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Sri Viswanatha Swami, A Hidden Gem by Murray Feldman

Sri Viswanatha Swami's dedication to Sri Bhagavan was complete and unconditional. He first met Sri Bhagavan at Skandasramam. Transformed by this meeting, he returned to stay with him permanently at the foot of Arunachala at the age of 23. His service and guidance to Sri Bhagavan's devotees was unstinting and he never tired of sharing the greatness of his guru with sincere aspirants. One such devotee graced by the company of Swami Viswanathan is Murray Feldman, who first visited Sri Ramanasramam in 1976 with the intention of staying for four days. Sri Bhagavan's grace kept him there for four years. He recalls the time spent in Swamiji's holy company in the following article that was first published in The Mountain Path in 2012. Murray Feldman has been residing in Tiruvannamalai for the past ten years.

Viswanatha Swami first came to stay with Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi when he was about 19 years old. His father, Ramaswamy Iyer, was a first cousin of Bhagavan.

I had the good fortune to spend considerable time with this great devotee of Ramana Maharshi from April 1976 until he became ill and passed away at 75 years of age on the 22nd November 1979. How he came to Bhagavan has been written about elsewhere. Here I attempt to show how he exemplified, so wonderfully and devotedly, the teachings of Bhagavan.

When I first came to the Ashram in 1976, I sought out Mrs. Osborne to hear about Bhagavan and to discuss his teachings and their practical application. She told me that I should visit an unassuming older devotee by the name of Viswanatha Swami who, except for his work on The Mountain Path, was living quietly at the back of the Ashram in a side room of the old dispensary.

I found his room near the dispensary the next day

and went to visit him around 4 p.m. Timidly approaching his open door, I saw a grey-bearded man sitting quietly on his bed with his legs dangling and staring straight ahead. I asked him if he was Viswanatha Swami. He nodded and gestured for me to enter and sit on the bench opposite him. I asked him a question about the application of 'Who Am I'. He did not look at me but said very tenderly, "Bhagavan's teaching is one of the Heart." At that moment, he closed his eyes and a beautiful delicate silence filled the room. I too closed my eyes and we sat together in this stillness. Time passed very quickly and after about an hour, he opened his eyes and gestured for me to leave. He said that I could come the next day around the same time if I wished to.

This was the beginning of an extremely beautiful and important period in my life. I had planned to stay at the Ashram for only four days but nothing pulled my heart elsewhere during the next couple of years. I am sure it was to a large degree Viswanatha who made Bhagavan come alive for

me. It is very true that Bhagavan's presence is profoundly felt at the Ashram but Viswanatha brought Him alive as a guru in the flesh.

After that remarkable first day, I went to visit Viswanatha daily. For two months, he hardly spoke another word to me. But after that, he told me many stories of being around Bhagavan. He represented Him in such a beautiful and true way. His love for Bhagavan and His teachings were evident in his words and his manner and he often mentioned how still and beautiful Bhagavan was.

During those two months, effortless peace became my constant companion and I had the opportunity to sit with Viswanatha daily and to watch him with other people. Ashram workers, old devotees and others would come in and talk to him about their problems. He gave advice, medicine, money, food and patience to all those who came for help. He was always surrounded by a wonderful peace. Even his movements seemed silent. I began to feel that he embodied a culmination of the three yogas; deep devotion for Bhagavan, jnana (wisdom) and effortless selfless service. He constantly gave to others in such a kind way without any hesitation.

After a period he allowed me to spend more time with him and we started to do pradakshina together. These were wonderful times as he brought Ramana so alive on these walks. He would point out the places where Bhagavan would sit and it was easy to imagine Ramana in these places.

Once when we were walking he said, "People say that Parvati walked here. This I don't know about but what I do know is that Bhagavan himself walked along this very place where we are walking now." Words cannot explain the love that was in his voice as he said this.

When Viswanatha walked, he was so quiet. He walked perfectly straight, rarely looking to the left or right: just silently walking. One time when we did a pradakshina in the rainy season we got soaking wet. When the rain started to come down, even here, he showed his love for Ramana by reminding me of the gift of this beautiful rain that Bhagavan was giving us. We laughed and laughed

with joy at this gift. When we arrived late at the Ashram we went in to get food and Balu served us with equal joy. Viswanatha spoke with great affection about Balu and how he loved to serve the devotees.

Once he told me how Bhagavan had come to his room in the middle of the night knocking on his door. Bhagavan said to him, "Quick, quick, let's go for pradakshina before anyone else finds out." The two of them walked together and Bhagavan gave him teachings along the whole circumambulation of the hill. Viswanatha had such a beautiful smile when he told me about this. He did not smile a lot but when he did his whole face beamed and when he laughed his whole body laughed.

Viswanatha always encouraged me to visit the places in the area that were associated with Bhagavan. He would ask me if I had visited places like Mango Tree Cave, Pavazhakkunru, and Turtle Rock (where Bhagavan had his second death experience).

Once I did not visit Viswanatha for two days as I had dysentery. I was staying in a small hut at Saraswati Nilayam and was shocked and very touched when, who should I see approaching me at 4 p.m. but Viswanatha Swami! He said, with a smile and a chuckle, "Mohammed has not come to the mountain, so the mountain has come to Mohammed." He gave me some *chyavanaprash* he had brought. Viswanatha was very fond of *chyavanaprash* as a general tonic. After that, he said, "Come, we are going for a walk." I said that I had dysentery but he replied that I would be fine. Needless to say, I was fine. After walking for a while, I asked where we were going. He told me, "It's a secret and you will like it."

We walked out of the town to a small shrine. This was Gurumurtham, one of the places where Bhagavan had stayed in His early days. Viswanatha showed me the indentation in the wall where Bhagavan had sat for long hours. Viswanatha was always ready to talk about Bhagavan and his teachings.

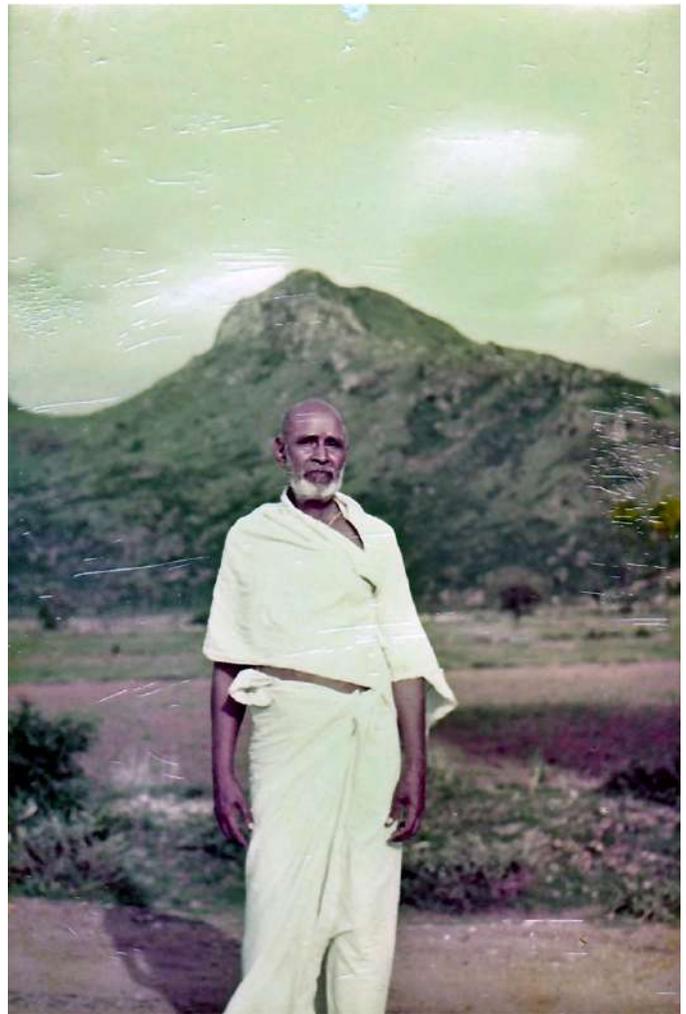
During one period, I became very sluggish and dull. I decided to do a retreat in Hyderabad with

the well-known Buddhist meditation teacher Goenkaji. When I returned from this retreat several people were critical of my need to go away. This disturbed me so I thought I would ask Viswanatha about it. I went to the Ashram in the morning planning to see him in the evening. As I started walking up the steps by the bookstore I met Viswanatha as he was coming out of the Ashram office. He looked at me, smiled, and asked if I wanted to go for tea. It was a hot summer's day and he was carrying his umbrella. As we were walking out of the Ashram, bells started to ring. Viswanatha said, "Sound comes out of silence, sound is sustained in silence and sound returns to silence, silence is all." We drank the tea and I thought this was a perfect time to talk with him, but I felt shy.

We walked back to his room and he said, "Come into my room, there is an article I want you to look at for The Mountain Path." He gave me the perfect opportunity but I still felt shy to do so. After I had read the article, he asked for my thoughts on it. He then asked me if I had anything else to say and I said no. He said to come back around four.

As I left however, he called me back and said, "Hey you, what do you want?" I was amazed at how Bhagavan had so wonderfully set the whole thing up to help remove my doubts and worries. I told Viswanatha about the Goenka meditation that I did and how the meditation emphasizes the purification of the latent (unconscious) mental tendencies. He looked at me so sweetly and slowly started to lie down on his bed. As he was lying down he said, "I know nothing about the mind or its tendencies. All I know is, be asleep to it all." I am sure to this day that his face changed complexion, almost becoming grey, and he started to snore.

I was sitting there and he was snoring. At that moment, an Ashram worker came in to see Viswanatha. He saw Viswanatha sleeping there and he promptly lay down on a bench as well and started to snore. I decided to lie down too on the bed beside Viswanatha and went into a deep, deep stillness. After a while, I became aware of the



Swami Viswanathan, 1973

noises around us and looked. Viswanatha was rising from the bed and staring at me. He said very pointedly, "Do you understand?" The Ashram worker was still snoring. Viswanatha laughed and said, "He does."

As I read over these few words, I see that they just cannot convey the beauty of this great devotee of Bhagavan. His love for Bhagavan and his gratitude to Him shone in every action he did and in every word he uttered. It is strange that we never spoke about Viswanatha's initial meeting with Bhagavan, but everything he said and did reflected his love and devotion. Sitting quietly at the back of the Ashram in his room, he truly was a hidden gem.

A Devotee Asks... Is the Study of Sanskrit Essential on the Path to Liberation?

Evelyn Kaselow Saphier has shared her experiences with Swami Viswanathan in a series of articles highlighting Swamiji's dedication and devotion to his guru. While offering his guidance to devotees of Sri Bhagavan and allaying their doubts, Swamiji gave them the encouragement to tread for themselves the royal path of atma-vichara, self-investigation. His first words to the devotees of Arunachala Ashrama on entering his small room during their first pilgrimage of 1973 were: "There is a center in man where there is no ignorance, where there is pure awareness." Recently, Evelyn received a question relating to her study of Sanskrit with Swami Viswanathan. We present here her reply to a sincere devotee's query.

Dear Friend,

I am currently pursuing my graduation studies in Indian Philosophy (Vedanta). We know you have spent some really precious moments with Swami Viswanathan and had learnt Sanskrit *vyakaranam* (grammar) from him. I have learnt basic Samskritam for 5 yrs during my school and college days. But now I am in a sort of dilemma.

Is knowledge of Samskritam necessary for one's spiritual sadhana and upliftment? Is knowledge of Samskritam absolutely necessary to understand Bhagavan's teachings? We have sufficient resources and materials available here to gain a deep knowledge of Samskritam. While a part of my heart says "yes" to acquire that knowledge, as somewhere in the heart there is an affinity for it, another part says "no" since Bhagavan himself has said "No learning or knowledge of scriptures is necessary to know the Self." (*Day By Day With Bhagavan*)

What did Viswanatha Swami tell you regarding the importance and/or necessity of knowledge of Samskritam, both in relation to sadhana and spiritual growth, and also to Bhagavan's teachings? Also, what advice did Viswanatha Swami give to improve your knowledge of Samskritam?

Although to my limited knowledge, Bhagavan has nowhere mentioned the necessity of knowledge of Samskritam, yet advice from his disciples like

Viswanatha Swami will serve as a guide for us particularly now when our thoughts and habits have deteriorated so much.

Kindly give me your valuable advice. As we never had the great fortune of association with Viswanatha Swami, you can transmit to us the guidance you have received from him.

Thanks and Regards,
– A sincere seeker

Dear Friend in Sri Bhagavan,

Thank you for your letter. It has given me occasion to recall those carefree days when I sat by the side of Viswanatha Swami, studied the works of Bhagavan with him and learned various slokas. Those are treasured memories, indeed. As we read through the sacred texts, the sub-text for me was always the peace, eagerness to impart wisdom and feeling of love and tender oversight of the revered Swami.

Of course, I was only one of many to be so blessed but nevertheless the subtle teaching that I received in those days was truly one of my life's greatest blessings. To be near Viswanatha Swami was to imbibe his impeccable spirit of dispassion, renunciation, devotion and love. He was selfless and self-effacing in everything and I found in him also a gentle sense of humor that surrounded his depth of understanding.

During my time with the Swami, we never touched on Sanskrit grammar of itself. It was enough that I had become acquainted with Devanagari script and basic Vedantic concepts. Nor did he ever advise me on points related to academic study. What I now remember from those days, is the indelible, sweet fragrance of his life of immaculate surrender and abidance in Sri Ramana-Arunachala. Personally, I too would have loved to study Sanskrit in greater depth to better appreciate the works of Sri Bhagavan in Sanskrit but the circumstances of my life required that I work and in free time I was in Arunachala Ashrama. In retrospect, as one who has enjoyed language studies, on many occasions I have been reminded not to become entangled in intellectual analysis but to again and again go within.

Bhagavan said clearly on various occasions that book learning is not at all necessary for spiritual

attainment, citing his own case as example. He also said that learning is not necessarily an obstacle to jnana but rather pride in learning. Viswanatha Swami had studied Sanskrit before coming to Bhagavan and he told us that Bhagavan himself had introduced him to Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri, with whom he had completed his studies. In the case of Kunju Swami, Bhagavan discouraged him from travelling to further his philosophical studies.

While it is true that Sanskrit is not essential for Self-knowledge, I believe that sometimes it is best to 'live with our questions'. Viswanatha, who surrendered to Bhagavan totally, came to do so many translations and thus served to widen the understanding of his teaching.

Bhagavan himself – the doer of all – has planted in your heart a love of Sanskrit. This itself is to me evidence of your yearning for wisdom. May your dedication in this direction serve to awaken divine knowledge in your heart and in the hearts of many, as was the case with Swami Viswanathan, whose first words to Murray Feldman were, "Bhagavan's teaching is one of the Heart."

Yours in His infinite grace,
Evelyn

Sri Bhagavan's Advice to Kunju Swami

As mentioned in Evelyn's letter above, Sri Kunju Swami approached Sri Bhagavan and told him of his desire to study the scriptures so that he would be able to give a suitable response to people who visited the Asramam and asked questions. He felt this study would be beneficial. Kunju Swami recounts this experience in a recorded interview that was published in the May/June 2021 issue of The

Maharshi:

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 one 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.

37. 'During the search, duality; on attainment, unity' – this doctrine too is false. When eagerly he sought himself and later when he found himself, the tenth man in the story was the tenth man and none else.

38. If we are the doers of deeds, we should reap the fruits they yield. But when we question, 'Who am I, the doer of this deed?' and realize the Self, the sense of agency is lost and the three karmas slip away. And Eternal is this Liberation.

– *Forty Verses on Reality (Ulladu Narpadu)*

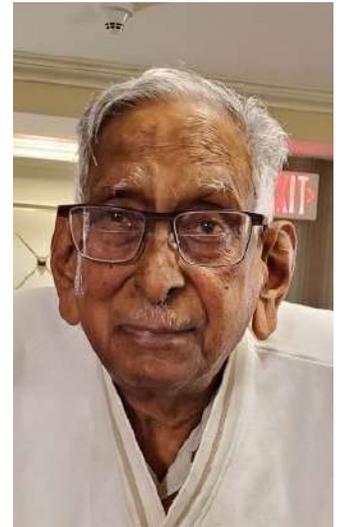
In Memoriam
Sri B.K. Raju

June 11th, 1925 – June 15th, 2022

Sri B.K. Raju quietly attained the abode of peace on June 15th, surrounded by his loving family. He was a devout supporter of Arunachala Ashrama throughout his life. Born in Vandram in Andhra Pradesh, Sri Raju became only the third person from India to attend Harvard University's School of Business in 1949 – two years after India's Independence. He recalled how he had been amazed to read of Bhagavan's greatness while in New York City in 1950 when a detailed report of Sri Bhagavan's life and demise was reported in the New York Times. Upon graduation, Mr. Raju would join his Dutch classmate's company, KLM – the first airline to offer overseas passenger flights – and fly the skies back to India to his family in 1951. Having captained multinationals and built self-driven enterprises, he chose Nova Scotia as a home for his family in 1967. He and his devoted wife Lakshmi (1931-2019) were two pillars holding aloft the spiritual and cultural heritage of India in Halifax for nearly half a century.

In the early 1970s, Sri Raju actively encouraged the purchase of the land where the Arunachala Ashrama Mandiram now sits, as well as the moving of the

original school house (which serves as the Temple), to its present location. He and Mrs. Raju, along with their children, would visit often and bask in the presence of Sri Bhagavan. He explained that he felt drawn to the Ashrama and its ideals, its enchanting location and environs. Special days such as Advent would find Mr.



Sri B.K. Raju

and Mrs. Raju active in preparations for the functions, in particular the preparation of prasadam for all of the visitors. These were indeed joyous occasions for all that were present.

When devotees had the opportunity to visit him in recent years, he always inquired about the Ashrama and its activities and continued to give his unstinting encouragement and support. He is survived by Vish (Sundri), Mahesh (Shoba), and Ram (Lakshmi), and his seven grandchildren, Vivek (Jen), Priya (Prasad), Arun, Kiran, Gautham, Kavita (Evan), and Sangeeta, as well as his two great-grandchildren, Kaanaki and Vaanilan.

The Three States: Waking, Dream and Sleep

From *Gems from Bhagavan*

There is no difference between the dream and the waking state except that the dream is short and the waking long. Both are the result of the mind. Our real state is called *turiya*, which is beyond the waking, dream and sleep states.

The Self alone exists and remains as It is. The three states owe their existence to *avichara* (non-enquiry), and enquiry puts an end to them. However much one may explain, this fact will not become clear until one attains Self-realization, and wonders how he was blind to the self-evident and only existence for so long.

All that we see is a dream, whether we see it in the dream state or waking state. On account of some arbitrary standards about the duration of the

experience and so on, we call one experience a dream and another waking experience. With reference to Reality both the experiences are unreal. A man might have an experience such as getting *anugraha* (grace) in his dream, and the effects and influence of it on his entire subsequent life may be so profound and abiding, that one cannot call it unreal - whilst calling real some trifling incident in the waking life that just flits by, which is casual, of no consequence and is soon forgotten. Just before waking up from sleep, there is a very brief state, free from thought. That should be made permanent.

In dreamless sleep there is no world, no ego and no unhappiness, but the Self remains. In the waking state there are all of these. Yet there is the Self. One has only to remove the transitory happenings in order to realize the ever-present beatitude of the Self.

Na Karmana

Translated by Sri Ramana Maharshi

A request regarding Sri Bhagavan's translation of the mantra Na Karmana which is chanted at the end of the morning and evening Veda Parayana at Sri Ramanasramam was received from a devotee who had written the following note:

Namaskaram,

Your Mar/Apr 2004, Vol. 14, No. 2 edition of *The Maharshi*, contains the following:

“In the Nirvana Room in Sri Ramanasramam, there is a framed Tamil translation of *Na Karmana* written on two pages. The page on the left, which is in pencil, is Bhagavan's draft; the page on the right is the same Tamil text but is a fair copy in ink, written by P.N. Swaminathan Iyer. Sri K. Natesan who was there when this translation was written said that Bhagavan had asked him to make a fair copy of his translation in ink, but his former math teacher, P.N. Swaminathan Iyer, who was also there, insisted he must do it. The fair copy in ink is his. The date written at the bottom of the sheet is 10-9-1938, one day after the entry in *Talks*. By these dates we can infer that Bhagavan probably had been requested to provide the devotees with a Tamil translation at the time Chadwick translated it into English.”

Would you have or be able to source this original Tamil version written by Bhagavan - not necessarily in his hand, but the text, please?

Thank you.

Geetha R.

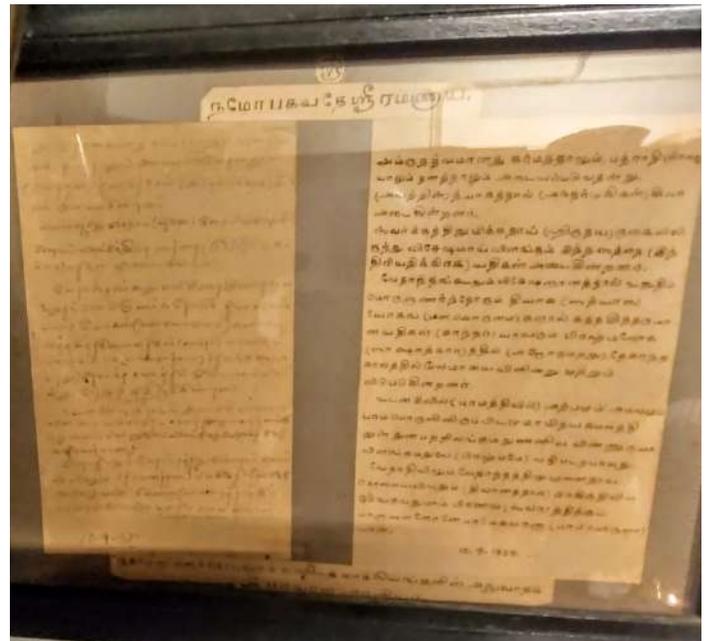
Some background of this mantra and Sri Bhagavan's translation of it is given in Suri Nagamma's book *My Life at Sri Ramanasramam*:

“...a devotee asked Bhagavan, ‘I find that whenever puja and the like is to be done, people bring all required articles to Bhagavan for his blessings and Bhagavan blesses by touching them. Puja is karma. Almost simultaneously the mantra *Na Karmana* is repeated whose meaning is that liberation is attained not by doing karma or by raising a family or by wealth but only by *thyaga*, i.e. renunciation. Is it not self-contradictory?’ Bhagavan smiled and said, ‘Yes. Yes. If they understand the real meaning of what they

repeat they would not do all this. How often is this mantra repeated here! Were people to find out the meaning and put it into practice, it would be good. But who will do it? Some rituals are being performed for worshipping God. It is after all a good thing. There is nothing lost in my touching the puja articles and so I do it. That is all.’

Another devotee requested Bhagavan to tell him the meaning of that mantra. ‘Is that so?’ said the Master. ‘Some time back, a devotee made a similar request and I showed him the commentary written by Vidyananya. He said he could not understand it properly and so I had to tell him the meaning. To avoid any such requests in future, I wrote the meaning in Tamil. That was sometime in 1938. Later the people here put it in a frame and hung it in the dining hall. See it and you will understand the meaning.’”

Here is the framed translation referred to above by Sri Bhagavan:



Sri Bhagavan's translation of Na Karmana on the left side with the fair copy of P.N. Swaminathan Iyer on the right side, dated 10-09-1938. Photo by J. Jayaraman.

The printed text of the above hand writing by Sri Bhagavan is found in the Tamil translation of *Talks*, (*Vachanamritam*) by Sri Swami Viswanathan dated 09-09-1938 and we are pleased to include it here:

1. அம்ருதத்வம் கர்மத்தாலும் புத்திராதி
(பிரஜை)யாலும், தனத்தாலும்
அடையப்படுவதன்று. (அவற்றின்) த்யாகத்தால்
(அந்தர்முகிகள்) சிலர் (அதனை) அடைகின்றனர்.
ஸ்வர்கத்தினுமிக்கதாய் (ஹிருதய) குகையிலிருந்து
விசேஷமாய் விளங்கும் இந்த ஸத்தை (இந்திரிய
நிக்ரக) யதிகள் அடைகின்றனர்.

2. வேதாந்தங் கூறும் விசேஷ ஞானத்தால் உறுதிப்
பொருளுணர்ந்தோரும், தியாக (ஸந்யாஸ) யோகங்
(மனவொருமை) களால் சுத்த சித்தருமான யதிகள்
(சாந்தர்) யாவரும் பிரஹ்ம லோக
(ஸாக்ஷாத்தார)த்தில் (அஜ்ஞானமற்று), தேகாந்த
காலத்தில் மூலமாயையினின்று முற்றும்
விடுபடுகின்றனர்.

3. உடனடுவில் (புரமத்தியில்) அற்பமும் அமலமும்
பரம்பொருளினிருப்பிடமுமா மிதயகமலத்தினுள்
துன்பற்றிலங்கும் நுண்ணிய விண்ணுருவா
விளங்குமதுவே (பிரஹ்மமே) வழிபடற்பாலது.

4. வேதாதியிலும் வேதாந்தத்திலுமுள்ளதாய்ச்
சொல்லப்படுவதும் (தியானத்தால்) பிரகிருதியில்
ஒடுங்குவதுமாம் பிரணவ (ஸ்வர)த்திற்குப்
பரனாயுள்ளோனே பரமேசுவரனா
(பரம்பொருளா)வான்.

The translation is as seen in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, dated 09-09-1938:

“1. Deathlessness is not obtained through action or begetting offspring or wealth. Some attain that state through renunciation.

2. The Sages (that have conquered the senses) attain that Sat which is more supreme than Heaven and shining all alone in the Heart. The adepts, who by renunciation and one-pointedness are pure in heart and have known the certainty of Truth by the special knowledge proclaimed by Vedanta, get fully released in the Brahmaloaka from the causal Maya at the dissolution of the body.

3. That alone which shines as the tiny Akasa void of sorrow, in the lotus heart, the tiny seat of the spotless Supreme in the (inner) core of the body is worthy of worship.

4. He alone is the Supreme Lord, who is beyond the Primal Word which is the beginning and end of the Veda and in which merges the creative Cause.”

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

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 Arunachala Ashrama (see our [home page](#)) will be welcoming overnight guests beginning May 11, 2022. Guests are required to make arrangements ahead of time by contacting nova-scotia@ashrama.org and submitting proof of being fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Guests will be responsible for cooking vegetarian food during their stay and ensuring that their rooms have been cleaned and their linens and towels are laundered and replaced before they leave.

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 COVID19 restrictions. Tel: 902-824-2297

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

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