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Sri Shuddhananda Bharati The Opening of the Heart

Shuddhananda Bharati (1897-1990) was a patriot, poet, writer and yogi of immense courage who was drawn to spirituality at an early age. He received the divine gift of poetry and letters at the age of eight, after meditating at the Chidambaram temple, following which he broke into spontaneous song. Proficient in many languages, he authored the work Ramana Vijayam (1931) which was Sri Bhagavan's first biography in Tamil. His visits to Sri Bhagavan furthered his divine aspirations, and by the Maharshi's grace Shuddhananda was absorbed into that from which all things arise, in which they have their stay and into which all is merged – the heart.

In an article titled *He Opened my Heart*, Shuddhananda describes his first meeting with Sri Bhagavan¹:

During my dynamic silence of thirty years, about five years were spent in going from saint to saint, ashram to ashram. Even samadhi was not the *summum bonum* of realisation. My heart wanted something which I did not find anywhere during my long journey from Mt. Kailas to Kanyakumari. I stood in silence at the feet of the gigantic Gomateswara up the hill of Shravana Belagola when I was living among the Digambari Jain sadhus, wearing just a codpiece. At midnight a bright face rose like the sun in the crimson dawn, and a hymn from the Vedas came to my mind, 'There he rises, the brilliant sun spreading a thousand rays, the cosmic form of the effulgent splendour, unique light, life of beings!' The crimson glory opened two lotus eyes, then coral lips emitted pearly smiles.

I quickly remembered Ramana Maharshi and felt his inner call. I put a semicolon to my spiritual pilgrimage and went quickly to Arunagiri. I went up the hill, took a bath in the waterfalls, meditated in the Virupaksha cave and came down.

Accidentally Seshadri Swami met me and smiled at me. I went near him and in his silvery voice he declared, "Go on and on, Shuddhananda, until you go deep in and in." He accompanied me a few yards and ran away saying, "Run, run, Ramana waits for you. Go in and in."

I reached Ramanasramam and entered the small shrine of the Mother. There was a square room adjoining it and Nayana stood up exclaiming, "Welcome, Welcome! *Swagatam!*" Ramana's gentle voice said, "Let Bharati come in. *Bharati varattum.*"

I saw no human form. I felt dazed. An effulgence enveloped me. My mind disappeared into silence. I sat down, closed my eyes and entered the inner cave – *nihitam guhayam*. An hour passed like five minutes. I came back to myself, opened my eyes and saw Ramana's lotus eyes riveted on mine. He appeared like a linga spreading rays of burnished gold. "Now you have felt 'That', the cave is open! the 'I' is the Self-nectar!" After all these years of sadhana, here I experienced a delightful inner reality which is beyond word and thought — *Yato vaacho nivartante aprapya manassa saha*. I caught I. Ramana Smriti, 1980.

hold of his feet and shed tears of delight singing with Saint Manickavachakar, who sang, “Today Thou hast risen in my heart, a Sun destroying darkness.”

Blaze on, O Light Divine
Swallowing I and mine.
The Self rose like the Sun
The many merged into the ONE.
Behold the beacon of I
Inner Light of every Eye,
Towering above He, She and it,
A new dawn of inner delight.

(All songs that I dedicated to Bhagavan are contained in my book *Arul Aruvi, Torrents of Grace*.)

Nayana, whom I already knew in the Gurukulam congratulated me saying, “Like myself, you have found the right guru in the right place! Now the cave is ready for you.” Sri B.V. Narasimha Swami entered the room and said joyfully, “Happy, Happy! Bhagavan has touched your heart!”

Then Niranjanananda Swami called me to the dining room. I opened my bag and brought out ground nuts and plantains and gave them to Bhagavan. He took one fruit and a few nuts, and I took the rest as his prasada. That has been my diet for many years.

The next morning after my bath I was meditating when Ramana came and we spoke for half an hour about practical Self-realisation. We had plenty of meetings during the nights. Maharshi is the beacon light of hope to seekers. He kept me in the Virupaksha cave silent. Only Nayana, Seshadri Swami and B.V. Narasimha Swami (who wanted to know about Sai Baba), used to visit now and then. Ramana gave a finishing touch to Shankara’s *Brahma Satyam*, or “Brahman is the unique reality”. Bhagavan located that Brahman in the heart and called it Heart itself:

*I-I shines the Truth in the heart’s core.
That’s Brahman; be That; seek no more.*

Deepam crowds disturbed my cave life in Tiruvannamalai. Ramana made me live with Nayana in a mud cottage near the ashram. I had the joy of hearing Vedic hymns and Nayana’s verses all day long as I remained silent and self-

immersed, and prepared myself for the future fulfillment of my life.

The last day was fully spent at the feet of Bhagavan and that was my golden day. What he taught me on that day sustained me for twenty-five years:

“The egoless ‘I am’ is realisation. The experience of ‘I am’ is peace. The meaning of ‘I’ is ‘God’. The outgoing mind is bondage, the in-going mind is freedom. The heartward mind brings bliss. The restless worldly mind brings bondage and misery. The triads of knower, known and knowledge are one. You go to a cinema. Observe the projector light. If the projector light fails the whole show stops. Be Self-centered and finish your work in silence and come out. The world is nothing but the objectified mind.”

It was not easy to depart from him who had won my heart. “Bhagavan, I take leave of you leaving my heart here. One boon I beg of you, Bhagavan, grant me the bliss of my true being!” Ramana smiled and said “Very good aspiration. That shall be.”

On my way to the station, Seshadri Swami met me and said: “*Mele mele po.*” Go to higher heights of realisation!”

‘I’ is my name,
Heart is my home,
My truth is the same,
Beyond form and name.

In an article from *The Call Divine*, in 1955, Shuddhananda further describes his meeting with Sri Bhagavan:

“At this time Maharshi rose up and came inside. The crowd was melting away for supper. The evening was solemn. Maharshi sat quite near me. I touched his feet, and then caught hold of his hands. His force was flowing into me. I saw his eyes; for Maharshi to me was his vision in and out. I saw the fire of knowledge radiating from those two red binocular-like eyes that saw the world around like a cinema show. His eyes darted into me. Tears flowed from my eyes. I did not move my tongue. Maharshi was reading my heart and mind, which were being saturated with divine consciousness.

Silence for five minutes.

“Then Maharshi spoke out in a calm, mellow, silvery voice: ‘Bharathi, take refuge in silence. You can be here or there or anywhere. Fixed in silence, established in the inner I, you can be as you are. The world will never perturb you if you are well founded upon the tranquility within. You have a *sankalpa* – to write out your inspirations, to bring out the *Bharata shakti* [power of India]. It is better to finish off *sankalpas* here and now and keep a clear sky within. But do it in silence. Gather your thoughts within. Find out the thought centre and discover your Self-equipoise. In storm and turmoil be calm and silent.

“I wept and mumbled, ‘Do you want me to remain?’ I felt I must come back the next day. Maharshi, after a deep silence, saw my face. After his gaze had sunk into me he whispered, ‘You must come back, and you will. For everyone must come to this path. Wind wanders before returning to the silence of the *akasa*.

‘Are you saying that I will not return in a week?’

“Maharshi smiled now and said, ‘Why a week? Even after years you must come here. Only take refuge in silence. Allow karma to work itself out and march on in faith. You will not miss the goal.

“With this he fell into trance while I fell at his feet. One hour passed. Then half an hour more. My philosophically inclined friend also stood there, struck dumb. His questions were rushed into silence. I placed a lump of dates into the hands of the Maharshi. He took a piece and returned the rest to me. I understood, ‘Today’s date is a sweet one. It is the date when I received the message of silence. I must taste in silence each date of my life by having communion with the divine.

“For two decades I was silence itself. Years later I returned. The former simple ashram had disappeared; the body of the Maharshi had disappeared. But the vibrating presence whispered into me ‘Silence, yet more silence!’ ”

Sri V. Ganesan in his beautiful collection titled *Sri Ramana Periya Puranam* shares Shuddhananda Bharati’s counsel to him as follows:

“He came to Ramanasramam in 1970 to write the biography of Annamalai Swami. I received him



Sri Shuddhananda Bharati

and served him for a few days. Before leaving, he invited me to stay at his ashram in Chennai. I accepted his offer and found him to be most kind and affectionate. One day, he made me sit next to him and shared with me something that is very important for all of us. He said, “Ganesan, I saw you managing the ashram and bringing out *The Mountain Path* efficiently. People will praise your capacity in management. I too am willing to give away this ashram to you. I will do it right now if you are willing. But remember, even vast volumes of possessions will not help you erase and annihilate the possessor. I see clearly with my inner eye that your spiritual fulfillment is waiting at your doorstep. Do not fall into the trap of any possessions or any management thrust on you. You are ever free. Be the Self, plunge within, be the dust of the holy feet of Bhagavan who is now in your Heart. He is the universal heart. The kingdom of God is within your infinite Self. Repose in the Heart. That is the truth... Remain at Arunachala as dust at Bhagavan’s holy feet.”

Sri Shuddhananda Bharati remained ever-devoted to Sri Bhagavan throughout his long and active life. He worked tirelessly for causes that were dear to him and spread the greatness of Bharat through his writings and discourses. When asked his age, he would reply, “My age is courage!” He attained samadhi in 1990, at the age of 92.

The Traits of True Penance

As we saw in a previous issues of The Maharshi, Sri Ramakrishna Swami was known to Sri Kunju Swami since his childhood. It was in the year 1920 that they both first visited Sri Bhagavan and obtained his grace, having the opportunity to stay with him and imbibe the peace that radiated from Sri Ramana's Self-abidance.

Sri Ramakrishna Swami's dedication to Sri Bhagavan was complete, and his service to the ashram was also very much appreciated by Sri Niranjanananda, the Sarvadhikari.

Sri Kunju Swami relates Sri Bhagavan's counsel to Ramakrishna Swami regarding the meaning of true tapas.

“At one time Ramakrishna Swami and I were both serving Bhagavan, but there wasn't much for two to do. We felt that it was not proper to take ashram food without doing justifiable work for it. So one of us used to go alternately by turns to *bhiksha* (begging) and *tapas* (meditation) while the other served Bhagavan, eating with him. Ramakrishna's brother was sending him twenty-five rupees each month, which was then a substantial sum. Sowbakyam Ammal, a resident of the town, was serving food to sadhus charging a mere five rupees a month. Her twin objectives were serving food to sadhus and having darshan of Bhagavan. For my tenure outside the ashram, Ramakrishna Swami would pay her five rupees to cover my meal cost and do likewise for himself for his turn outside. We would live on just one midday meal a day provided by the lady. She used to dispatch our food to Virupaksha Cave where we were lodged. During one of his turns off, Ramakrishna went to stay in Virupaksha for a spell of meditation. After three days he had a vision of a huge effulgence. Surprised and equally delighted, he wished for a vision of Kumbakonam town in that effulgence. He wanted to test if the phenomenon would endure. And lo! He did see that town in that brilliance. He next wished to see the Ramanasramam at Kumbakonam, and that too appeared! He was immensely thrilled, believing that the effulgence was Lord Arunachaleswara Himself, revealing all visions

that he wished to see. He returned to the ashram and told us about it. We were greatly surprised. When it was reported to Bhagavan, he dryly commented, ‘Well! Well! Is that what penance is? Nice indeed! He goes to do penance, gets a vision of Kumbakonam, and in addition to it, that of the Ramanasramam at Kumbakonam! Isn't it great *tapas*! Let me now tell you what true *tapas* is! *Tapas* means making the mind rest in its source, in *atma-sphurana*. Seeing this or doing that are not stable states of abidance.’ “Bhagavan says the same thing in Upadesa Undiyar (verses 10, 26):

‘Absorption in the heart of being whence we sprang, is the path of action, of devotion, of union and of knowledge.

To know the Self is but to be the Self, for it is non-dual. In such knowledge one abides as that.”

Following the direct advice of Sri Bhagavan regarding the meaning of true tapas, Ramakrishna Swami did not further indulge in pursuing such fleeting phenomena such as visions and lights, etc., but followed ardently the counsel given by his guru in order to rest in the immutable essence, the heart of all.

Ramakrishna Swami, a long-resident disciple, asked Maharshi the meaning of *Twaiyarunachala Sarvam*, a stanza in *The Five Hymns*. Maharshi explained it in detail, saying that the universe is like a painting on a screen - the screen being the Red Hill, Arunachala. That which rises and sinks is made up of what it rises from. The finality of the universe is the God Arunachala. Meditating on Him or on the seer, the Self, there is a mental vibration ‘I’ to which all are reduced. Tracing the source of ‘I’, the primal ‘I-I’ alone remains over, and it is inexpressible. The seat of realisation is within and the seeker cannot find it as an object outside him. That seat is bliss and is the core of all beings. Hence it is called the Heart. The only useful purpose of the present birth is to turn within and realise it. There is nothing else to do.

– *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 219, 30th June 1936

That Was the Best Cheesecake Ever!

It was going to be a glorious day. I had awakened early in the morning to the sound of the electric mixer whirring in the kitchen. Upon hearing that sound, I knew exactly what it portended! It was cheesecake day! Yes, today was the long-awaited day when my wife, whose reputation for making delicious cheesecakes had spread far and wide, would bake my favorite dessert.

All day today I pictured in my mind the smooth, round form of the dessert, the snow-white layer of sweet icing and the melt-in-your-mouth interior of a combination of ricotta and cream cheese. And the cherries on top, what to say of the cherries on top! So, after waiting for most of the day, after the baking, cooling and setting of the cake, it was finally ready to eat. "Come and get it!" were welcome words to my ears. I rushed into the kitchen, loaded up with a generous slice of heaven, and with much anticipation let the odors of the enticing ingredients massage my olfactory nerves, while the sweet flavors washed over my taste buds. When I tasted the cake, I was transported instantly into a realm of contentment and dare I say, peacefulness. I knew that this cheesecake was the cause of my immediate happiness!

But wait a minute! Was it actually so? Could this cake really be the cause of the peace I was experiencing and the happiness I felt? Let us see what Sri Bhagavan says about it.

On 17-8-46, in *Day By Day*, Sri Bhagavan says: *Thinking that happiness comes from some object or other, you go after it. See from whence all happiness, including the happiness you regard as coming from sense objects, really comes. You will understand all happiness comes only from the Self, and then you will always abide in the Self.*

Okay, it is true that I did think that the reason for my contentment was the cheesecake. Okay, fine, I agree that it is a sense object. But how is it said that that happiness that I had comes from the Self? Yes, I must admit that the restlessness of the anticipation to taste the treat which I experienced during the day had abated when I finally bit into it. In fact, the mind was much quieter than it had been for the preceeding many hours. But could that happiness that I felt truly

be emanating from the essence of our being, or was it something different from that? Bhagavan states in *Talks*:

Ego's perfection is suddenly broken at a point and a want is felt giving rise to a desire to get something or do something. When that want is cured by the fulfillment of that desire, the ego is happy and the original perfection is restored. Therefore happiness may be said to be our natural condition or nature.

—Talk 28

In "Who Am I", the truth is again expressed: *Bliss and the Self are not distinct and separate but are one and the same. And That alone is real. Not even in one of the countless objects of the mundane world is there anything that can be called happiness. It is through sheer ignorance and lack of discrimination that we fancy that happiness is obtained from them. On the contrary, when the mind is externalized, it suffers pain and anguish. The truth is that every time our desires get fulfilled, the mind, turning to its source, experiences only that happiness that is natural to the Self. Similarly, in deep sleep, in spiritual trance (samadhi), in a swoon, when a desired object is obtained, or when evil befalls an object considered undesirable, the mind turns inwards and enjoys the Bliss of the Atman.*

So, according to Sri Bhagavan, when a desire is fulfilled, the mind turns inward and returns to its source and thereby experiences happiness. It is not from external objects that we obtain happiness; this idea occurs only because of our lack of discrimination (avivēka). If we enquire closely, the peace that we experience is due to the waves of the mind being stilled and settling into its source. When a desire arises again, the mind becomes outwardly focused and attempts to attain the object of desire. It experiences sorrow in its going out. Having obtained the object, the mind is released from its restlessness. It again subsides into its own source, and happiness, or peace, is the result.

Bhagavan has graciously explained that the cause of my happiness was not the cheesecake, the external object. Rather it was *the quieting of the mind and its absorption in its source*. Now I know it. Another slice for me, you ask? Thanks, but no thanks.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

Guru Vachaka Kovai, Selected Verses

The importance of Sri Muruganar's *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (The Garland of Guru's Sayings) cannot be overstated.

This translation by David Godman, Rob Butler and Dr. T.V. Venkatasubramanian, is a boon for Sri Bhagavan's devotees, allowing us to dwell in that sacred experience that was vouchsafed to Sri Muruganar by the grace of his guru.

The following verses, including editorial comments, are from the first chapter titled *The Reality of the World*.

20 The worlds that are described as being either three or fourteen are real when seen from the point of view of the primal cause [Brahman] because they have unceasing existence as their [real] nature. However, when attention is paid only to the names and forms, the effect, even the undecaying cause, the plenitude, will appear to be non-existent.

21 To the ignorant, who believe it to be real and revel in it, the world that appears before them is God's creation, but to the steadfast *jnanis*, who have known the bondage-free Self by direct experience, it is merely a deluding and binding concept that is wholly mental.

Bhagavan generally taught that the appearance of an external world comes into existence as an act of projection by the individual 'I' that sees it. As such, it is very similar to the dream world, which is also a mental creation of the one who dreams. For those who were not able or willing to accept this explanation he would say that it was 'God's creation'. Irrespective of which theory one believes in, the external world is known to be a mere concept once the Self has been realised.

22 Understand [well] that the world-scene of empty names and forms, comprising the objects of the five senses perceived in the perfectly pure swarupa, the Supreme Self, is merely the divine sport of the mind-maya that arises as an imaginary idea in that swarupa, being-consciousness.

23 Those in whose consciousness there is no awareness whatsoever of anything other than the Self, the absolute fullness of consciousness, will not declare this world, which from the perspective of God [Brahman] does not exist, to be that truth whose hallmark is never to deviate from absolute fullness [paripuranam].

24 You who believe that the world, which is experienced merely as an object of the senses, is real, and who cherish it as something worthwhile, come ultimately to grief, like the parrot that waits for the silk-cotton fruit to ripen! If this world is real merely because it is perceived, then water seen in a mirage is also real because it too is perceived.

The fruit of the silk-cotton tree is a large pod that always remains green. When it finally ripens, it bursts open, revealing its insides — an inedible, white, fluffy mass of fibre. Expecting the world to produce real benefits is compared to the fruitless vigil of the parrot that ignorantly expects something delicious to come out of the silk-cotton tree's pod.

25 Do not get confused by abandoning the state of clarity, the swarupa-perspective, and then pursue appearances, taking them to be real. That which appears will disappear, and hence it is not real, but the true nature of the one who sees never ceases to exist. Know that it alone is real.

26 Since the world appears only to mind-consciousness, the distortion produced by maya, and not to the Atma-swarupa-consciousness that exists as the source of that mind, can there be any world that truly exists?

27 Do not be confounded by this worthless samsara that appears as a dream in the deluding [sleep of] ignorance. In a mind that has an intense desire for reality — consciousness, the supreme — it is impossible for the binding mental delusion that arises in the dense darkness of ignorance to remain.

In Memoriam

Smt. Kamalalakshmi Viswanathan, 1938-2023

Srimati Kamalalakshmi Viswanathan attained the feet of Sri Bhagavan on February 24, 2023, after a brief illness. She was born in a very religious and musical family in 1938, the eldest and only daughter with two younger brothers.

She lost her father at age 7, and grew up bearing many responsibilities. She was unwavering in her support and guidance of her younger brothers. She excelled in her studies and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Botany and Sanskrit and a Master's degree in English Literature. She retired as the manager of the North Zone in The Life Insurance Corporation of India.

Smt. Kamalalakshmi's family initially came to Arunachala Ashrama in New York in 2004 in Rego Park and thereafter moved to be close to the current location in Jamaica Estates. She was a very frequent visitor to the Ashrama in New York and actively participated in all the events there. Her knowledge and effusive nature made her well liked by everyone she met. She was instrumental in putting together the lyrics of *Bhaje Ramana Namam*, the devotional recording by Sangeetha Swaminathan that is treasured by devotees all over the world.



Smt. Kamalalakshmi Viswanathan

Even after moving to Florida in 2016, she was in constant touch with the New York Ashrama as well as Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai.

She is remembered by her loving husband Sri P.N. Viswanathan, her daughter Dr. Vasudha Viswanathan, along with her husband Srikant and their daughter, Sritha. She is also survived by her two brothers.

May Sri Bhagavan's grace be always with her and her loved ones.

Updates

For the latest information regarding Arunachala Ashrama, New York, please visit our [home page](#). 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) is welcoming overnight guests. Guests are required to make arrangements ahead of time by contacting novascotia@ashrama.org

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.

We do request that you postpone your visit to the ashrama if you are having signs of cough, cold, fever, etc. During your stay, should you develop signs or symptoms of illness, you will be asked to isolate away from the ashrama.

As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. Visitors will be required to wear masks while inside the temple. Tel: 902 824 2297

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

THE MAHARSHI is a free bimonthly newsletter published by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, New York. To subscribe online or access all back issues, please visit "www.arunachala.org/newsletters/". Books, DVDs and audio CDs on Sri Ramana Maharshi are also available at "www.arunachala.org/bookstore/".

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