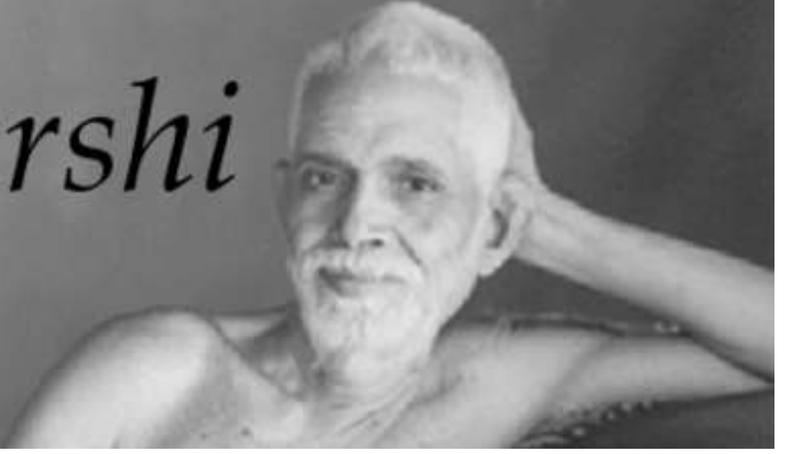


# The Maharshi



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Excerpts from *Upadesa Ratnavali*  
by Sadhu Natanananda

Translation and Commentary by Sri Hari Moorthy

*Sadhu Natanananda first met his guru Sri Ramana Maharshi on May 2nd, 1918 when Sri Bhagavan was at Skandasramam. The young man was immediately captivated by the divinity radiating from the holy form of Sri Bhagavan and he surrendered to him completely. Sri Bhagavan in turn poured his grace on Sadhu Natanananda, enabling him to dwell as the eternal, blissful essence extolled by Vedanta, the atman, one's own true self.*

*Sadhu Natanananda also had a close relationship with Sri Muruganar, whose work Guru Vachaka Kovai was published in 1939 and contains the essence of Sri Bhagavan's teachings. Listening to the questions of devotees, hearing Sri Bhagavan's replies, and seeing Sri Muruganar's poetic summations of the teachings (which were in the early days, written on scraps of paper and were notably unorganized), Sadhu Natanananda wished to preserve these gems and present them to Tamil devotees who perhaps were unfamiliar with the classic, beautifully dense poetry of Sri Muruganar. Hence his prose work Upadesa Ratnavali came into being. Containing 108 aphorisms, it was published in 1931. Thus, it can be considered a prequel to Guru Vachaka Kovai. Sri Hari Moorthy has lovingly translated this work from the original Tamil, and it was published recently by Sri Ramanasramam. We are pleased to share these inspiring excerpts from this new publication.*

**T**he Heart: Meeting Ground for Guru and Disciple

அவதாரிகை: குரு சிஷ்யர்களுடைய  
மனங்கலக்குமிடம் ஹ்ருதயமே யெனல்.

79. Meaning: The heart is where the guru and the disciple meet.

Explanation: The heart is an independent, singular, and omniscient source of all philosophies. It transcends the body, the subtle sound, and all dualities. Every soul's mind eventually subsides in that source. Abiding in the heart is the most effective path for a qualified disciple to listen to the guru's

words of wisdom. Minds engaged in external activities will find it difficult to abide in this source. Commentary: In this section, the author establishes the important, practical conclusion that a disciple meets the guru in the heart. While abiding in the silent heart, the guru is ever eloquent with wisdom. In all other states of mind, the disciple will find it difficult to abide in the peace of the Self, as the guru's eloquence will not be heard.

80. Guru's Grace Reveals the Supreme Path

அவதாரிகை: குரு சீடர்களின்  
கருத்தொருமையே பேரின்பத்திற்  
கேதுவாமெனல்.

Meaning: Consensus of the guru and the disciple is the only path to supreme bliss.

Explanation: Between lovers, the mutual understanding that leads to their marital bliss comes from their interlocking gaze. Without the loving glance, words hold no meaning for them. Similarly, between the guru and the disciple, the understanding that leads to supreme bliss is achieved through their interlocking gaze; without it, words are of no use.

Commentary: The guru's supreme compassion comes from his graceful gaze. Without the guru's grace, the disciple cannot enjoy the supreme path of the Self. Sadhu Natanananda gives the example of two lovers whose love cannot be consummated without their eyes locking in love.

### 81. Tracing One's Path Back

அவதாரிகை: வந்த வழியே சொந்தநிலை  
சேர்த்தற்கேதுவாமெனல்.

Meaning: Returning the way one came is the path to reach the place of one's sacred abode.

Explanation: The individual soul, which emerges from the supreme abode of the Self into the material world, needs to retrace its steps to realize the permanent peace of the Self. Why? An individual soul has two paths: one of walking with attachments towards the material world, and the other of walking with detachment away from it. Attachment to the material world is external focus, while detachment from the material world is internal focus. The former leads to the cycle of birth and death, and the latter leads to permanent liberation. Therefore, by avoiding actions that create more attachments, and by following the path of liberation, a spiritual aspirant (mumukshu) fulfills their purpose. Searching for and abiding in the root of the ego is Self-inquiry, which leads to liberation.

### 82. Forgetting to Retrace the Path Is Bondage

அவதாரிகை: வந்த வழியின் மறதியே  
பந்தத்திற்கேதுவெனல்.

Meaning: Forgetting the path by which one has come is the cause of bondage.

Explanation: Jivas experience all binding effects, including repeated births and deaths, because they forget the path by which they have come. Why? This becomes obvious with the following story.

In the ashram where Sri Ramana Maharshi resided, there was a small chimney. One day, a small bird somehow ended up being caught in this chimney. Except for the lower part, all other sides of this chimney were secured with an iron net. Contrary to its nature to fly freely in the vast sky, the bird was trapped within this confined space and wanted to flee from the moment it got there. Despite its restless efforts, it couldn't free itself because, forgetting the path by which it had entered, it kept searching for other potential exit points.

Witnessing this, Sri Bhagavan explained a profound truth to those around him to help them realize and appreciate their current state of being.

“Look how this bird is caught in this prison, contrary to its nature to be out in the open with full freedom. It doesn't know how to escape. Driven by panic and fear, it is undergoing a great deal of suffering. Likewise, jivas, which naturally belong to the vast space of the Self, are caught in the finite body. Because of this imprisonment, they undergo immense suffering, not knowing how to escape, bound by desires. The hard work done by this bird does not yield its desired results because it cannot find the path through which it came inside and keeps looking upwards. Similarly, jivas who struggle for freedom do not realize the benefits of their efforts because they cannot follow the path by which they came and instead look externally for happiness. Birds always try to go upwards, thinking that this is the path to freedom. Likewise, jivas tend to look outwards, thinking that this path will bring them happiness. However, by turning their attention inwards and traveling on the inner path, their liberation is instantly available and guaranteed.”

This upadesa (spiritual advice) alone is sufficient for the spiritually inclined to realize the truth.

### 85. Pretentious Acts of the Jivas

அவதாரிகை: ஜீவனது கூத்து  
கோபுரந்தாங்கியினது கூத்தை நிகர்க்குமெனல்.

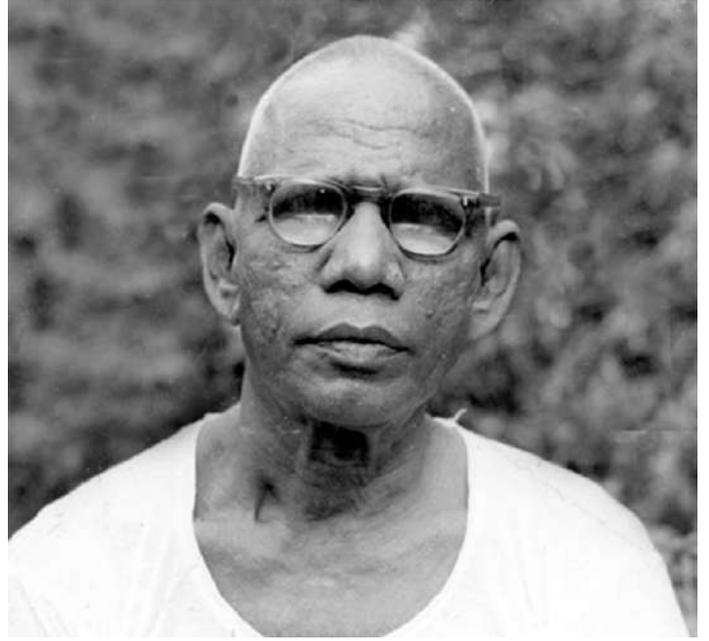
Meaning: The dance of the jiva can be compared to sculptures that appear to hold up the weight of a grand temple.

Explanation: Driven by total ignorance and not knowing the truth of the Self, jivas dance, believing they are both the doers and the enjoyers of their actions. This dance is like sculptures that stand in front of a temple, appearing to hold the weight of the entire structure. Why? Only the earth bears its own weight in addition to the weight of the large temple. However, the decorative statues pretend to shoulder this entire burden. Similarly, the Self sustains everything, including itself, while the jivas claim to shoulder the actions of the omnipotent Ishvara as their own.

Commentary: Jivas are neither the doers of work nor the enjoyers of its fruits. Everything happens as ordained by Ishvara through his grace alone. However, jivas, driven by their egos, assume ownership of their actions. Due to this misidentification, they continue to suffer the consequences of their actions – experiencing happiness and misery – while forgetting the truth of the Self. In reality, the Self always provides the sustenance for all actions. Sadhu Natanananda explains this truth clearly using an excellent analogy: statues standing in front of temple structures appear to carry the entire weight of the temple, but in reality, the weight is borne by the earth. Similarly, the Jivas' perceived actions are sustained by the Self.

### 86. The Comedy of Jivas' Self-Assertion

அவதாரிகை: ஜீவன் சக்தியின் காரியங்களைத்  
தனதாகக் கொண்டகங்கரித்தல்  
நகைப்புக்கிடனா மெனல்.



*Sadhu Natanananda*

Meaning: It is laughable that jivas take ownership of all actions of the divine power (shakti).

Explanation: Every day, jivas suffer through the waking-dreaming states because of their past karmas as bestowed by the divine power. They are then absorbed in the ignorant darkness of deep sleep. To further experience the consequences of their karmas, they transition back to the waking and dreaming states only through the intervention of the divine power. Without the divine power helping them awaken, jivas do not have the strength to move between these states. Without realizing their inert nature and helplessness, they claim ownership of all actions once the divine power has awakened them, as if they possess the power to act independently. This is as laughable as a person without legs claiming, “If someone can lift me up, I can go and win against all enemies in warfare.”

“A puppet tied with strong ropes dances until the ropes are cut off. Can it dance when the ropes are cut off? O Lord, I dance and walk only because of Your grace. Without Your grace, what work can I do alone? O Lord of Kanchi, Ekambara, pray tell.”

– Pattinathar

“When you make them dance, who can’t dance?  
When you control, who can’t be controlled?”

–Tevaram

### 87. Jivas Misled by Material Objects

அவதாரிகை: விஷய போகங்களுக்கு  
ஜீவணூணாகிறா னெனல்.

Meaning: Jivas waste their energy through the enjoyment of material comforts.

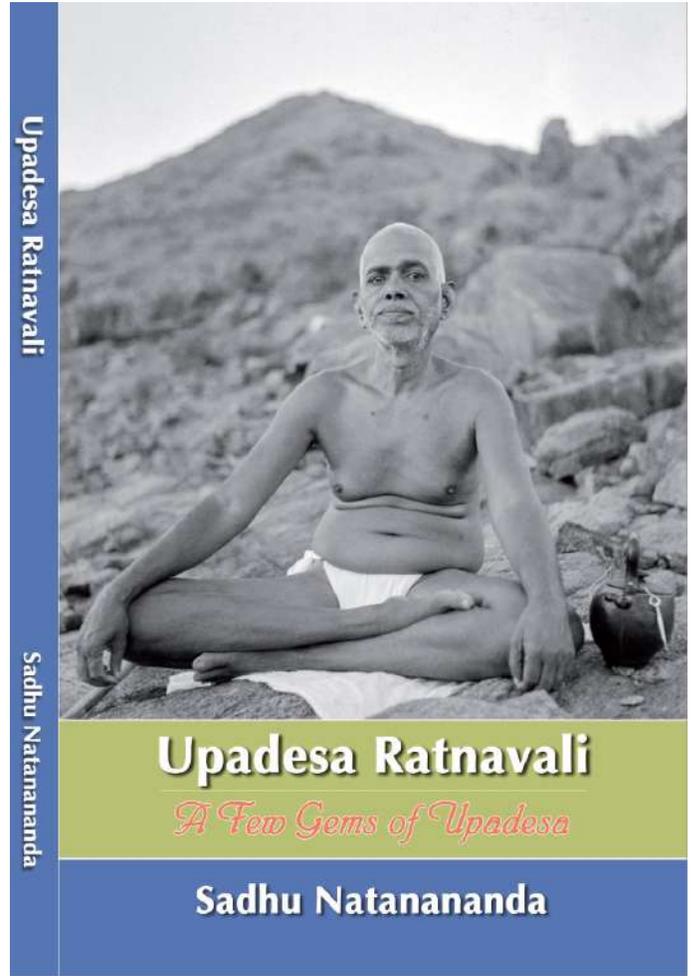
Explanation: All material comforts enjoyed by jivas consume their energy without their awareness. Not knowing this truth, jivas run around desiring worldly and heavenly objects. Why? Inert objects only bring misery. With such characteristics, all material objects and things, bound by time and space, appear in the Self on a temporary basis and disappear. A shining marble reflects the color of a beautiful flower as if it were the color of the marble. Likewise, these material objects reflect the character of the Self, which is of the form of consciousness-awareness-bliss. Furthermore, these objects conceal the truth that their true character is illuminated by the Self and obscure the fact that there is nothing present apart from the Self. Jivas are completely misled by these objects, which divert their attention away from the truth of the Self, ever available as their own innate nature. Therefore, jivas expend their energy on objects, away from the truth of their Self.

### 88. Detachment Is Essential for Spiritual Aspirants

அவதாரிகை: மனதைக் கவரக்கூடிய  
விடயங்கள் உடனே த்யஜிக்கப்படவேண்டு  
மெனல்.

Meaning: All objects that attract the mind should be rejected.

Explanation: If spiritual aspirants (mumukshus) discard any pleasures they might enjoy from material objects during the practice of Self-inquiry, their pursuit of wisdom will remain unaffected. However, even a small desire for any object can become a



*Upadesa Ratnavali*

significant obstacle to their spiritual progression. Without hesitation, they should sever attachments to such objects as if they were dust, which will allow them to proceed further on their path.

Commentary: Sadhu Natanananda has built a compelling argument for why spiritual aspirants should remain steadfast in their resolution not to enjoy or be beholden to any material objects. No matter how small a desire for an object may be, that desire can become an obstacle in the path of Self-inquiry because the nature of objects is to hide the truth. Jivas are naturally attracted to external objects due to the power of maya, so one must be very careful not to let their attention slip away due to these objects.

...To be continued

Yoga Vasiṣṭha  
Translated by Swami Venkatesananda  
Prahāda's contemplation

*Prahāda was a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu, who, pleased with Prahāda's loving worship and complete surrender, instructed him to be constantly engaged in enquiry into the nature of one's own reality.*

Therefore, the Lord appeared before him and said:  
Prahāda, may you be endowed with the spirit of enquiry till you rest in the infinite Brahman, so that all your delusions might come to an end and you may attain the highest fruit (blessing).

Vasiṣṭha continued:

Having said thus, the Lord disappeared. Prahāda concluded his worship and after singing hymns in praise of the Lord, began to reflect in the following manner.

Prahāda contemplated:

The Lord had commanded, "Be continually engaged in enquiry." Hence, I shall engage myself in enquiry into the self. What am I who speaks, walks, stands and functions on this elaborate stage known as the world – I should find this out to begin with.

Surely, I am not this world which is outside and inert, composed of trees, shrubs and mountains. Nor am I the body which was born on account of the movement of the life-breath, and which seems to live for a very brief moment. I am not the sound (word or name or expression) which is apprehended by the inert substance known as the ear, which is but a momentary movement of air and which is devoid of form and devoid of existence. I am not the sense or experience of touch, which is also momentary and which is able to function only on the account of the infinite consciousness. Nor am I the sense of taste based on the ever changing and restless tongue ever devoted to its objects. I am not the sense of sight (or form) which too is momentary and which is but a perversion of the understanding of the seer. Nor am I the sense of smell, which is an imaginary creation of the nose and which has an indeterminate form.

Hence I am devoid of all these imaginary qualities. I have nothing whatsoever to do with the functions of these senses. I am pure consciousness. I am peace beyond thought.

I am the all-pervading reality which is devoid of objectivity and therefore percepts and concepts. I am pure consciousness. It is by the consciousness that all things, from a little pot to the mighty sun, are perceived. Ah, I now recollect the truth that I am the self which is omnipresent, in which there is no conceptualization. It is by that self that all the senses and their experiences are made possible, for it is the inner light. It is because of that inner light that these objects acquire their apparent substantiality.

It is thanks to that inner light of consciousness, which is utterly free from all modifications, that the sun is hot, the moon is cool, the mountain is heavy and water is liquid. It is the cause of all the effects that manifests as this creation, but it is itself uncaused. It is on account of that inner light of consciousness that the characteristic nature of the diverse objects arises. Because it is formless and because it is the cause of all effects, this universe has arisen in it, with all its diversity. It alone is the cause of the manifestation of the trinity (Brahmā the creator, Viṣṇu the preserver and Śiva the redeemer); but it is not itself caused.

I salute this self which is its own light, free from the duality of the knower and known, subject and object. In it exists all things of this universe, and into it they enter. Whatever this inner self thinks of, that happens everywhere – apparently as an external reality. When thought of by this consciousness, these things seem to come into being, when thought of as non-existent, they reach their end. Thus, all these infinite objects appear in the limitless space of consciousness. They appear to grow and appear to diminish in the light of the sun.

This self of inner light of consciousness is unknown and unseen. It is attained by those who have purified their heart. But by the holy ones it is seen in the supremely pure cosmic space (dimension) of consciousness.

This self exists in an undivided state in the three worlds – from Brahmā the creator to the blade of grass, as the infinite and self-luminous consciousness. It is one, without beginning and end. It exists as the all, as the inner experiencing of all mobile and immobile beings.

Truly, it was but the infinite consciousness that existed. How has this finite, limited ego-sense arisen in it, without justification and support? What has given rise to this delusion which expresses itself in the

statements like 'This is you' and 'This I am'? What is this body and what is bodilessness, who lives and who is it that dies? Surely, my ancestors were of little understanding in that they abandoned this infinite consciousness and roamed this little earth. What comparison is there between the vision of the infinite and this fearful vanity known as world glory, which is full of dreadful desires and cravings? This vision of the infinite consciousness is pure and of the nature of supreme peace, and it is surely the very best among visions that are possible in this universe.

I salute my own self which is the indweller of all beings, which the consciousness freed from objectivity or conceptualisation and which is the intelligence in all beings. I am the unborn in whom the world-appearance has vanished. I have gained what is worth gaining. I have triumphed and lived triumphantly. I find no delight in reigning over a kingdom, abandoning this supreme felicity of cosmic consciousness. Fie upon those wicked demons who revel in the filth of worldly life. ...

The infinite consciousness simultaneously pervades the three periods of time and experiences the infinite worlds. It envelopes all, it sees all, and because it is undisturbed and unmodified, it alone remains at all times.

This consciousness experiences simultaneously what is sweet and what is bitter; it is tranquil and at peace. Because this consciousness is in itself free from all

modifications (concepts and percepts), and because it is subtle and experiences all things at the same time, it is ever at peace and homogeneous, even while apparently experiencing the diversity of all phenomena.

When the apparently transformed becoming resorts to or rests on that being which has not undergone any modification, the former is freed from sorrow.

When consciousness abandons the perception of the three modes of time, when it is freed from the bondage of objectivity or conceptualisation, it rests in utter tranquility. It is as if it were unreal, because it is beyond description. Hence some people declare that the self does not exist. Whether there is the self (Brahman) or not, that which is not subject to dissolution is the supreme liberation.

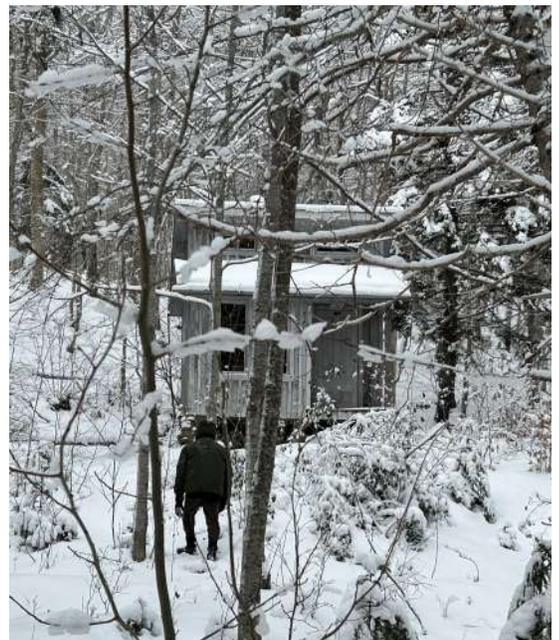
He in whom the ghosts of cravings and hostility have been laid and the mirage of ignorant thinking has been dispelled by the cloud of true inner awakening, he alone lives. For how can there arise concepts and percepts in the infinite consciousness which alone is?

I salute the self! Salutations to myself – the undivided consciousness, the jewel of all the seen and the unseen worlds! You have indeed been reached very soon! You have been touched, you have been gained, you have been realised, you have been raised above all kinds of perversions, you are what you are. Salutations to you. Salutations to you – myself, Śiva, the Lord of lords, the supreme self.



*The play of seasons at the forested 'Skandasramam' at Arunachala Ashrama, Nova Scotia, is readily apparent in these contrasting views.*

*Constructed by Dennis and Jim Hartel and friends in 1995, it has stood the test of time, drawing devotees to its silence and stillness. As one approaches its threshold, Bhagavan's grace is effortlessly experienced.*



My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana  
by A. Devaraja Mudaliar

One summer afternoon I was sitting opposite Bhagavan in the Old Hall, with a fan in my hand and said to him: "I can understand that the outstanding events in a man's life, such as his country, nationality, family, career or profession, marriage, death, etc. are all predestined by *karma*, but can it be that all the details of his life, down to the minutest, have already been determined? Now, for instance, I put this fan that is in my hand down on the floor here. Can it be that it was already decided that on such and such a day, at such and such an hour, I shall move the fan like this and put it down here?" Bhagavan replied, "Certainly." He continued: "Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it is to pass through was already decided when it came into existence."

Thereupon, I naturally exclaimed: "What becomes then of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions?"

Bhagavan explained: "The only freedom man has is to strive for and acquire the *jnana* which will enable him not to identify with the body. The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by

*prarabdha* (destiny based on the balance sheet of past lives) and a man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions, or be detached from it and be a mere witness of its activities."

This may not be acceptable to many learned people or philosophers but I am sure I have made no error in making the gist of the conversation that took place between Bhagavan and me. Though this answer of Bhagavan may upset the apple-cart of our careful reasonings and conclusions I am satisfied that what Bhagavan said must be the truth. I also recall in this connection the following lines that Bhagavan once quoted me from Thayumanavar on another occasion: "This is not to be taught to all. Even if we tell them, it will only lead to endless discussion."

It may be well to remind readers that Bhagavan has given his classic answer to the age-old question "Can free will conquer fate?" as follows in his "Forty Verses": "*Such questions worry only those who have not found the source of both free will and fate. Those who have found this source have left all such discussions behind.*" The usual reaction of Bhagavan to any such question would be to retort: "Who is it that has this fate or free will? Find that out and then this question will not arise."

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### 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 [nova-scotia@ashrama.org](mailto:nova-scotia@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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