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Upadesa Undiyar Commentary by Sri Muruganar *Introduction and Translation by Hari Moorthy*

Sri Bhagavan's composition Upadesa Undiyar (also known as Upadesa Saram in Sanskrit) is a beacon of light given by the Master to illuminate the path of atma vichara for his devotees. Sri Muruganar, whose life was entirely surrendered to Sri Bhagavan, was instrumental in bringing forth this divine upadesa for the welfare of all. Sri Muruganar also wrote a small prose commentary on this monumental work, which is to be found in Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham, Volume 9. A brief introduction to and background of Upadesa Undiyar is given by Sri Hari Moorthy, who has also graciously provided a translation of Sri Muruganar's commentary. This is the first English translation that we are aware of.

Muruganar's composition of his magnum opus *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* was not just a random poetic endeavor but a profound spiritual experience guided by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi himself. Bhagavan's guidance to Muruganar led him not only to structure his work along the lines of *Tiruvvasagam*, adhering to its thematic sections, but also to adopt a similar poetic meter in his compositions, mirroring the spirit and style of *Tiruvvasagam*.

In *Tiruvvasagam*, there exists a section known as *Tiruvundhiyar*, dedicated to extolling the glory of Lord Shiva, particularly in the sacred town of Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu. *Tiruvundhiyar* comprises roughly 20 verses, numbered from 295 to 314. Each of these verses expresses the profound spiritual experiences and unwavering devotion of the poet-saint, Manikkavacakar, to Lord Shiva. *Tiruvundhiyar's* uniqueness lies not only in its lyrical beauty but also in its profound simplicity.

Muruganar, who was firmly established at the feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramana and deeply inspired by the

spirit of devotion found in *Tiruvundhiyar*, sought to capture a similar depth of spiritual fervor in the rendition of his own compositions. In *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, sections 99 and 100 bear the appropriate title of *Tiruvundhiyar*. These two sections collectively contain a total of 144 verses, meticulously crafted in a style reminiscent of the verses found in *Tiruvvasagam*. The first section is particularly noteworthy, as 30 of its 137 verses were composed directly by Bhagavan Sri Ramana himself. In contrast, the second section consists of seven verses composed by Muruganar. The story of how Bhagavan came to compose these verses is a fascinating and enlightening one.

Unlike other compositions written by Bhagavan, *Upadesa Undiyar* had a set format and a plan to it. Bhagavan remarked about it once:

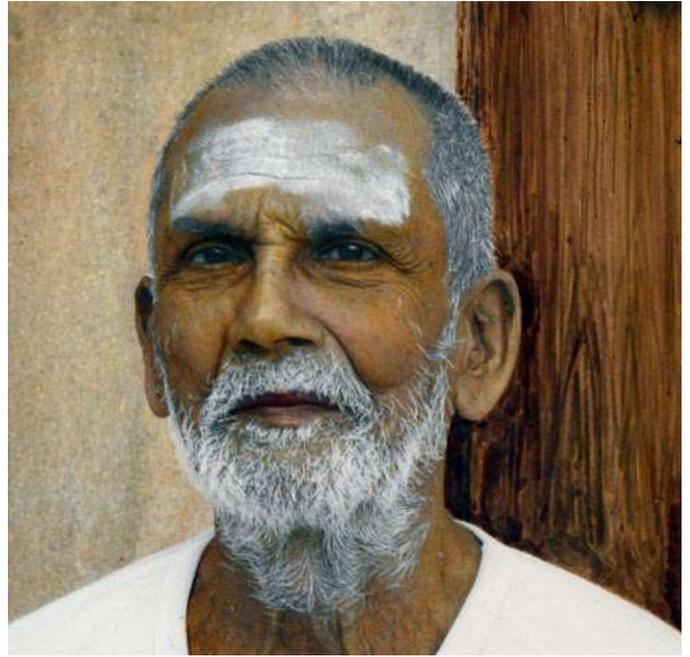
Upadesa Saram [Upadesa Undiyar] alone was written with a scheme and a set purpose and at a stretch, at one sitting. That was because Muruganar had set a limit of one hundred stanzas for the entire theme of the poem and in it had planned that the

particular subject of Upadesa should be confined to thirty stanzas, of which again he had already composed three stanzas, leaving thus only twenty-seven stanzas within the brief compass of which I was required to deal with the whole subject.

In the accounts shared by Bhagavan Sri Ramana, we can clearly discern the unwavering determination exhibited by Muruganar in his quest to have Bhagavan compose the verses of *Upadesa Undiyar*. These verses, as Bhagavan explained, serve as a divine dialogue in which Lord Shiva imparts profound spiritual wisdom to those residing in the Daruka Forest who believed that worldly actions were the sole means to attain desired outcomes. In the context of this divine narrative, Lord Shiva is symbolically represented as Lord Ramana, the embodiment of spiritual knowledge and realization. Arthur Osborne provided a concise summary of the legend depicting Lord Shiva's interaction with the sages in the Daruka forest.

There is an ancient legend that a party of Rishis or Sages, living with their families in a forest, were practicing karmas, that is ritualistic and devotional acts and incantations, by which they had attained supernatural powers and hoped eventually to obtain supreme Deliverance. In this, however, they were mistaken. In order to convict them of their error, Siva appeared before them as a mendicant, accompanied by Vishnu in the guise of Mohini, a beautiful lady. All the Rishis fell in love with Mohini and their wives with Siva, with the result that their equanimity was disturbed and their powers began to wane. Seeing this, they decided that Siva must be an enemy and conjured up serpents, a tiger and an elephant that they sent against him. Siva, however, merely took the serpents for a garland and, slaying the tiger and elephant, used the skin of the former as a loincloth and of the latter as a shawl. The Rishis thereupon, recognizing his greater power, bowed down before him and besought him to give them Upadesa or guidance. Only then did Siva explain to them their error, teaching that action cannot bring release from action, that karma is the mechanism, not the cause of creation, and that it is necessary to go beyond action to contemplation.

In pages 368 - 371 of *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham Volume 9*, Muruganar offers a concise prose explanation of the entire *Upadesa Undiyar*. Despite



Sri Muruganar

the wealth of translations and interpretations available for this profound poetic work by Bhagavan, this particular brief prose commentary does not seem to have been previously translated into English. Presented here is a humble attempt to translate Muruganar's commentary word into English.

— Hari Moorthy

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi composed *Upadesa Undiyar* to assist devotees of varying levels of spiritual maturity. The following presents the essence of his teachings in *Upadesa Undiyar*. Among billions of lives on Earth, virtually everyone desires to gain something. Many of these individuals are materialistic, seeking to acquire material wealth as their primary goal. In pursuit of these material gains, they often mistake actions (karma) as the sole means to attain these rewards, leading them to believe that action is of utmost importance.

They liken this belief to how a calf, placed in a vast pasture with hundreds of cows, can swiftly find its mother. They argue that just as the calf can find its mother, actions can also yield rewards by tracing back to the doer with benefits. Nevertheless, as a calf is a living entity, and actions are inanimate, this metaphor is not suitable, making their argument incorrect.

Actions result in benefit for the doer solely because the Lord, who embodies perfect wisdom, ordains it. Hence, both actions and their outcomes are

expressions of His will, as He is the ultimate source. Even if actions may temporarily fade due to other sensory pleasures, they often linger as latent desires (vasanas) in seed form within the heart of living beings, only to resurface and compel further actions, thus creating a cycle of action and reaction. This cycle doesn't lead the soul to attain its lasting bliss. However, by the divine will of Iswara, when these actions are performed by the soul without attachment to their results and only as an offering to the Lord, they can serve as a means to purify the soul's mind, paving the way to liberation. For such souls, with increasing priority, worshiping actions performed by the body, speech, and mind as pooja, japa, and dhyana, respectively, can be extremely beneficial, each more nuanced than the preceding.

Viewing everything as a manifestation of God and engaging in selfless work as a form of worship are excellent ways to honor Lord Ishwara. Devotional prayers hold merit. Even more effective is the practice of japa, particularly silent japa. Among the various forms of Japa, mental repetition is the most profound and is referred to as dhyana or meditation. Superior to sporadic meditation is continuous meditation, akin to the unceasing flow of a river or the uninterrupted flow of ghee. This continuous meditation strengthens the mind's connection with the Divine.

Within every contemplation, envisioning the Lord as one's true self, the atma, is the most profound form of reflection, ultimately leading to the realization of the Self. In this self-reflection, abiding in one's true nature is the essence of the ultimate surrendered devotion. The mind, abiding in its source, represents the culmination of the paths of Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana.

Controlling the breath is a tactical method to regulate the outwardly scattered mind. Using this approach, the mind can be stilled, much like catching a bird in a net. The reason the mind remains tranquil after breath control is that the mind, along with all its faculties, and the breath both originate from the same source. There are two forms of controlling the mind: one is temporary, and the other involves the permanent dissolution of the mind.

The mind, when controlled through breath regulation, should be focused on a single internal object. Such intense practice can lead to the dissolution of the

mind. When the mind completely disappears, the yogi, established in the formless reality, fully realizes the ultimate truth and remains in that state, free from any further obligations. This yogi has accomplished all the necessary work.

What has been discussed so far pertains to the devotional yogic path. What follows is the path of Jnana, intended for those who have achieved maturity after completing the actions suitable for a worshiper.

By disregarding distractions from external objects and recognizing the original source of awareness that encompasses all external phenomena, one attains the true realization of shining as the primordial 'I am I.'" When introspectively contemplated upon, the nature of one's mind reveals that there is nothing called 'mind'. This revelation is the path to salvation. The mind is a collection of diverse thoughts, with the thought that manifests as 'I' serving as the foundational thought underlying all others. Hence, this 'I' thought is referred to as the mind.

The 'I' thought, which appears in connection with other thoughts or objects, when examined introspectively to understand its origin, withers away in disappointment and dies crestfallen. This is the dissolution of the ego, and it is known as Jnana Vichara or self-inquiry. When the ego, which emerged as 'I', dissolves through self-inquiry, it is replaced by a spontaneous 'I-I' (I am I) in the heart, representing the genuine experience of the Self, the Atma. Unlike the previous contrived egoic thought 'I', the 'I-I' feeling radiates as the perfect expression of truth.

Even during sleep, when the egoic thought 'I' vanishes, the misidentification with the body as 'I am the body' persists. This misidentification stems from ignorance, and the ultimate answer to 'Who am I?' is the realization of the radiant 'I-I' within the heart. The body, all the faculties that engage in actions (Karma indriyas), all the faculties that perceive actions (Jnana indriyas), prana (the vital energy permeating the body), the mind, and the ignorance that fails to grasp reality are all inert, and thus none of them constitutes the Self. Therefore, the eternally alive and ever-present Self can only be experienced directly, shining as 'I am.' This is what is referred to as the ultimate reality. Therefore, 'I am' is identified as the Self. Because the Self alone shines as 'I am', both Jiva and Ishwara are identical. Any deviation from this highest

truth occurs solely due to the differentiating nature of a soul's mind, which erroneously identifies the body as the Self. Therefore, as Ishwara radiates as the Self, realizing Ishwara involves shedding this egoic sense and its attachment to the body, then discovering the truth of the Self. As there are not two distinct entities known as the Self but only one singular Self, being still (*summa iru*) and abiding in the singular Self is known as Self-realization. This is often referred to as meditation on the Self.

Since there is nothing beyond the non-dual Self, there is no knowledge or truth beyond the Self. Therefore, the wisdom that transcends both knowledge and ignorance is considered the ultimate truth. Tiruvalluvar calls this wisdom 'God Knowledge.' When the highest truth of the Self is explored through experience, it is discovered that the Self is boundless, without a beginning or an end, indivisible, and the

perfect essence of existence-consciousness-bliss (*Satchitanandam*). Without notions of bondage or liberation, dwelling in the Self is the ultimate bliss. This state is also known as the sacred service to God and the liberation of the individual soul. In summary, the supreme wisdom lies in recognizing the Self by shedding the egoic identity, leading to the comprehension of truth. Bhagavan encapsulated the quintessence of Vedanta and Siddanta, extracting butter from an ocean of milk in just two lines: "When the ego dissolves, what remains is the state of abiding as the Self which is becoming one with the Self. Realize this."¹

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya.

1. *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, v. 40.

Mother Alagamma

From *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*

by Suri Nagamma

Letter 102, 3rd April, 1947

The other day there was a talk in Sri Bhagavan's presence about old songs. Bhagavan said, "Mother used to sing 'Dakshinamurthy Stotra' and other Vedantic songs. They used to be full of meaning. Nobody cares about them nowadays but it would be very good if they were edited and published." On hearing that, I remembered about the old philosophic songs in Telugu also and felt that it would be beneficial spiritually to our ladies if those songs also could be edited and published, and wrote an article about it. In it I mentioned the "Appalam Song"¹ which assumed much prominence in Bhagavan's teachings to Mother Alagamma, and which is considered to be one of the best of songs. When I told Bhagavan that I wanted to send the article to the Telugu magazine *Griha Lakshmi*, he asked me to read it out to him. On hearing it, Bhagavan said, "There is a big story about this song," and at my request he was pleased to narrate it.

"In the early days when Mother came to stay with me in Virupaksha Cave, there was no cooking. If

Echamma or anybody else brought her any food she used to eat it, clean the vessels and then go to bed. That was all. One day she thought I had nothing special to eat and as I was fond of the twin appalams, she thought it would be a good idea to make some for me. Being well experienced, she could not refrain from making them. Without my knowledge she asked the Mudaliar old lady, Echamma and some others to get everything ready and one evening she set out, saying that she was going to the village. I wanted to see where she was really going, and so when she left, I waited silently under the tree outside. She thought I did not know anything. She went to several houses, collected all the required things in a big vessel and returned. I closed my eyes and pretended complete ignorance. She put them away carefully in the cave till all the visitors left. After nightfall, I had my usual meal and lay down pretending to sleep. Leisurely, she took out the wooden roller, wooden seat, loose flour and the balls of paste and commenced making appalams. There were about two to three hundred to be made. She could not prepare them 1. *Appalam in Tamil, Poppadam in Malayalam, Appadam in Telugu, is a very thin, round cake made of black gram flour fried crisp. The Appalam Song can be heard in its entirety on YouTube.*

all single-handed. I knew the job. So she quietly began telling me, 'My boy, please help me with it.' I got the opportunity I was waiting for. If I were lenient in this, she would start something else. I wanted to put a timely stop to it. I said, 'You have renounced everything and have come here, haven't you? Why all this? You should rest content with whatever is available. I won't help you. I won't eat them if you prepare them. Make them all for yourself, and eat them yourself.' She was silent for a while and again started saying, 'What, my dear son, please help me a little.' I was adamant. She continued to call me again and again. Feeling it was no use arguing any more, I said, 'All right. You make these appalams; I will make another kind', and I started singing this 'Appalam Song'. She used to sing a rice song, soup song and other such songs, all with Vedantic meanings. None appears to have written an appalam song. So I felt I should compose one. She was very fond of songs. So she felt that she could learn another song. By the time the preparation of the appalams was over, my song also was finished. 'I will eat this appalam (the song about the appalams), and you eat those that you have made,' I told her. That happened sometime in 1914 or 1915."

"What a big story! I wrote it in brief in this essay. This won't do," I said. "Why all this in that essay?" asked Bhagavan. I said I would write all this in my "Letters" (to my brother) and Bhagavan agreed to it. He was then reminded of some other incident, and said, "Some time after the 'Appalam Song' was composed, we all set out one day on giri pradakshina.

Someone said, 'Swamiji! Please tell us the meaning of the "Appalam Song"'. I started explaining thus: 'Take the words *'thanugani pancha kosa kshetramunnada* (in the body with the five elements)' — there are many authorities about the '*pancha kosa kshetra*' in the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Vedantic texts. I quoted them all. Similarly for every word there are many authorities. I gave them all, explaining their meanings and significance. We finished our round of the hill, returned to the Virupaksha Cave and sat down. I was still explaining. All the essence of the

Vedanta is incorporated in that one song. If properly commented upon, it would make a big volume by itself."

I said, "It would have been good if somebody had recorded all that when Bhagavan explained. Who can comment upon the song as Bhagavan does! Why not somebody record it even now?" "That is all very well!" he said laughing. After hearing all the commentary, I said, "I am not satisfied with this article and so I will not send it to *Griha Lakshmi*." Bhagavan said, "Just as you please," and resumed his talk, "Though I was remonstrating with my mother, she slowly started cooking, first a vegetable, then soup, and so on. We went to Skandasramam afterwards. She used to wander all over the hill, gather something or other, and say, 'He likes this vegetable and that fruit'. She took no notice of my remonstrations. Once, while she was coming to the jungle at this side, her saree got in a thorny bush. It was only then that this path was cleared of all bushes and the like. She said she would not leave me and go anywhere else. If she went anywhere, she was afraid that she might die there. She was particular that she should die in my arms. When Alamelu (Bhagavan's younger sister) built a new house in their village near Manamadurai, she begged mother just to go over there and see the house. She said it was enough if she (mother) just set her foot in it. But she never went. She declined because she was afraid that in case she fell ill there, there might not be trains running properly at that time to bring her back here and in that case, she might not die in her son's arms.

She used to say, 'Even if you were to throw away my dead body in these thorny bushes I do not mind but I must end this life in your arms.'" As he was saying that, his voice began to falter through emotion. My eyes got moist. I said, "Renunciation should be as firm as that with everybody." "Yes, yes!" he said and was silent.

Because she said, "Even if you were to throw away my body in these thorny bushes," we now see that the place of her burial is adorned by a temple fit to be worshipped by kings and emperors.

Forty Verses on Reality (Uḷḷadu Nārpadu) –
Part III
The Invocatory (Mangalam) Verses
Commentary by Lakshmana Sarma

We conclude Lakshmana Sarma's commentary on the second of the two invocatory verses of Sri Bhagavan's composition, Uḷḷadu Nārpadu. The translation has been done from the original Tamil by 'Kays'.

Exegesis: Brahman, the *nirguṇa* (attributeless) form that was dwelt upon in the first invocatory verse, appears with form and attributes (*saguna*) for the sake of yet other devotees. When the mind has resolved into the ego-less state, Brahman is *nirguṇa* and is *saguna* when the mind is functional. Then it is called *Īśvara* or God. Those who love God with pure devotion finally offer their very selves (ego-sense) to him, and they become the fit recipients of his grace. They obtain the same pure non-dual experience of being the self. The averment of this truth forms the content of the second invocatory verse:

Marāṇa-bhaya mikkula-vam makkaḷara ṇāga
Marāṇa-bhava millā magēṣaṇ – chara-ṇamē
Sārvar-taṅ sārvoḍu-tāṅ savuttṛār sāveṇṇaṅ
Sārvarō sāvā davar

Verse-split: marāṇa bhayam mikku uḷa ammakkaḷ araṅ
āha marāṇa bhavam illā mahēṣaṇ caranamē sārvar; tam
sārvoḍu tām sāvuttṛār; sāvū eṇṇam sārvarō sāvādavar?

Import: Virtuous people, seized with an intense fear of death, to sunder that fear, seek as refuge and surrender themselves unto the Lord who is free from birth and death. Thereby their ego ('I') along with their attachments (mine) gets destroyed. Will they, having become deathless, entertain the thought of death?

Commentary: Fear of death assails all at some point of time but passes away without any significant impact. The fleeting and so-called 'dispassion of the cremation ground' triggered by close encounters with death is short-lived and gets extinguished with enjoyment of objects of pleasure like good food, etc. But men of higher calibre made of sterner stuff do not allow the impact of death on them to wane but ever remember it, seek a remedy, and instantly reach the sublime goal.

For men ensnared by the *māyā* of the world and

enslaved by nescience, the painful woes of *samsāric* life are but stepping stones leading to the door to release. Bhagavan says: "When one dreams while asleep, so long as the dreams are pleasant and joyful, he will not wake up from slumber, but sorrowful or frightful visions shake him up to wakefulness. So long as the world appears to be a stretch of placid enjoyment the worldling (wallowing in *samsāra*) will not wake up from the *māyā* world to his own Truth. Only encounters with the tragic aspect of *samsāra* or fear of death can drive one towards deliverance." Though one is aware of the certainty of death, fear of death does not arise intensely until one comes face to face with it. The knowledge born out of personal experience that worldly life is riddled with sorrow turns one through dispassion towards *nivritti mārga*, the path of withdrawal from activity or of renunciation. A few highly illustrious personages at the very thought of or by merely pondering death turn to the path of knowledge and gain release. Lord Buddha and Bhagavan Sri Ramana, who bestowed this text, are two such.

A mind that has so turned away from the mundane world and its ensnaring holds comes under the sway of the grace of Lord Mahesa, who is free from birth and death. Such descent of grace turns the mind inward and unifies it with the supreme reality when the ego-sense – the 'I' rising in respect of the body – along with the *vāsanās* of various bonds it is impregnated with, gets annihilated. What is left behind is the deathless, immortal Self.

Ahamkāra or ego-sense is the wrong awareness that the body itself is the Self. So long as this wrong notion persists, the death of the body is considered one's own death. But that the very thought of death, is uprooted with the annihilation of this wrong awareness, is what is revealed here.

The heart of the teaching of this text is the quest of the Self, *Atma Vicāra* – the *sādhana* with release as the goal.

That which aids, prepares for and guides the *sādhana* is *satyāsatya vivēkam*, the discriminative knowledge between *sat* and *asat* or ascertainment through discrimination of what is real and unreal. The quest of the Self endows on one the attainment of the experience of the Self. ...concluded

Notes From the North Mountain

On Dec. 2nd, 2019, our dear friend Dennis Hartel, an inspiration to countless of Sri Bhagavan's devotees, retired into a life of solitude, taking the feet of Sri Bhagavan as his sole refuge. He wrote in an email to his friends at Arunachala Ashrama:

“After 48 years of living in His abode, serving Him through His devotees, I became possessed, so to speak, with a single aspiration. I felt Bhagavan telling me: “Now you need only to serve Me by remembering Me and abiding in Me, the Self. Hence, you need not continue to serve Me physically, but serve me by remembering Me and abiding in Me.”

In addition to this, I experienced an intense yearning to simplify my life, to depend on Him alone for all things, to take complete refuge in Him and leave it to Him to provide me with whatever is required to fulfill this aspiration, as enunciated by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita:

To those who always think of Me and engage in exclusive devotion to Me, to those whose minds are always absorbed in Me, I provide what they lack and preserve what they already possess. – Ch. 9, v. 22.

I have put all my faith in Bhagavan’s guiding presence and all of you should do the same and celebrate with me this new direction in my life. Does

not the Lord of the Universe sustain the trees of the forest, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea? Will He ever forsake me? How is it possible? And how wonderful it



Dennis Hartel

is to want nothing from the world but the opportunity to abandon all hopes, all fears and desires and rest in Him.”

As winter approaches Arunachala Ashrama, situated at the foot of the North Mountain here in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia, magnifying further the deep peace and quietness of its environs, we are remembering Dennis, our friend and guide. On his 75th birthday, Dec. 8th, 2023, devotees here and in Arunachala Ashrama in New York recalled with gratitude his life of dedication and devotion to Sri Bhagavan, with the certitude that wherever he may be, Sri Bhagavan's grace continues to sustain, inspire and protect him. Thank you, Dennis. We are all grateful.

Read the entire text of Dennis' email in [Jan/Feb 2020 issue of The Maharshi](#).

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 [events page](#).

The [Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama](#) 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.

Wearing a mask while inside the temple is optional. Visitors are advised to have health insurance. As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. Tel: 902 824 2297

Please see our [online satsangs](#) page for a listing of other centers that are offering satsangs.

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