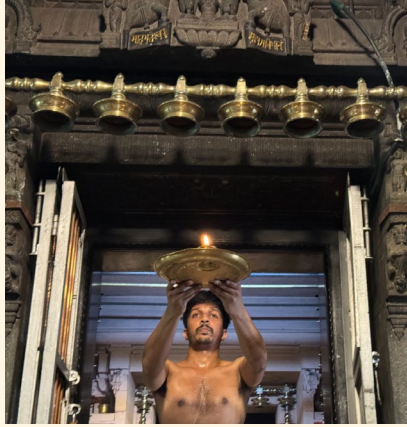


# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

APRIL 2024  
VOL. 18, NO. 4



Photos from D. Thiyagarajan



## Saranagati



APRIL 2024  
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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

In this April issue we continue with the life story of T.K. Sundaresa Iyer whose gripping prose and formidable storytelling abilities capture memorable intimate moments with Sri Bhagavan in the Hall.

Also in this issue, we conclude the series on excessive internal chatter which modern researchers have correlated with cardiovascular disease, anxiety and depression. Bhagavan cautioned us about unwanted thoughts in the mind and told us that our progress in the spiritual life hinges on tackling them.

For videos, photos and other news of events, go to <<https://sriramanamaharshi.org>> or write to us at <[saranagati@gururamana.org](mailto:saranagati@gururamana.org)>. For the web version: <[http://sriramana.org/saranagati/April\\_2024/](http://sriramana.org/saranagati/April_2024/)> or <<https://saranagati.arunachala.org/issues/>>.

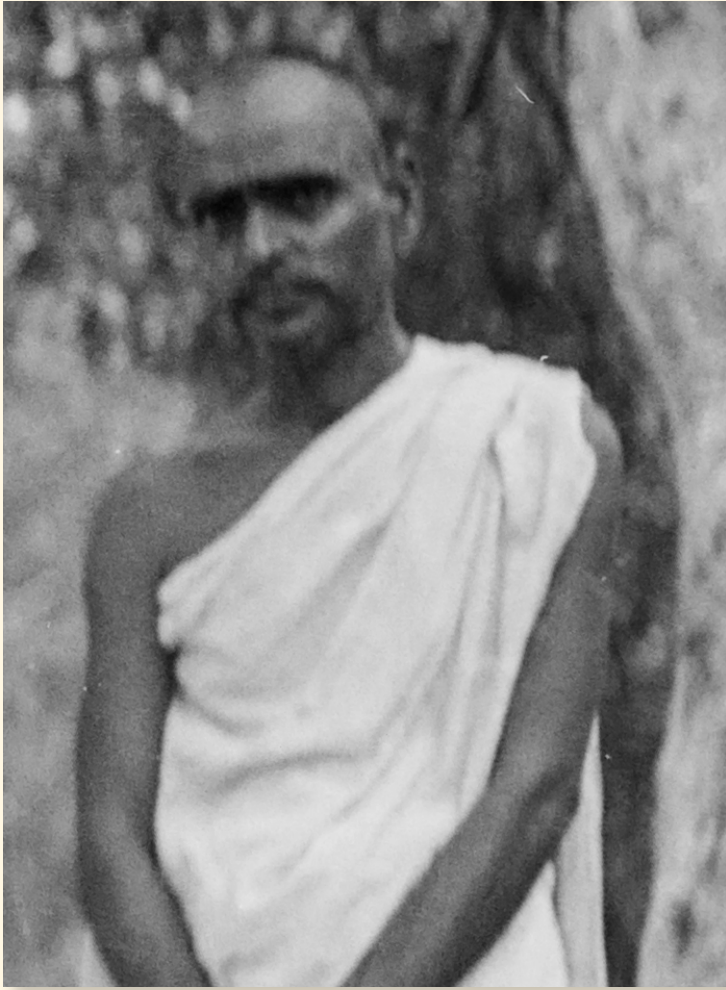
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*Saranagati*

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## Calendar of Ashram Events

2nd April (Tue) Jagadish Swami Day	23rd Apr (Tue) Full Moon
6th Apr (Sat) Pradosham	5th May (Sun) Pradosham
9th Apr (Tue) Telugu New Year	6th May (Mon) Sri Bhagavan's 74th Aradhana
14th Apr (Sun) Tamil New Year/Nirvana Room Day	13th May (Mon) Punarvasu
15th April (Mon) Punarvasu	20th May (Mon) Pradosham
17th Apr (Wed) Rama Navami/Maj. Chadwick Day	22nd May (Wed) Full Moon
21st Apr (Sun) Pradosham	31st May (Fri) Maha Puja





## IN PROFILE

### T.K. Sundaresa Iyer (pt. III)

#### The Headmaster

TKS continued his teaching work in the local school and even had as students Bhagavan's grand-nephews—V. Sundaram, V. Ganesan and V. S. Mani. If a gifted educator pours his heart and soul into every lesson, igniting minds with passion and curiosity, TKS was a natural. This is surprising since his heart only beat for the moments he spent at the feet of the Master. Yet, it was the intensity of his longing to be

in Bhagavan's presence that allowed him to inspire, guide, and uplift students. But if TKS considered himself ruined by God and not fit for anything other than sitting in the darshan hall oblivious to the world outside, it was Bhagavan who nudged him along in his duties as schoolteacher. TKS narrates the following:

*After breakfast one fine morning, I was in the assembly of Sri Bhagavan's devotees. Sri Bhagavan was expounding some remote point in philosophy; He went on talking till it was 10.45am, and we were all so much absorbed that we had no sense of time, space or causation. At 10.45am, Sri Bhagavan turned to me and said, "Why, fellow, you have not left for the school yet!" I said, "But, Bhagavan, it is Sunday today!" Bhagavan gave a hearty laugh and said, "It is a funny way you do your school work. It is Monday today. Run up; your Headmaster is waiting there at the gate, looking for you to come." So I hurried, and reached the school exactly at the stroke of the recess bell. As I reached the gates, I found the Head-master standing at the entrance to the school, with his usual pinch of snuff in his hand, his eyes turned towards the temple, and eagerly expecting me to come. As I neared him, he said the same as Sri Maharshi: "Why, Sir, you have forgotten that it is Monday, and perhaps you required the Maharshi to remind you that today is a working day!" I answered neatly, "Too true Sir; I did forget, and Sri Maharshi himself sent me for duty!" My Headmaster laughed heartily, and answered, "Go to your classroom!"<sup>1</sup>*

#### Spiritual Progress

Though possessing marks of an earnest person of faith and ever ready to make the needed sacrifices to deepen his connection with Bhagavan, TKS was never satisfied with the spiritual progress he was making. Bhagavan was keenly aware of TKS's unwavering commitment and supported him in every way. TKS tells of an exchange with Bhagavan in the hall:

*In May 1933, on my 36th birthday, after the usual bath and prayers, I sat in Sri Bhagavan's presence in a pensive mood. I addressed a prayer in the Tamil viruttam style to Sri Bhagavan, complaining: "O Bhagavan, I have completed three and a half decades, and yet have not had the experience of the real You. Pray let me have this day the touch of Your Grace." Handing over this slip of paper I prostrated before him. Bhagavan bade me sit down and gazed steadily at me; I was still in a pensive and meditative mood. Suddenly, I lost body-consciousness, and was absorbed in Sri Maharshi. I was turned inward, and the voice of Bhagavan bade me see whatever I desired, I felt that if I could have the*

<sup>1</sup> *Call Divine*, vol. 3, 1st September, p. 18.





*darshan of Sri Rama my life would have been fruitful, as I was very much devoted to Sri Rama. I had then immediately a darshan of Sri Rama, with Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrugna and Hanuman. The ecstasy of the vision defied description; I simply sat on, with Maharshi perhaps gazing on me without my being aware of his gaze. Two hours may thus have passed in pin-drop silence, lost in the vision, until it vanished. I prostrated at the feet of Sri Maharshi, with tears of ecstasy in my eyes and my hair standing on end.*<sup>2</sup>

### Life in the Hall

As TKS's daily life revolved around the moments spent in Bhagavan's presence, he hung on every word and catalogued in his prodigious memory all that took place, affording later devotees the chance to participate in the life in the hall as experienced by those present.

One day a 30-year-old Italian that TKS remembered as Mr. Noles, well-read in Eastern and Western philosophy and eager to imbibe the spirit of Sri Maharshi's teachings, was in the hall, and took great interest in Bhagavan's words. TKS narrates:

*Sri Bhagavan was telling of the state of a jivanmukta; how he is the ever-aware Self, the Witness-Consciousness transcending space and time and causation, the fullness of Being; how he is the non-actor, non-enjoyer, and yet at the same time the greatest of actors, the greatest of enjoyers, and so forth. Well, this was too much for Mr. Noles to digest. He put a straight question to Sri Bhagavan: "Are you, or are you not, now talking to us?" By an answer to this question he wanted to know how Sri Bhagavan expressed himself consistently. Others around eagerly watched for what would fall from Sri Bhagavan's lips. Sri Bhagavan gave Mr. Noles a meaningful look and said in a most emphatic tone: "No, I am not talking to you." In an ecstatic mood Mr. Noles echoed: "No; Sri Bhagavan is not talking to us; Sri Bhagavan simply IS." Devotees greatly enjoyed this conversation.*<sup>3</sup>

### Bhagavan the Storyteller

TKS loved seeing the way a great story from the scriptures could engage Bhagavan's attention and how the Sage would recite it in a most gripping way. By all accounts, Bhagavan was a master storyteller. In narrating a story, he transcended the boundaries of words and transported the listener to worlds where joy

and sorrow intertwined. Bhagavan wielded a natural power of narrative and each of his words was infused with deep meaning. Additionally, the intonation of his voice would naturally rise and fall for emphasis, his gestures would paint vivid pictures of heartache and triumph in a most natural way, allowing the tension of the plot to build until even the storyteller himself was moved to tears. TKS describes one such scene:

*Once someone placed the Periapuranam in Tamil prose in Bhagavan's hands, and he began reading out of it. Devotees never missed a chance of being in the Hall on such occasions. Bhagavan began to read out the life of Kannappar, the great devotee-saint. He read incidents about his early life, and how he went to the forest and found Kudumi Denar, the Sivalinga, his Lord, up the Kalabasti Hill in the Chittoor District. Then he told how Kannappar worshipped the Sivalinga with water carried in his own mouth, flowers taken from his own hair, and the well-cooked meat prepared for his own meal—knowing no better and having no better to offer his beloved Lord. The way in which the ordained priest, Siva Gochariar, resented the intruding defiler of the sacred Sivalinga was so characteristically brought out by Bhagavan, with his own explanations of the rites and the meanings of the mantras used in the worship, that it enriched the recital greatly to the benefit of his listeners.*

*Then came the scene of scenes, when the Lord in that Sivalinga tested Kannappar and incidentally revealed to Siva Gochariar the intensity of the forest hunter's worship from a place of hiding. He saw the unexpected trickling of blood from one of the eyes on the Sivalinga; he saw Kannappar running to and fro for herbs and treating the Lord's eye with them. Then he saw how, finding all his efforts in vain, Kannappar plucked out one of his own eyes and applied it to the Lord's wounded eye. Then, seeing the treatment was effective, he began to dance in ecstasy. When Bhagavan came to the part of how Kannappar began to pluck out his second eye to heal the second eye of the Lord, and of how the Sivalinga extended a hand to intervene, saying "Stop, Kannappar!" Bhagavan's voice choked, his body perspired profusely, tears gushed from his eyes; he could hardly utter a word, and there was pin-drop silence in the Hall. All were dumbfounded that this great jnani could be overpowered by emotion and ecstasy at the great hunter-saint's devotion.*

*After a while Sri Bhagavan quietly closed the book, dried the tears from his eyes with the ends of his towel, and laid the book aside, saying, "I can't go on any further."*

*We then realised the import of his words in Aksharamanamalai: "Having become silent, if one remains like a stone, can that be called real silence?" His blossomed*

<sup>2</sup> *At the Feet of Bhagavan: Leaves from the Diary of T. K. Sundaresa Iyer*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.





*Heart had in it the perfect warmth of devotion, no less than the supreme light of Knowledge.<sup>4</sup>*

## Kindness to Trees

Another scene from the hall involved an exchange Bhagavan had with a worker while passing by:

*K. was cutting down ripe coconuts from the trees while Bhagavan was returning from the gosala. Bhagavan asked K. what rod he was using to cut the coconuts, whether it had a bamboo bit attached to the end or an iron point. K. remarked that it was only an iron sickle. Bhagavan asked: "Will not the trees be hurt by the sharp iron? Would not a rod with a bamboo bit at the end serve the purpose?"*

*Bhagavan did not wait for a reply. K. went on with his work, nor did he change his instrument, but continued to use the iron sickle every morning. A week later, at the same time as on the previous occasion, while K. was cutting down coconuts, one fell on his forehead and struck his nose very painfully. This news was reported to Bhagavan. While expressing pity for the man, Bhagavan also remarked: "Now he will know what it is to be hurt, and also how much his iron sickle must have pained the uncomplaining trees." How characteristic this is of Bhagavan who finds all nature pulsating with life and light!<sup>5</sup>*

## The Crumbled Dosais

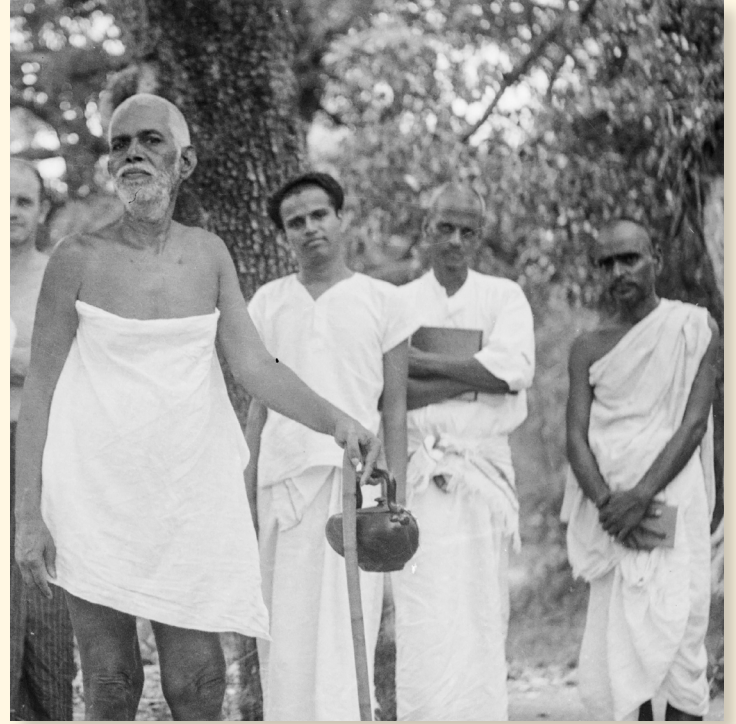
Another encounter took place in the days when Bhagavan was residing in the Golden Jubilee Hall. TKS recounts:

*My wife had prepared rice flour enough to prepare a hundred dosais. At about 12noon she had put the iron pan over the oven and was going to pour the first ladle of flour over the pan and spread it evenly. Gratiified at the love with which she was preparing these dosais to be taken and offered to Sri Maharshi, I said in an ecstatic mood, "All broken pieces of dosai must be offered to Chokkanatha". Of course, I had in mind the story of the old woman, Puttu Vanichi and Chokkanatha of Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam equating Bhagavan Sri Maharshi with Chokkanatha Siddha. As if it were the result of my utterance, everyone of the dosais broke and not one came out whole. My wife and I were greatly surprised to see the heap of one hundred dosais all in broken pieces. We gathered them and carried them to Sri*

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> This is a reference to Manikkavasagar's life story where Mahesvara appears as the labourer to help the elderly lady fulfil the king's decree, namely, that each household provide one labourer to help dam the flooding river. It is agreed that the labourer, Lord Siva in disguise, will receive only the broken pieces of candy-cone as his compensation. But all the cones turn out to be broken.



Bhagavan, Venkatoo with TKS in Palakotthu, ca. 1945

*Maharshi, along with an appropriate quantity of chutney. It was about 2 pm when we reached the hall. Bhagavan gave us a beaming smile and asked us what it was that we carried with us. My wife told Sri Bhagavan the whole story and added that Chokkan must consume all the broken pieces. Bhagavan said, "Chokkan must have the broken pieces", stretched his hand and took a big handful of the broken pieces of dosai from the basket and put it on to a plate. My wife added chutney and Bhagavan had a hearty meal of it while the abundant remaining dosais were distributed to the devotees that were there.<sup>7</sup>*

## The Pontiff

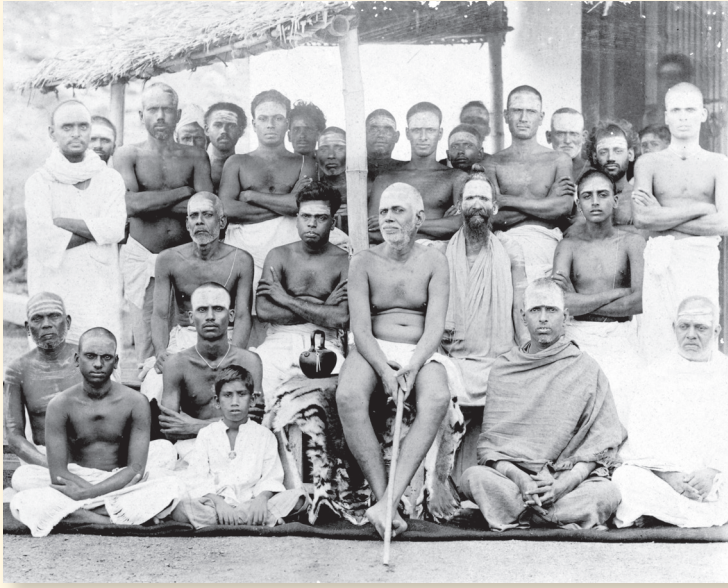
The reader will remember that TKS was in charge of Ashram correspondence and would go through letters sent to the Maharshi and draft replies for Bhagavan's consideration.

In 1948, about a year or so after the above account, the Ashram office received a letter from His Holiness Sri Sankaracharya of Puri. TKS enumerates:

*The Pontiff expressed his desire to pay a visit to Bhagavan and to get certain doubts cleared. Incidentally, the letter categorically mentioned the doubts and asked that they might be solved in a reply letter. The chief of these referred to certain Agamic texts:*

<sup>7</sup> *Call Divine*, vol. 3, 1st September, p. 17.





Bhagavan with devotees; TKS is standing at far left, ca. 1940

respect for his exalted position; the Ashramites spared no pains arranging for his reception and accommodation. Sri Bhagavan was seated in the Golden Jubilee Hall; and eager spectators had gathered in their hundreds. Quite near to Bhagavan's sofa a small dais was arranged, with a deer's skin for the Pontiff to sit on, and then he was escorted to the presence of Bhagavan. On coming before the Maharshi, the teacher greeted him with his staff, as is the custom of sannyasis, and was shown the seat arranged for him. He was surprised that so prominent a seat had been allotted; he asked the dais to be removed, spread the deer's skin on the ground, and sat on that. After a preliminary talk, the teacher repeated the main question of his letter and asked Bhagavan to enlighten him on the meaning of this phrase. Bhagavan gave him his look of Grace and was silent, and the teacher was all receptive. No words were exchanged between them. Thus, over half an hour passed. Then Bhagavan smiled and remarked: "What is there to explain? You know it already; this text represents the very essence of Divine Knowledge — when Nature unites with the Person, then the visible becomes all shadows. It is as meaningful as pictures on the cinema screen, and then will be experienced the state of All-Self as seen... The one Being-Consciousness which projects all this out of Itself, sustains and then withdraws again into Itself. Having swallowed all the shadows of this world, Itself dances as the Ocean of Bliss, the Reality or Substratum of all that is, was and shall be. And then It is 'I'."

The teacher seemed to have received new light and life; he was all joy. He said that in all his wandering through the country he had tried to be enlightened upon this mystery; but it was only here that he got the secret and the truth of light as explained in the texts of the Vedanta. So overwhelmed with joy was he that he repeated his visit to Bhagavan when the Matrubbhuteswara Shrine was consecrated, and personally supervised all the rituals in the yagasala and saw to it that everything went off all right.<sup>9</sup> —

(to be continued)

<sup>9</sup> *At the Feet*, p. 44.

"Hara Gauri Samyogat ... avachayah yogaba<sup>8</sup>" and the Teacher asked what this 'avachayah yogaba' is. I placed this letter before Bhagavan and asked what answer should be sent to him. Bhagavan simply laughed and said that the questioner knew it all himself and needed no fresh light, but that he would know it better when he came in person. A reply was accordingly sent along these lines. After some days the Acharya visited the Ashram. Bhagavan gave instructions for him to be received and attended to with all care and

<sup>8</sup> The reference here is to Lord Siva and the Goddess Parvati and would seem to be a subtle allusion to the marital bond (*samyogat*) but in actuality, according to Bhagavan, ultimately points to the hypostatic union between the manifest and divine. This is a point that has perplexed seekers and philosophers down through the ages, not least of all this pontiff. If the human person and the Atman are rooted in the union of form and consciousness or the body and the mind, how do these two distinct realms interact with one another? Bhagavan's cogent response deftly circumvents the delicateness in the language of bridal mysticism and skillfully goes to the heart of its meaning rooted in vedantic teaching and the 'essence of Divine Knowledge'.

## In Focus: Special Edition

For the newly released, *In Focus: Special Edition*, see: <https://youtube.com/embed/IKxXh7T16Mg>.  
For the March edition, see the following: <https://youtube.com/embed/IKxXh7T16Mg>.—





## RAMANA REFLECTIONS

### Managing Internal Chatter (pt. II)

**I**N the first segment, we looked at the complexity of the fast-paced modern world with its multitasking and decentralised high-speed communication which may contribute to an incessant internal dialogue. No doubt the digital revolution has afforded numerous conveniences, but the quality of community and family life as well as the overall calm of the individual human mind have suffered. If we live in an age that is increasingly cut off from inner life where our attention is drawn outward in multiple directions, and if modern urban populations are increasingly looking to pharmaceutical medicines, device use, alcohol use,

and activity addictions to mitigate psychological and emotional stress, then calming the mind through the consolidation of attention is an urgent need in the present generation.

Throughout the centuries, meditation has been seen as the royal road to healing the confusion of the heart and revealing the hidden world of the psyche wherein lie intuition, wisdom, faith, and the direct experience of what lies beyond. If human suffering is attributable to karmic residues—*vasanas*, *samskaras* and *kleshas*—the laser-like awareness born of deep meditative absorption is the requisite means for healing them. If consumer culture conspires with our baser longings to evade the poignant regions of the heart and cover them over with stimulation of one sort or another, Bhagavan's inquiry is employed as the principal means to uncover them for the purpose of their healing.

But wherefore the need for moments of interior investigation and silent repose? The answer is quite simple: *the roots of mental and karmic affliction are often unconscious*. In brief, practising self-inquiry teaches us that we cannot overcome what afflicts us until we can see and know it for what it is.

Carl Jung once commented that, *enlightenment is not turning darkness into light but making what is hidden conscious*. But what is it that is hidden from consciousness? It is the shadow of the unconscious—our narcissism and self-partiality—which must be seen and known to be transformed and healed. If the English words *narcissism* and *narcotic* are etymologically linked, both stemming from the Greek root *narkē* meaning 'numbness' or 'torpor', narcissism is a form of slumber or ignorance.

Here we gain a clue about the way we direct our attention toward a made-up internal world that we hope would give us protection against the threatening external world. Inquiry and the investigation of states has relevance here in helping us know more about this made-up internal world and what may lie beneath it.

But such work often makes us uncomfortable. Without really knowing why, we prefer a mind filled with ideas and images. We resist inquiry because it leads us to the quandary within, whereas endless chatter covers over our difficulties and fills uncomfortable spaces with objects of thought, giving us something to do and relieving us of apprehensions caused by a mind that is empty.





A proverb reads, *where there is a flood of words, sin will not be absent.*<sup>1</sup> Why? Because the flood of words is meant to cover over and drowned out the conflict within, namely, the dissonance we feel between propping up a separate self, all the while knowing deep down there is no such entity. The gap between the actual and stated motivations underlying our thoughts, words and deeds,<sup>2</sup> makes us uneasy. We begin to see the distance between the way we conduct our lives and the way we believe we *ought* to conduct our lives.

Words are born of the desire to come free of present conditions. They reach out toward the future and automatically assume that the future will be an improvement over the present. But Sri Ramana favours the silence of the present and invites us to risk the uncertainty that may attend a newly discovered spaciousness of a mind at rest. If words allow us to devise explanations and models of the world, meditation inquiry shows us just how mistaken they can be. Words as representations, no matter how sophisticated, cannot penetrate the depth of the mystery of the Beyond, the teacher argues. Rather only the silence born of inquiry can penetrate and inhabit the mystery to know it firsthand. Therefore, chatter highlights the cleft between the restless grasping mind and the mystery that can only be known through stillness free of unwanted thoughts. Sri Ramana tells us:

*All thoughts are inconsistent with realisation. The correct state is to exclude thoughts of ourselves and all other thoughts. Thought is one thing and realisation quite another. Give up thoughts. You need not give up anything else.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 10:19.

<sup>2</sup> Plato once said, *Whatever has the power to deceive, also has the power to enchant.*

<sup>3</sup> Talks, §41

## The Cycle of Dependence

Stress through excessive rumination is correlated with physical disease. Chatter is most often an adaptive response to difficult internal or environmental conditions, an effort to resolve painful feelings. Such efforts bring only temporary results. If digital culture has gotten us into the habit of indulging our attention to ward off unpleasant internal circumstances, we come to see that such habits are bound up with the law of diminishing returns. In other words, such indulgences, like all addictions, only work for a time and compel us to repeat them with ever increasing intensity, imprisoning us in a cycle of dependence.

Obsessive mental rumination is marked by a frenetic and cyclical quality, brooding over the same themes dozens of times. If some imagine that the inner voice and its murmurings are useful, or even that they are *me*, are *mine*, are *myself*, on further investigation are discovered not to be as benign as one might have thought. Studies consistently reveal the connection between health issues and attentional wandering. Subjects who tend toward obsessive self-narratives that make frequent use of personal pronouns such as 'I', 'my' and 'mine' suffer a high incidence of cardiovascular disease and clinical depression.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, if excessive mental activity were symptomatic of disease rather than just something we do, we might feel inclined to listen to what the meditative traditions have to say about it.

Attentional wandering is a close relative of flitting attention and involves involuntary shifts of focus toward unrelated thoughts. In the meditation setting we can observe that internal chatter is not just arbitrary data shuffle but self-propelled rumination

<sup>4</sup> See the work of George Bonano and Richie Davidson.

## Spiritual Instructions: Chapter 3, §10

### *The Existent and the Nonexistent*

*As the Self is existence and consciousness, what is the reason for describing it as different from the existent and the nonexistent, the sentient and the insentient?*

Although the Self is real, as it comprises everything, it does not give room for questions involving duality about its reality or unreality. Therefore, it is said to be different from the real and the unreal. Similarly, even though it is consciousness, there is nothing for it to know or to make itself known. —







born of an overstimulated psyche's need to off-load thousands of loose-ends of mental stimulus. In the intensive meditation setting one can see up close how the mind cycles through endless images, visiting each one momentarily before moving on to the next. Here we can see the healthy cathartic function of chatter but should be on guard against excessive chatter that occurs in loops and is believed to be promotive of anxiety.<sup>5</sup>

From a neurological point of view anxiety may be seen as compulsive shifts of focus from one object to the next in a ceaseless succession. Rapidly changing mental states can cause the subject to feel overwhelmed which invariably brings further triggering, never allowing the observer to pan back to disinterested monitoring.<sup>6</sup> Aimless internal chatter therefore acts like a low-grade anxiety that lies below the threshold of conscious awareness, yet bleeds us like leeches unseen, draining and enervating us. It promises us *a self* but diverts our attention ever away from *the Self*. By contrast becoming intimate with oneself in the meditation setting is the means to gather powers of attention into one harmonious direction.

If *purity of heart is the will to one thing*,<sup>7</sup> a mind divided and fragmented with outflows like a live wire in a pool of water is nothing short of dissipation. When asked about the signs of an aspirant's progress towards Self-Realisation, the teacher responded:

*The degree of freedom from unwanted thoughts and the degree of concentration on a single thought are the measure to gauge progress.*<sup>8</sup>

Thinking is just an aspect of nature, an extension of the body, perishable like the body, and not liberating or permanent. Thinking, rumination and word knowledge are the idols of ego-hood, Bhagavan tells us. Without them, there could be no ego. With them, we have all the fuel we need to keep the illusion of a permanent separate self alive and well.

5 The New York neuropsychologist George Bonano who spent decades studying the causes of anxiety studied in depth the link between clinical anxiety and flitting rotating attention.

6 Likewise, triggered states are often so overpowering that the subject does not even know what is going on but is carried away by the storm of strong emotions born of the trigger. Such moments in the meditation setting can be re-traumatising. A lot of progress has been made in recent years in greeting such states, such as with deep breathing practices that replicate traditional meditation practices.

7 Søren Kierkegaard.

8 *Talks*, §427



The distracted mind and its incessant chatter speak to the psyche's plea for care, like the cries of a baby. When such care is given within the heart, the crying stops and stillness resumes. But stopping the crying calls for true care, not to mention patience. Chatter serves as our assurance that we exist which also functions to stop the babies from crying, but only in a very temporary way. The Sage counsels us:

*Wise ones hold that dream and waking are both creations of the confused mind. Since both are filled with thoughts, names, and forms, we too conclude they are just the same.*<sup>9</sup>

Chatter may be related to the inability to tolerate uncertainty. If anxiety is born of flitting attention, then it is easy to see why internal chatter is so deleterious. Compulsive thinking is a form of low-grade chronic anxiety, and chatter invariably refers to the illusory 'I'. One 20th-century meditator stated it poignantly:

*You want to know why you are so unhappy. I will tell you: all that you do, and 99% of what you say, is about your [small] self—and there's not one!*<sup>10</sup>

Chatter may be born in part of refusal. Refusal of what? Refusal of the existing conditions of the heart and mind, subtle unconscious fears and anxieties, regrets about things said and done or not said and not done. Here chatter functions almost like a nervous tick, a mental form of rushing forward and running away from internal conditions such as difficult emotions and regrets. The Maharshi says:

*Thoughts are only vasanas, accumulated in innumerable births. Their annihilation is the aim. The state free from vasanas is the primal and eternal state of purity.*<sup>11</sup>

9 *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, Prof. K. Swaminathan, §555.

10 Wu Wei Wu.

11 *Talks*, §80.





## Investment in a Separate Self

Sri Ramana warns against gratuitous thinking and extols the practice of overcoming it and letting go of the illusion of a separate self. But if the notion of a separate self is so debilitating, why would we cling to it?

The desire to be seen by others is one reason. This may stem from early life development when the child is slowly seeking to gain separation from its mother. Developmentally the child needs to learn that it is separate from its mother. To make the separation healthy and pain-free, it seeks the mother's acknowledgement and validation. This natural process assumes separateness. But what if the child makes separateness a way of life and on its way to adulthood never reaches more mature stages of development?

The religious traditions can help us see that what was once a necessary phase in our growth must be left behind. In an era fraught with uncertainty, anxiety and stress, the natural course of maturation can get delayed and we never arrive at full emotional, psychological and spiritual maturity. An excessive longing to be seen by others, whether mother or father, neighbour or stranger, boss or employee,

friend or foe is maladaptive. We grew up with the understanding that a productive life meant gaining a place in the world, i.e. respect, honour, and recognition by our peers. While this is perhaps a healthy part of our life's path, if taken as the final goal, it is a recipe for misery. Working feverishly so that the image we project into the world is satisfying to would-be onlookers is vanity, and whatever satisfaction we gain from such recognition can only bring temporary happiness. Excessive craving to be esteemed in their eyes is ultimately flawed from the point of view of faith, and leaves us in a kind of perpetual adolescent longing that can never reach fulfilment. A lifetime of longing for recognition by others is a dead-end, a mere provisional life lived reactively. Here we may be tempted toward an independence from the demands life makes on us, ever refusing to grow up fully, ever banking on the hope that something new will come in to save us.

The Maharshi offers an alternative. Rather than striving to validate the separate self and be bound by its logic, he calls us to make use of inquiry to see that there is no such entity. The mind and its wants, and desires have no enduring substance and will pass away with the body at death. Discovering this fact directly may at first be jarring, even painful, but it sets us on a path that leads to true freedom.

Many of us get stuck in the practice of inquiry. We long for liberation from identification with the body and mind but in truth, we don't want it. Rather, what we want is the *illusion of a separate self to be true*. Why? Because it is familiar, is the only thing we have known all our lives, whereas egolessness is daunting, alien, and unfamiliar.

## Sri Ramanasramam Centenary Celebrations: Mumbai



On 23rd March, Ramanasramam President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan delivered an address in Mumbai with the Ashram board of trustees' member, Sri Janaki Raman, Swami Chidananda, founder head of FOWAI (the Flame of Who Am I) and Ramana devotees in attendance for the celebration of 100 years of Sri Ramanasramam. The event, held in the Ramakrishna Math, concluded with a Hindustani music recital by Sarod player Pandit Brij Narayan and Sarangi player Sri Harsh Narayan. Concluding remarks were made by trustee and Ashram Manager, Sri S. Krishnan. —





The tradition tells us that we must undergo a period of disenchantment where we begin to see that many of the things we revel in and call ‘our life’ are void of any ultimate meaning. The discomfort this presents us with can be therapeutic and help us become free from attachment to the body, the mind and the little self.

Chatter in the mind thus may be seen as a defence mechanism employed to counter evidence that points to the mind and body’s fleeting nature. Perpetual thought-streams born of the impulse to establish a little self that would seem to actually exist—and exist forever—are the roots of bondage, Sri Ramana insists.

Inquiry is designed to address cyclical obsessive behavioural styles, which include addiction, by attending the spiritual and psychological wounds that underlie them. The enemy is ultimately inattention, distraction, and non-awareness. Cultivating the capacity to know what is taking place within us at any given moment is already 95% of the remedy. Inquiry, if applied correctly, can be so potent and effective, so completely transformative, that it threatens to overwhelm us at first. We must be patient and diligent—diligent to face off with what is uncomfortable, and patient in not forcing ourselves unduly. We must be persevering when in the midst of the storms that can arise in deep meditation. We must be steadfast and sincere, trusting that our efforts will be attended by grace which will give us the strength and wisdom we need to carry on.

Following the curriculum Sri Ramana bequeathed to us is arguably the greatest undertaking. Repeated efforts at inquiry help us dissolve numerous residual afflictions, not least of all, the root affliction of a separate self and its attendant chatter. Blake once wrote, *if the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is.*<sup>12</sup> This would seem to mean that in the absence of perceptual

<sup>12</sup> William Blake’s, ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’.



distortions, we can behold the world for the first time in its pristine beauty. In *cleansing the doors of perception* through inquiry, we find ourselves gripped by feelings we don’t understand nor have any power to control. If we face resistance that makes us tense, nervous and restless, we may blame ourselves. But this is par for the course. How do we face such eventualities? We simply hang on to the teaching, soldier forth, and trust that the Master will extend his help in our time of need.

### Conclusion

Inquiry is getting to know oneself. The mind plays tricks on us and gives the impression that we carry within us something monstrous and demon-like, whereas the little self and its shadows are just mind-generated phantoms. We concoct dramatic story lines and feverishly prop up and defend them as if they were of paramount importance. We fear that if all were revealed, our charade would be exposed, and we would appear as someone altogether *less than*. But this is just the same game of the little self. The shame of an exposed little self is just the little self reinventing itself all over again. If we persist in inquiry, ego’s masks in all their manifold forms can be given up one by one.

## Announcement: Daily Live Streaming

Ramanasramam is live streaming the Tamil Parayana and Vedaparayana each day, Mon-Sat, 5-6.45 pm IST. To access Ashram videos, go to: <<https://youtube.com/@SriRamanasramam/videos>>





Self-inquiry affords us the opportunity to become intimate with what is hidden so that we might heal it. The ostensive inner demons only turn out to be orphaned children within. Being with oneself intimately requires courage as habit forces rear their ugly heads, mimicking devils. When boredom arises, we remember that it is a reflex born of long years of misuse of the mind. Turning our attention inward, we become peaceful and feel more at ease as if the storm that had overwhelmed us for so long is beginning to abate. A saint once wrote, *Restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.*<sup>13</sup>

At times we find we can stand on level ground and walk straight ahead. The former all-pervading, ever-present and unrelenting internal chatter and rumination born of fears and apprehensions, worry and frenetic preoccupation now have space around them. We discover an emerging lightness and stillness as we uncover layers of lament, disappointment, unresolved grief, self-denial, self-loathing, resentment, bitterness, unforgiveness, all that had once seemed so real. In their place comes a newfound joy, imperturbable, solid and natural. The storm begins

13 St. Augustine.

to break up, and we find that we are at the center and need not fear future storms, which will surely come. But now, because we have grounding in God, *a happiness that does not depend on what happens* begins to settle over us.<sup>14</sup>

If *the greatest sin is a superficial life*<sup>15</sup>, then life's greatest fulfilment is finding ourselves in the depths of our being. We bring this about by following in the footsteps of Sri Ramana. To miss the opportunity means that our lives will have been needlessly diminished.

None in their final hour ever lamented not having read more newspaper articles, watched more television shows, earned more money, had more possessions, sent more SMS's or posted more photos on Facebook. But millions down through the ages made the following lament in their parting sighs: *Lord, if only I had sought you earlier?* —

(series concluded)

14 Br. David Steindl-Rast.

15 Oscar Wilde.

## Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Mahasivaratri



When Parvati once asked the Lord which of the special days was his favourite, Mahadeva said the 14th night (*tithi*) of the dark fortnight (*krishnapaksha*) during the month of Magha, (mid-Feb to mid-March). When she shared this with friends, the word spread and the night came to be known as Mahasivaratri, 'the Great Night of Lord Siva'. The Great Night celebrations this year at the Ashram began with the first *kala puja* at 6pm on Friday, 8th March. —





## Obituary: Sri Oleg M. Mogilever



Sri Oleg M. Mogilever, affectionately known in Sri Ramanasramam as OM, was born in 1939 in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov and graduated from two universities in Leningrad, where he defended his Ph.D. thesis in as a mathematical engineering. In 1968 he married Nadezhda V. In 1979, he read Arthur Osborne's *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, the book that would bring him to Bhagavan. In 1991, after the publication of his first book on Sri Ramana, OM visited Ramanasramam. Two years later, he organized a group study of the Maharshi's teachings which came to be known as 'The Arunachala Centre for Self-Knowledge', a small ashram in St. Petersburg. Under OM's patronage various members visited Ramanasramam in the years that followed. He translated numerous books into Russian: *Collected Works, Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Letters, Day by Day, Maha Yoga, Vivekachudamani, Guru Ramana, The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words, Be as you are* and *Sri Ramana Gita*.

Oleg's wife passed away in 2007. As he was suffering a degenerative condition that affected his ability to walk, his daughters took care of him from that time forward and though his mobility was limited, he managed to come and stay in the Ashram for two months each year. After a long illness, Oleg Mogilever passed away in Jerusalem on 9th February 2024 at the age of 84. He is survived by two daughters and five grandchildren and will be remembered among devotees in Sri Ramanasramam for the forbearance with which he conducted his sadhana, and made the trip each year to Tiruvannamalai, even reenacting with his crutches Bhagavan's advent to Arunachala by foot. —

## Best Shot: Along the Giri Valam Road

The renowned French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson once said that there are 'decisive moments' in photography.

Pictured right are several generations of women from a single family as they sit enjoying their meal along the pradakshina path. Bhagavan was keen to point out that the face of Arunachala could be discerned in every human face. Here is a perfect example. We are reminded of the words of Sage Ribhu to Nidhaga, "I am special and I am common." But tell us, what year is this shot taken, in the present or in some former century? —



Dr. Carlos Lopez

