought easily comes to mind, but the truth is otherwise. It is only the great pull of his inwardness that prevents activity. He often quotes Bhagavan Ramakrishna who said, "When a pitcher of water is only a little filled it will make all kinds of noise, but once it is filled to the brim, it cannot make any noise."

Today I asked Bhagawat: "You always write, 'My breath is merged in the Heart.' Does this mean you stop breathing?"

He said, "No, not that. But instead of the breath flowing outwards, I feel it flowing into the Heart. I feel the thought and breath merging in the Heart. As far as words can explain it, it is just that."

Also, the other day he said that "those people (referring to someone who has taken up the mission of saving animals) love everyone else, but do not love themselves." Today I asked what exactly he meant by this. He explained: "They want to save everyone, but will not take the time to save themselves. They should do this first. I remember reading in my high school days what Swami Rama Tirtha wrote, 'Wanted: Reformers. Not those with university degrees, but those who have reformed and can control themselves.' This is exactly in line with what Sri Bhagavan says: 'First realize yourself and then if you wish to reform others, by all means do so.'"

— From *In Search of Self* by Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat

8. Under whatever name or form we worship It, It leads us on to knowledge of the nameless, formless Absolute. Yet, to see one's true Self in the Absolute, to subside into It and be one with It, this is the true knowledge of the truth.

9. 'Twos'¹ and 'threes' depend upon one thing, the ego. If one asks in one's Heart, 'What is this ego?' and finds it, they slip away. Only those who have found this know the truth, and they will never be perplexed.

— *Ulladu Narpadu* v. 8, 9

¹"Twos" are pairs like pleasure-pain, knowledge-ignorance; "threes" are triads like the knower, act of knowing and the known.

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 until further notice. Please visit our [web page](#) for the latest information.

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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