

Sri Ramana Maharshi on Bhakti

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, one of the most revered Indian saints of the twentieth century, is known for his advocacy of the Advaitic path of Self Enquiry as a way to liberation. But there is another path that he gave equal importance and credibility to, and that is Surrender or Bhakti.

Bhagavan has often said, "There are two ways: ask yourself 'Who am I?' or submit." By submit he meant submit or surrender oneself to the Divine will, which is the essence of Bhakti or devotion to the Lord. He has also often said, "Bhakti is the same as vichara (self enquiry)."

Bhagavan advocated the path of surrender to many of his devotees. Arthur Osborne, in his biography of Bhagavan — *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* — quotes Bhagavan as having said to one devotee, "Submit to me and I will strike down the mind," and to another, "Your business is only to surrender and leave everything to me."

In the same book, Osborne writes (about

a devotee):

"Venkatraman grew uneasy after some time at being given no sadhana — that is no practice to perform — and complained.

'And what brought you here?' Sri Bhagavan asked.

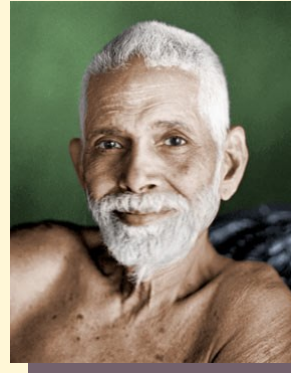
'Thinking of you, Swami.'

'Then that is also your sadhana.

That is sufficient.' And indeed, the thought or remembrance of Bhagavan began to accompany him everywhere, to become inseparable from him."

Bhagavan also encouraged chanting of the Divine names of the Lord as japa or meditation. To a devotee's question "Can advaita be realized by japa of holy names; say Rama, Krishna, etc.?" Sri Bhagavan answered categorically "Yes".*

Many of Bhagavan's devotees chanted Rama Nama and he always encouraged



them to do so. He once explained the significance of the name Rama.

"The 'Ra' stands for the Self and 'ma' for the ego. As one goes on repeating 'Rama', 'Rama', the 'ma' disappears, getting merged in the 'Ra' and then 'Ra' alone remains.

"There is in fact no difference between bhakti and vichara."

- Sri Ramana Maharshi

nature."*

Not only did Bhagavan prescribe the path of bhakti to some of his devotees, but he himself was the greatest of bhaktas. Many of his Tamil compositions like the *Aksharamanamalai* (Marital Garland of Letters) ooze with devotion to Arunachala and the Supreme Self, thus standing testimony to the fact that supreme bhakti is inherent in a true Jnani.

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2008 Spiritual Discourse Series (September-December)

It's that time of the year again! Ms. Poornima Kumarasami — who enthralled audiences in the US last year with her simple yet profound expositions of Sanatana Dharma-related subjects — is visiting us again this year. She will speak in various cities across the country.

Poornimaji, a disciple of Sri Sri Muralidhara Swamiji, is an expert upanyaskar who has earned acclaim across the world for her devotion, knowledge and eloquence. She is especially known for her ability to explain complex concepts in a manner that is easily understandable by her audience. She discourses (in English, Hindi or Tamil) on a wide variety of topics ranging from Srimad Bhagavatam to Stress Management. **For more information about her schedule see Page 4.**



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The Highest Virtue

Infinite Ways to Infinite Bliss

Excerpts from the discourses of Sri Sri Muralidhara Swamiji of Chennai, India.**

"All virtues are contained in the highest virtue – humility. Likewise, all vices are contained in the one vice – pride. The good qualities in a man do not shine forth if he lacks humility. A man may have many vices but if he is humble this shows him to be a person of good nature.

Adi Sankara commences his Shatpati stotra with 'Avinayam apanaya vishno.' Avinayam means pride. He prays to the Lord to remove his pride because God graces only those devotees who are devoid of pride.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavan Krishna, in His upadesa to Arjuna says,

*'Tatvittih pranipātena paripresh-
nena sevaya'*

- 'Jnanis know the Tattva. Serve them in all humility and clear all your doubts.'

During the (Pandavas') Rajasooya Yajna, the hosts desired to perform the first puja for Bhagavan Sri Krishna; but they could not find Him. After a search they found Him at the entrance performing pada puja to all the guests.

Adi Sankara has sung a hundred slokas on Ambal (Divine Mother) in his work, *Soundaryalahari*. But in all humility, he likens this work (singing the praises of Ambal) to giving 'argya' with a drop of water to the ocean that is vast stretch of water and showing 'karpooora harati' (lighting the camphor) to the Sun that is a ball of fire.

Kanchi Maha Periyava once gave a detailed discourse on Adi Sankara titled 'Egoless Acharya'. At another time, while speaking with his close devotees, Maha Periyava said, 'It is said that sanyasis (ascetics) should not possess any desire. But I have a desire.'

When the devotees asked, 'What is it?', Maha Periyava said humbly, 'I desire that none in the world should know that such a sanyasi lives.'

Many years ago, in a weekly magazine's Diwali special issue, the replies of dignitaries from various walks of life to the ques-

tion, 'What is the lesson learnt by you from the world?' had been published. This question was also placed before Maha Periyava. Maha Periyava said to them, 'Every moment the world is teaching me some lesson. But only I do not possess the required maturity to learn.' This shows his humility.

When Paul Brunton (a foreigner who came to India seeking a spiritual Master and author of the famous book, *A Search in Secret India*) sought an upadesa from Maha Periyava, Maha Periyava offered him the wonderful advice - 'Be humble. You will find what you seek.'

Sri Ramanuja, the founder of the Vaishnava sampradaya, at the time of departing from the world after the completion of his 'avatara karya' (work of the Incarnation) stood atop the Srirangam Temple tower. Innumerable bhagavatas, sanyasis and vaishnavas had gathered below. Sri Ramanuja said to them, 'As I was concerned only with the proper execution of the Lord's work, I might have been harsh to you all. My behavior, while making you involve yourselves in the service of God, might have upset you. Bhagavan will not give me a place in Vaikunta if my behavior had hurt even one of you, a bhagavata. I, therefore, beg your pardon.'

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who established Nama Siddhanta not only said that a bhakta should deem himself to be lower than a blade of grass but he also prostrated to everyone.

Ramana Maharshi has said that he prostrated mentally to everyone who came to have his darshan.

Some proud people who came to have darshan of Yogi Ramsuratkumar in Tiruvannamalai, in the early days, used to wonder if they should prostrate to him or not. Even while they stood wondering Yogi Ramsuratkumar would say, 'It is not difficult to bow down. I will do pranams.' and prostrate to those who had come for his darshan."



Pages of Inspiration

A Search in Secret India

by Paul Brunton



To get a chance to read this book is in itself a blessing. Paul Brunton's account of his travels in India in the first half of the twentieth century is a must read for anybody. It is miles apart from most books about westerners' experiences in India that abound today. This is the book that introduced Sri Ramana Maharshi to much of the western world.

But to say that this book will interest only spiritual seekers from the west is a grave injustice. In a mere 300 odd pages, Brunton has offered a vivid snapshot of the deeper India and has shown clearly what lies behind what the common man sees in her. His skeptical approach combined with a genuine urge to find the truth will appeal to questioners and believers alike.

"Spiritual sensitivity and scientific skepticism usually range in sharp conflict and flagrant opposition," says the author in his introduction. Yet, he has balanced these elements in perfect harmony. Each episode in this book tells a fascinating story – some that of magicians and some of genuine future tellers, and many of saints who dwell in perfect peace emanating the bliss that captures and quiets the busiest of minds.

This book was first published in 1934, and it is sad that the 'secret India' Brunton unearthed has actually gone deeper into the woods since then. Materialism is at an all time high now and the real yogis and sadhus seem to come out in fewer numbers. Still, this book shows that the true seeker's quest is never in vain, even though the answer may not be obvious at first.

It is hard to put this book down, as page after page each of Brunton's adventures seems to be more interesting than the previous one. And it is only apt that finally his faith is restored "in the only way a skeptic could have it; not by argument, but by witness of an overwhelming experience".

Mahishasura Mardhini—The Victory of Good

Mahishasura was a mighty asura who could change his form at will to that of a buffalo (*mahisha* in Sanskrit means buffalo). He terrorized and defeated the devas, and usurped the throne of Indra, the Lord of the devas.

The devas led by Brahma approached Vishnu and Shiva and appraised them of the situation.

The actions of Mahishasura caused intense anger in the Trimurtis - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. It is said that the flames of fire that gushed out of the eyes of the Trimurtis formed a mountain, brilliant like a million suns. Out of this mountain, Durga took shape as a goddess more powerful than all the gods.



Captivated by the awe-inspiring Durga, the Trimurtis and the devas bestowed on her their own characteristic weapons.

When Mahishasura saw Goddess Durga, he fell in love with her and sought to marry her. Durga promised to marry him if he defeated her in battle. A terrible combat ensued and continued for nine days. Finally, Durga assumed the terrifying form of Chandika (Kali) and pinned Mahishasura down with her foot, pierced his neck with her spear and cut his head off with her sword.

Navaratri or Durga Puja, a nine-day festival celebrated in all parts of India, is a celebration of the slaying of the demon Mahishasura by Durga. In some northern parts of India, Navaratri commemorates the victory of Rama over Ravana. But in both cases, it symbolizes the victory of good over evil.

Answers and beyond...

Spiritual questions answered by Sri Sri Muralidhara

Q: I wish to know if we can choose the Guru or does God show us one.

A: Many people believe that only with the help of Guru can one attain God. It is actually the other way round – only with the help of God can one attain a real Guru.

Q: What has one to do to get motivated to do japa, meditation?

A: By repeatedly reading about Mahatmas one gets motivated to do japa and meditation.

Q: In my life, I am facing problems all the time. How should I interpret this?

A: The more problems you experience, the closer you

are to God. Only in those circumstances, we are able to do bhakti wholeheartedly. Life will lose its liveliness if there are no problems. We have to thank God whenever we face problems. We should have faith in God that everything happens for a good cause that is not known to us.

Q: Having received upadesa from a Sadguru, a friend of mine was practicing the sadhana. However, he has now stopped doing sadhana. All advice to him to resume the sadhana falls on deaf ears. What is to be done?

A: You need not worry on this account! The upadesa of

a real Guru does not go in vain. At the appropriate time it will work, inducing him to take up the sadhana once more.

Q: Is 'spirituality' just a means of escape?

A: Unless one has a direct experience of spirituality it will only appear to be so. Without 'realization' confusions and doubts will not cease to be. Or one should have strong belief in Mahatmas' words. So long as one is self-centered nothing can be comprehended.

For more such answers by Sri Sri Swamiji, or to ask a question of your own, please visit the Nama Dwaar website at www.namadwaar.org.

Did you know?

Sanatana Dharma, the original name of what is now known as Hinduism, means Universal Righteousness. Sanatana means something which always is, never beginning nor ending, and is eternal in its very essence. Dharma (God's Natural Law) is the sustainer of the earth. Sanatana Dharma comprises of the spiritual laws that govern human existence.

Kids' Quiz—Navaratri

- Name the deity from whom Mahishasura, the demon, received the boon of near-immortality?
 - Lord Shiva
 - Lord Vishnu
 - Lord Brahma
- On which day does the worship of Devi Durga begin?
 - Mahasaptami
 - Dashami
 - Mahalaya
- What is the name of the fortnight in which Durga Puja is celebrated?
 - Devipaksha
 - Krishnapaksha
 - Suklapaksha
- In Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, families celebrate Navaratri by arranging
 - Dolls
 - Lamps
 - Flowers
- Children are given instructions to write the first few alphabets on rice (for the first time) on this auspicious day
 - Durgashtami
 - Mahanavami
 - Vijayadasami

Answers:

1-c, 2-a, 3-a, 4-a, 5-c

Events and Satsangs

San Francisco Bay Area Gokulashtami Celebrations

The San Francisco Bay Area satsang members celebrated a 10-day Gokulashtami Utsavam for the 8th consecutive year. The utsavam commenced on Janmashtami with chanting of the Hare Rama Mahamantra. Over the next 9 days, several kirtans were sung to entertain and enjoy the Lord. Govinda Pattabhishekam was celebrated with Bhagavata padanam and chanting of the divine name "Govinda Govinda". The final day of the celebration was Radha Kalyanam. The divine couple was beautifully bedecked with flowers. The satsang hall literally resembled a marriage mantap with children running around in joy. Radha Kalyanam was performed with Ashtapadis followed by Choor-nikam. The 10 day festivities ended with Sri Swamiji's songs and Hanuman utsavam. All satsang members thank the Lord and our Gurudev for His abundant blessings on this occasion.



Janmashtami was also celebrated with pomp in many other parts of the country, including Chicago and Houston. In Houston, a Nama Dwaar booth was set up at the city's popular Janmashtami fair which attracts thousands of people. To read reports of these and other celebrations, visit www.namadwaar.org/god/news.

Poornimaji's Satsang

City	Date/Venue	Contact
Chicago, IL	27 and 28 Sep Yaamini ZivanPrakash's Residence	Yaamini ZivanPrakash; (630) 747-6249
Chicago, IL	29 Sep-4 Oct Home satsangs	Yaamini ZivanPrakash; (630) 747-6249
Des Moines, IA	5 Oct, 2-4 PM Hindu Temple of Iowa	Yaamini ZivanPrakash; (630) 747-6249 Viji Damodaran; (515) 771-1617
Seattle, WA	7 Oct Priya Murali's residence Topic: <i>Satsang Mahima</i>	Priya Murali; (425) 445-0157
Seattle, WA	8-9 Oct Home satsangs	Priya Murali; (425) 445-0157
Seattle, WA	10-12 Oct Satsangs in area temples Please call for details	Priya Murali; (425) 445-0157
Fremont, CA	13-19 Oct Fremont Hindu Temple Topic: <i>Bhagavata Saptaham</i>	Sankar Venkataramani; (408) 507-0241

****Please call ahead to confirm the date, time and venue.**

Mass Prayer Satsangs for Hurricane Ike victims—Houston, TX

Millions of people have been affected by Hurricane Ike across the US. Houston, other parts of the Gulf coast and even places as far as Kentucky and Ohio have been devastated by the storm. Over a week after the hurricane, millions of people in Texas are still without power and other basic



amenities.

The Houston Nama Dwaar team, along with many others, performed prayers with the Mahamantra for hurricane relief at the Lakshmi Narayan Mandir on Sunday, 21 September.

More Mahamantra prayer satsangs for hurricane relief are being arranged in the Houston area during the weekends of 28-29 Sep and 5-6 Oct. For more information, please contact Sriram at (832) 515-1251.

Weekly satsangs are held regularly in the following cities:

**Bay Area, CA
Boston, MA
Chicago, IL
Cortlandt Manor, NY
Dallas, TX
Houston, TX
Los Angeles, CA
Seattle, WA**

A weekly telecon e-satsang is also held every Friday evening at 8:30 PM CST.

Email newsletter@godivinity.org for more information about the telecon satsang or satsangs in your area.



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