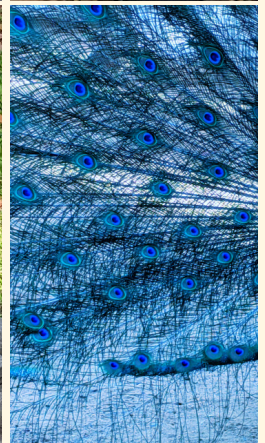
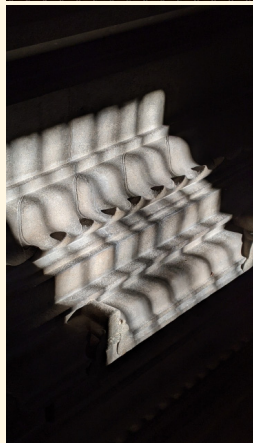
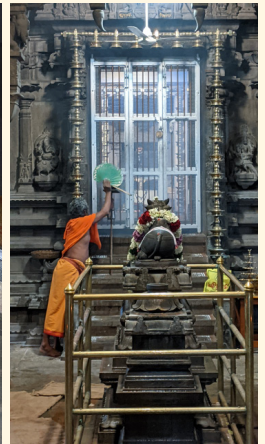


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

FEBRUARY 2021
VOL. 15, NO.2



Photos: John Maynard



Saranagati



FEBRUARY 2021
VOL. 15, NO.2

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The month of January began with the final segments of the Global Online Jayanti programme and included Swami Ramanananda's Day (see p. 5) and the continuation of daily Margazhi pujas. Sivaprakasam Pillai day took place on the 12th and Ramaswamy Pillai day on the 14th. Meanwhile the Ashram dared along with the rest of Tamil Nadu to gradually reopen as the roll-out of vaccines across the nation slowly gets underway (see p. 12). With the ringing in of the New Year, 2021 brings renewed hope.

In this issue, we take a look at the life of Dr G. S. Melkote, the Gandhian freedom fighter who was active in India's push for independence. Meeting Bhagavan in the 1930s during a time when he suffered a serious medical condition, Dr. Melkote was blessed not only to treat Bhagavan but be treated by him (see p. 3).

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org.

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

<i>In Profile: Dr G. S. Melkote</i>	2
<i>Events in Ramanasramam: Sw. Ramanananda Day</i>	5
<i>Events in Ramanasramam: Pongal Celebrations</i>	6
<i>Ramana Reflections: The Lever and the Fulcrum</i>	7
<i>Events in Tiruvannamalai: Samudram Gosala Puja</i>	10
<i>Events in Ramanasramam: Arunachaleswarar's Pradakshina</i>	11
<i>Events in Ramanasramam: Thai Krithigai Muttroddal</i>	11
<i>Events in Ramanasramam: Reopening the Ashram</i>	12
<i>Events in Ramanasramam: ChinnaSwami Day</i>	12

Calendar of Events Celebrated at Home

24th February (Weds) Punarvasu
26th February (Fri) Full Moon
3rd March (Weds) Sundaram Iyer's Day
11th March (Thurs) Mahasivaratri
19th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa
23rd March (Tues) Punarvasu
28th March (Sun) Full Moon

13th April (Tues) Telugu New Year
14th April (Weds) Tamil New Year
14th April (Weds) Nirvana Room Day
19th April (Mon) Punarvasu
21st April (Weds) Sri Rama Navami
26th April (Mon) Full Moon
9th May (Sun) Sri Bhagavan's 71st Aradhana





IN PROFILE

Dr G. S. Melkote

[Dr G.S. Melkote's was a case of someone who succeeded in the world while never neglecting his spiritual life and service to Bhagavan. If Bhagavan embodied jnana marga, he could also appreciate the karma yogi, a person who could make spiritual advances by virtue of his or her service in the world. Born in Brahmapur, Ganjam, Odisha, Dr Melkote was a gold-medallist in medical school and joined the Hyderabad medical service hospital. He became a freedom fighter in India's struggle for independence. Later, he became the first finance minister of Hyderabad State and ultimately was elected four times as a Member of the National Parliament from 1957. He presided over nearly fifty associations in the newly formed nation, e.g. Assam Plantation Workers Union, Delhi Transportation Union, Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi, etc. In 1973, Indira Gandhi took him along with her to the WHO conference in Geneva called, 'World Health 2000'

where Dr Melkote gave an address. He founded the Patanjali Yoga Research Institute in Hyderabad representing India in the International Labour Organization in Geneva.

In the following account of his productive life, we hear how he came to Bhagavan following numerous dramatic incidents in the struggle for Independence.]

IN the 1930's, Hyderabad was ruled by the Nizam of Hyderabad and was considered as a 'Nizam State'. As all political activity was banned, Dr Melkote went to Rajahmundry to attend a meeting where other eminent leaders, including Gandhi and Nehru, were in attendance. During a peaceful rally there was a 'lathi charge'. When Pandit Nehru was about to be struck, Dr Melkote interceded and held Panditji to protect him from the blow. In saving him, Dr Melkote was struck on his head and was seriously injured. There was profuse bleeding and he fell unconscious. The crowd dispersed and the British police came in search of people to arrest. A potter who saw Dr Melkote lying unconscious took him to his home and administered first aid. He kept Dr Melkote safe from the British police by keeping him hidden in his pottery shed. When the doctor gained consciousness, he couldn't remember his name or where he came from. His wife and family were deeply anxious not knowing his whereabouts. He returned home only after a month and was so changed in appearance that no one could even recognize him.

In time he recovered from his wounds and returned to his medical practice in Hyderabad which continued to flourish. Among his patients was the Nizam of Hyderabad. He was introduced to Sir Nizamath Jung Bahadur, who was the Nizam's translator. After being treated by Dr Melkote, Nizamath Jung, requested Dr Melkote to move into a large house next to his in order to take care of him. Nizamath Jung almost adopted Dr Melkote as his son. Madina Bagh, with 44 rooms, came with palatial grounds in the middle of the city. Dr Melkote put the ample space to good use by accommodating sixteen students and hosting a number of guests who were involved in India's freedom struggle including Pandit Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel, Jai Prakash Narayan and Aruna Asaf Ali.

¹ A lathi is a baton like a cricket bat.





Amid all this activity and work, Dr Melkote developed severe discomfort in his stomach. Being a doctor, he consulted colleagues and got treated but no treatment seemed to help. The eventual recommendation was to go to England to get further treatment. But opposing British occupation of India, he refused to travel to England. One of his friends performed an investigative surgery. He opened him up and found nothing wrong. Unfortunately, the sutures from the surgery got infected and the incision developed gangrene. In those years before antibiotics, Dr Melkote was told that his days were limited and that he would succumb to the infection soon. At that stage his elder brother, A.G. Ramachandra Rao of Bangalore, visited his ailing sibling in Hyderabad. The elder suggested that they go and see Sri Ramana Maharshi. But Dr Melkote was a strong believer in science and rationality and promptly rebuked his brother by questioning how a saint could help and what he would know about medicine. His brother persisted as did the doctor's wife and at last he agreed and came to the ashram. They reached the ashram in the evening, made their pranams to Bhagavan, had dinner and took rest.

Early the next morning they went for darshan. As they were standing at the back of the hall, a magnetic attraction drew the doctor to a space that opened up close to Bhagavan. The doctor moved closer and sat down and became mesmerized by Bhagavan. He continued to stare at him and Bhagavan reciprocated by looking intently back at him. No words were shared between them. After lunch the two brothers returned once again to have darshan. Dr Melkote approached Bhagavan, bowed and shared the story regarding his physical ailment and Bhagavan listened quietly. Dr Melkote didn't think much about it, but the next morning he realized that there was a subtle shift in his health and well-being. He had more energy and his stomach discomfort had reduced considerably.

It was during this visit that Dr Melkote was blessed to treat Bhagavan who was suffering from eczema on both legs and on his back. The doctor applied various balms and ointments and kept Bhagavan's legs in bandages. One day Bhagavan referred to them as *kal kattu*, punning on the word, which in Tamil means both literally something 'tied to the



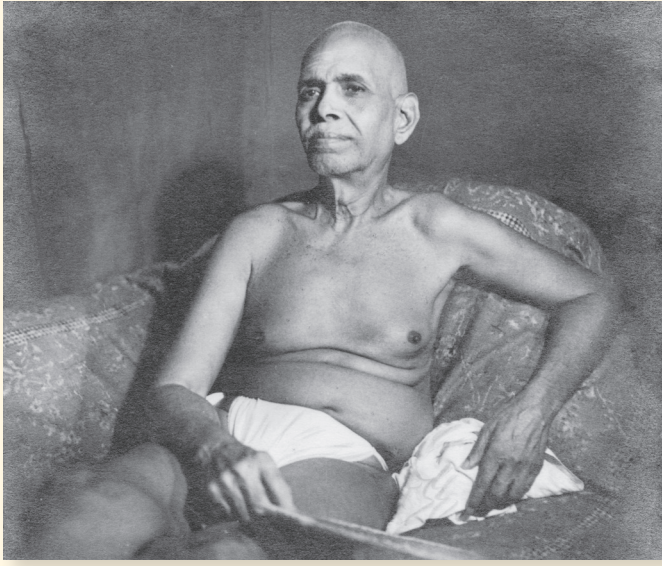
Dr Melkote in 1930 following an injury during a demonstration

leg', and figuratively 'dependents', 'obligations' or 'responsibilities'. Dr Melkote replied, 'We are here always, your dependants, tied to your legs.'

Though the doctor had come in a precarious condition, he was now improving while enjoying the privilege of treating Bhagavan. This reciprocal connection between Guru and disciple was a grace for Dr Melkote, and the reader is reminded of what Bhagavan told Kitty Osbourne when she was a small girl: 'If you don't forget Bhagavan, Bhagavan won't forget you'.

After a fortnight, the disease seemed to be under control. The doctor was happy and congratulated himself that he had had the opportunity to treat Bhagavan. But, alas, his elation was short lived. The disease burst out again in redoubled vigour. The doctor said it was a lesson to him to curb his ego and he continued the treatment with humility, praying to Bhagavan that he must effect the cure himself and that he, Dr Melkote was but his instrument. T.K. Sundaresa Iyer writes:





He oscillated between elation and curbing his ego according to the disease as it decreased or increased. All along this course of treatment and from the time he arrived at the Ashram, I had the pleasure of his acquaintance and of talking to him about Bhagavan. We used to sit until late in the night and talk about Bhagavan, so absorbed in our conversation that we had no sense of space or time. I used to talk to my doctor friend about the significance of darshan on special occasions. Bhagavan had a special glow of light about him and his starry eyes shed an unusual lustre and those around experienced the ambrosia. It is for experiencing this light or bliss of being that devotees flocked to him from near and far. Though this experience was obtained on normal days too, it was very intense on occasions like Jayanti, Mahapuja and Karthikai days, so also it was when great souls met him.²

² 'Bhagavan Treated For Eczema', TKS, *The Silent Power*, pp. 67-70.

A variety of drugs and ointments had been collected from all parts of India, but they had no effect. Dr Melkote was quite ashamed of himself, that being such an eminent doctor he could do nothing for Bhagavan.

On the eve of Maha Puja, which fell on 11th June in the year 1939,³ Sri Bhagavan insisted upon the bandages being removed. Indeed, how could he give darshan with them on? Dr Melkote was nervous about Bhagavan's blemished skin being visible on the important day. He worried aloud to TKS: 'Mr. Iyer, how will Bhagavan give special darshan to his devotees with these white patches on him? I am sorry that I shall not have the fortune of having his condition instead. Why should he have this disease at this time when I am visiting him?'

TKS responded saying, 'Wait and see if he will be Bhagavan your patient, or the Bhagavan of special grace on this unique occasion.'

As it turned out, on Mahapuja day there was such a glow of health around Sri Bhagavan's body that no one would suspect any skin disease. The following day, Dr Melkote resumed the treatment and replaced the bandages. TKS continues:

³ TKS remembers the event as Jayanti 1935, after the fact, but G.V. Subbaramayya first came to Bhagavan in 1936 and was chronicling life at the Ashram each day during the period of Dr Melkote's visit. He tells the story in detail leading up to Mahapuja in June 1939. Devaraj Mudaliar would seem to confirm the latter date when he writes: 'I was once spending my summer vacation at the Ashram, I think, about 1939. Dr Melkote of Hyderabad was also staying at the time in one of the houses opposite the Ashram.'

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Swami Ramanananda Day



On the morning of 1st January, family members and Ashram staff gathered at Swami Ramanananda's Shrine to celebrate his life and service to the Ashram in the difficult years following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana. —





One day he received an urgent call and had to leave for his native place. It irked him that he had to leave Bhagavan in this condition. We were staying in the same room and he told me how perplexed he was. I just laughed: 'So you imagine that Bhagavan is your patient and that you can cure him! His eczema cannot be cured unless he wants it to be cured. If you are unable to leave him in his present condition, pray to him to change it so that you may have some peace of mind.' That night he prayed. Next day, when we went into the hall, Bhagavan said: 'This eczema seems to be getting much better.' There were tears of joy in the doctor's eyes. When we came out, he hugged me. ... Dr Melkote said to me, 'Mr. Sundaresh, I have lived to see this great marvel. Who would say he is like any of us? He condescends to be one of us and that is our great fortune. My patient is my darling and God'.⁴

4 'Bhagavan Treated for Eczema,' T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, in *The Silent Power*, p. 67-70; see also *Ramana Smrti Souvenir*, 'The Bhagavan I Knew' by Krishna Bhikshu.

When the bandages were at long last removed, Sri Bhagavan humorously remarked, 'Now I have attained *bandha moksha!* ('liberation from bandage'⁵). When it was commented that the healing seemed to depend upon the doctor's programme, Sri Bhagavan replied, 'Yes, the doctor won't leave until after removing the bandages.'⁶

During this same visit, Dr Melkote would have the opportunity to treat Devaraj Mudaliar who had a piece of grit in his eye. But before the treatment even began, Bhagavan healed it, much to Dr Melkote's amazement.⁷

(to be continued)

5 Bhagavan puns on the Sanskrit *bandha* which is cognate with the English words 'bandage' and 'bondage' but means the latter.

6 *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, GVS, pp. 51-52.

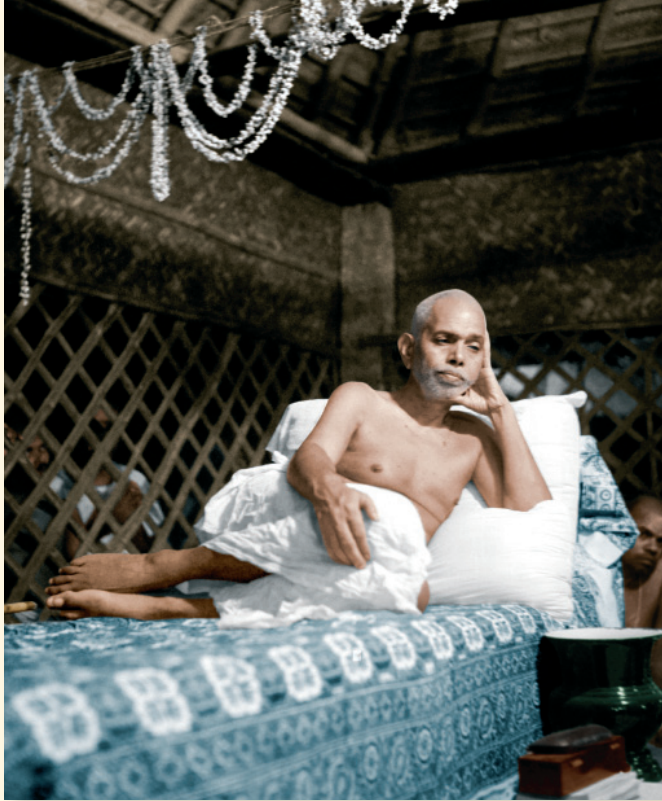
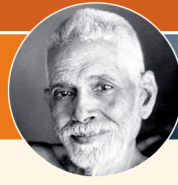
7 *My Recollections of Bhagavan*, Devaraj Mudaliar, Chapter 2.

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Pongal Celebrations



Pongal celebrations at the Ashram began with *uttarayana* puja on Thursday, 14th January, marking the day when the Sun 'crosses over' (*sankramana*) into Capricorn. It also marks the end of the special days of Margazhi month. The 15th was Mattu Pongal which is dedicated to cattle in appreciation of their patient service. Nandi puja was followed by puja at Cow Lakshmi's samadhi. The morning celebrations culminated with gosala puja and feeding bananas, pongal and *agathi keerai* to the Ashram gosala cows with limited attendance owing to pandemic restrictions. —





RAMANA REFLECTIONS

The Lever and the Fulcrum The Neuroanatomy of the Strategic Mind

COVID lockdowns have been times of interruption and separation where our normal lives come to a near standstill. Jarring as they are, lockdowns have benefits as well, not least of all, giving us time to reflect on our lives.

One of the things I have found myself doing during lockdowns is taking stock of my relationship with Bhagavan. Recently, I began to wonder if I am too relaxed in my understanding of Bhagavan, especially with respect to the impulse to pare down Bhagavan's teaching into short simple phrases, both in my conversations with others and in my own reflections. I always feel a little tinge of remorse when I do that, as though I were betraying Bhagavan.

In the pandemic era when there is so much uncertainty, it is understandable that we might want to make Bhagavan's teaching more accessible. It might look as though we are trying to simplify Bhagavan's teaching and make it into a sort of system, i.e. render it in a format that is digestible. But in doing that, we may inadvertently be putting Bhagavan in a box.

Historically, we see how religious traditions centred on an enlightened being can fall prey to some form of routinizing, i.e. streamlining the original insights in order to make them more manageable. In the digital era, such a trend may be a natural reflex to the busyness of our lives (not to mention the low-grade anxiety permeating the collective since the pandemic began). We could be forgiven for wanting to reduce complexity given the increasing demands on our lives in a world where we just don't seem to have time for the transformation Bhagavan is calling us to. To make time, we would have to give up a lot, and herein lies our dilemma.

Devotees may recall the scene just prior to Bhagavan's *Golden Jubilee* celebrations in 1946 when the Master first glimpsed the new pandal that was intended to honour him on this special occasion. Bhagavan said: 'Just fancy, they insist on erecting this for me when all I need is the shade of a tree to sit under.'¹

When devotees were pressing him about his wishes for the upcoming celebrations, Bhagavan got annoyed and said something to the effect, 'If you really want to know what I want, it is that all of you would sit quietly and practice looking within to know the Self. That is how I would like you to celebrate. But you are not going to do that, are you, so why ask me?'

The impulse to package Bhagavan in neat nifty phrases is like worshipping Bhagavan from a safe distance. It insulates us from the vulnerability we feel when face-to-face with what Bhagavan is proposing. Again, this is understandable because he was talking about bringing down the whole edifice while we are unwittingly trying to keep it standing. Sure, we would like to transcend the small self, but at the same time, the prospect of major change is daunting.

¹ *The Mountain Path*, January 1980, p. 17.





Our dilemma seventy years after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana is reminiscent of the 2nd century BC Greek mathematician, Archimedes, who once said: *Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the Earth.*

The problem in this declaration, of course, is the place to stand. Archimedes would need a second Earth from which to perform his operation. It need not be added that the Earth does not really need moving anyway since, astronomers tell us, it is already moving at quite a good clip in its orbit around the Sun—about 30 km per second. But that is not the real point. Archimedes' pronouncement raises a deeper issue, one that is analogous to the impulse to systematize Bhagavan. Archimedes' phrase is a sleight of hand, like picking yourself up by your bootstraps. Systematization involves a similar excess: the impulse to make Bhagavan's teaching into something graspable is bound up with the urge to domesticate, contain or possess Bhagavan (and the Self). But this is the very narcissistic compulsion that Bhagavan's teaching is designed to liberate us from.

System-thinking gives us a little boost and we imagine that an improved, spiritualized small self is preferable. If earlier we had a small self that said 'I'; now we have a small self that says 'I know'. It is understandable that we might mistake this knowing for true knowing but the knowing that Bhagavan is trying to lead us to is a knowing wherein the 'I' is removed altogether. Vast is the distance between *being* the one that knows and *being free* from the one that knows, yet still, we would like to have it both ways, namely, to be free without having to give up a lot. This urge is like that of Archimedes who wanted to move the Earth while standing on the Earth.

The *jnani* knows that making Bhagavan's teaching into a system cannot help him precisely because what most needs being left behind is what is all the while being clung to. It is like seeking to free oneself from suffering while clinging to its causes. Bhagavan knows that the mind cannot take us there. But if we cling to systems, it is because we like their handles.



Grasping vs. Intuiting

Modern neuropsychology offers help in shedding light on the confusion between these two modes of knowing, between the impulse to system-thinking and the spiritual aspiration to *jnana*.

Neuroscience points out that the denotative mind, often thought of as the left-hemisphere, relishes detail and imagines that its ability to name things constitutes higher knowledge. If we find ourselves trying to reduce Bhagavan's teaching to something conceptual, it is because we feel we can get our hands on concepts. They are graspable and wieldable. Neuroanatomists have suggested that conceptual knowing and the grasping function of the hands are neurologically related, that the ability to manipulate objects with the hands (what neuroscientists call *manipulospacial functions*) helped bring about human language. Indeed, similar neural mechanisms are required for referential language and manipulating objects² and the neural functions needed for grasping in the sense of a physical object as well as grasping in the sense of a mental concept take place in the same area of the (left) brain.

But what do these findings from neuroscience have to do with understanding Bhagavan's teaching?

The fact is, Bhagavan is trying to lead us away from the grasping-knowledge of the left hemisphere. If system-thinking is sequential, centred in the strategic mind of the left hemisphere, Bhagavan's *jnana* is spiritual knowledge, i.e. global awareness centred in the right. Of course, both the left and right hemispheres are needed and the distinction between

² *The Master and his Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist, p. 348.





the two is only *modal*, rather than *spatial*.³ But we often confuse them and think that knowing means *grasping* in the mode of concepts, whereas Bhagavan's knowing means *intuiting* beyond words and labels.

If devotees resist meditation or inquiry, the reason may be that practicing them demands we give up the strong allure of the grasping mind.

How to better understand the difference between these two forms of knowing? One neuroscientist proposed the image of a mother-bird that goes to a tree and pecks at the bark to retrieve a worm. The denotative awareness of the bird's left hemisphere (*focused attention*) is activated in studying how to get at the worm. Simultaneously, the right hemisphere's panoramic awareness (*open attention*) surveys its surroundings, listening passively for potential threats or the cries of her chicks. Both hemispheres are active but while the right hemisphere's global awareness is aware of its surroundings including the pecking at the bark, the strategic mind's retrieval work is only aware of the work itself and has no real knowledge of the right hemisphere's objectless awareness.⁴ It is this orientation to detail that makes strategic awareness

³ Experts tell us that the two hemispheres in a healthy brain are lateralized (i.e. in communication) and that the neural correlates of brain and body functions are distributed throughout the brain, thus strict topographical mapping in terms of two hemispheres is oversimplified. From an explanatory point of view, the language of left and right hemispheres is perhaps still useful in distinguishing these two contrasting modes.

⁴ *The Master and his Emissary*, p. 74.; also, from a talk by Iain McGilchrist at Oxford University, 10 February 2011.

salient. The left hemisphere's strategic functions are visual, lucid and clear while the right hemisphere's panoramic awareness is indistinct, intangible and subtle. Here we encounter the divide between detail orientation and faith. Faith, while expansive, is dark and unclear, but the strategic mind is only interested in what is graspable, clear and distinct.

Over the centuries, spiritual traditions have sought to cultivate right hemispheric intuitive awareness, one of the aims of religious life. If, as has been said, *science teaches us how to take things apart so that we can understand how they work* (denotative consciousness), *religion teaches us how to put things together to understand what they mean*⁵ (connotative consciousness). Both modes are essential but the digital revolution has magnified the quantitative axis of these two poles, and the trend in the 21st century is toward abandoning anything that looks like faith in favour of the certitude that comes with tangible data and information. Having lost sight of the sacred in preference for strategic functions is related to prioritizing the *how* of life over the *why* of life. Denotative consciousness is linear, sequential, analytic, explicit and known, but also isolated and decontextualized. By contrast, connotative consciousness, though never fully graspable, is interconnected⁶, intuitive and broad-based; it has a sense of context for living beings situated in a complex world and endeavours to make meaning of that world. But, again, both modes are required. One neuroscientist describes the two modes like this:

*Knowledge mediated by the left hemisphere is knowledge within a closed system. It can never really 'break out' to know anything new, because its knowledge is only of its own representations. Where the thing itself is 'present' to the right hemisphere, it is only 'represented' by the left. Where the right hemisphere is conscious of the Other, the left hemisphere is only conscious of itself.*⁷

These insights from neuroscience can help us map the distinction between Self and ego, i.e. global all-encompassing awareness vs. representational consciousness that names and identifies objects.

⁵ Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Oxford University, 12 Feb 2012.

⁶ *The Master and his Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist, p. 547.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 548.





Here we see why Bhagavan urges us to inquire into the ego-self. The strategic mind by its nature *cannot know*, neuroanatomically, about its surroundings and *cannot know that it doesn't know*; it naturally assumes that the task before it is all there is. In other words, it misses the forest for the trees. True Self-knowing, on the other hand, arises in connotative awareness.

Sustained investigation exposes the illusion of the systematizer which imagines itself as the master but, in truth, the systematizer is only master of that which is outside of itself, i.e. objects, ideas, labels, and concepts. Inquiry unmask the phantom and brings the light of all-encompassing awareness to bear on the true identity of the master.

The reader may recall occasions in the darshan hall when a devotee would ask Bhagavan about a philosophical problem. Bhagavan would reply: 'Find out who you are first, then ask that question.' In other words, rather than attempting to solve the problem with the strategic mind, cultivate all-encompassing awareness.

Bhagavan knew that Self-knowledge cannot come about through thinking and conceptualization. The Self does not lend itself to systematization because it is not an object. Indeed, however we visualize the Self, It cannot be *that*. The mind that seeks to view the Self is itself contained *within* the Self. If we invoke the term 'witness' to envisage the Self, we fall headlong into the same Archimedean hole. When asked about the witness, Bhagavan gave this interesting reply:



'Witness' is applicable when there is an object to be seen. [But this] is duality. The Truth lies beyond both.

And then further on:

Subject, object and perception [...] appear and disappear, whereas the Truth is eternal..⁸

Like Archimedes' lever, systems tend to lose sight of the fulcrum. The fulcrum of any system is the knower of it, the ground on which all knowing rests. It's not that Bhagavan's 'system' is unknowable, but rather, that Bhagavan's is not a system at all, and in fact, is beyond all systems. In short, words trap us in the division which only pure awareness can overcome. This is the territory Bhagavan is trying to lead us to.

⁸ Talks §466, §376 and §146.

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Samudram Gosala Puja



On Friday, 15th January, a handful of devotees gathered at the Nallavan Palayam or Samudram Gosala, the retirement home for the Ashram gosala cows. About a dozen animals live on several acres of land in a pastoral setting on the banks of the Samudram lake. The animals are honoured each year on Mattu Pongal Day with special decorations, puja and feeding of pongal, bananas, and other treats. —





Conclusion

Readers may recall Muruganar in the years after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, when on various occasions, a devotee would approach him and ask him to say something about Bhagavan. Muruganar would take the request to heart and slowly prepare himself to say something about Bhagavan. He would start out very carefully with, 'Bhagavan...' and then he would trail off. He would pause and redouble his efforts, and begin a second time, 'Bhagavan..., Bhagavan...' and then he would fall silent again. In the struggle to form a single coherent sentence about his Master, tears would begin to well up in his eyes. Finally, he would just give up. After all, what words could ever capture the vastness and mystery of Bhagavan, of the Self?

When we call this scene to mind, we lament the loss of a simpler time. We lament not just the COVID pandemic and its attendant concerns, but advancing digital infusion into our lives. While the digital realm offers myriad benefits, not least of all, democratization of knowledge

through greater access, it may simultaneously be thwarting our capacity to cultivate the intuitive wisdom needed for the path that Bhagavan laid out for us. We intuit the predominance of strategic thinking within ourselves even if we cannot see it directly. And if studies show that intensive device use causes overstimulation of the strategic mind and diminishment of right hemispheric functions, and if altruism studies in recent years are devastatingly dark simply because altruism, empathy and compassion belong to the atrophied right hemisphere, then we may feel overwhelmed. But the outlook is not so bleak. Even with the passing of generations, we too have access to Bhagavan, to the Self, is it not so?

The light at the end of the tunnel is Bhagavan himself, and his teaching, which provides a map, one that, if followed, can lead us out of any predicament. What this map might look like will be the subject of the next segment. —

(to be continued)

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Arunachaleswar Pradakshina



Early on 16th, Lord Arunachaleswar made a circuit of the Mountain, stopping at the Ashram where devotees eagerly received Him with dhotis, saris and garlands. It had been expected that the entourage would proceed without making any stops whatsoever owing to

COVID protocols. But at the last minute the decision was taken to make brief stops for the benefit of devotees. —

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Thai Krithigai Ramana Purana Muttrodal

Thai Krithigai falls in the month of Thai on Krithigai nakshatra and is considered auspicious for Lord Murugan. *Ramana Puranam* was first debuted on Thai Kritikai in the year 1938 and since then ashram has been celebrating the event on a regular basis. This year, the text was chanted seven times by a handful of devotees gathered at Muruganar's Samadhi near the Ashram hillside gate. —





Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Reopening the Ashram



Significant drops in the rate of COVID infections in Tamil Nadu and across India have prompted the Government to take the bold step of moving towards reopening. The *Times of India* reports that India is experiencing 12,000 new cases per day, a marked reduction from the peak period last September of 90,000 new cases per day. Positivity rates and fatality rates have likewise fallen and are at their lowest since April 2020 while hospital beds are mostly empty. The development suggests that pre-existing cross-reactive immune memory to SARS-CoV-2 may be a factor in this unexpected and welcome change. Already last August, the Berlin Charite, a group of 30 scientists led by Andre Thiel, published their research on the presence of 'cross-reactive T cells in about 34% of the population of Berlin'. The study concluded that cross immunity among the populace of Berlin originates from previous exposure to circulating common cold coronaviruses. The team speculated that similar cross-immunity effects would likely be found elsewhere. (See the September issue of *Saranagati*). In India, the rate of (asymptomatic) infections may have been higher than previously known bolstering the collective defence against further spread. *The Guardian* reports that India's low mortality rate may be attributable to the fact that 50% of the population is under the age of 25, and that 'the prevalence of communicable diseases such as typhoid and tuberculosis may make the immune system more resilient to coronavirus.'

Even if the signs are hopeful, the Government is exercising caution. Some public health officials still fear a second wave following the relaxation of containment measures, citing COVID's erratic and unpredictable behaviour. In Manaus, Brazil, for example, which had almost reached herd immunity in October with 76% of its population having been exposed, is now experiencing a punishing second wave. The Government of India is maintaining vigilance in respect of possible future mutations, new strains and ongoing infections. Mask use is still being strongly recommended as are social distancing protocols until vaccines can bring India to herd immunity. *Covishield* (the Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine) and *Covaxin* both from Bharat Biotech are being deployed and it is hoped that 30 crores of citizens may be inoculated by October.

Given these positive developments, Sri Ramansramam reopened in the first week of January with limited visiting hours (from 9.15 am-12 noon and 2-4 pm). Devotees are exercising caution and avoiding congested peak periods. —

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Chinnaswami Day



On 28th morning, following Thai poosam puja, a small puja was performed at Swami Niranjanananda's Samadhi shrine. Sushilamma and KVS performed a song he wrote in honour of the Ashram's first President. —

