

# SRI MAHARSHI'S WAY

A Translation and Commentary on  
Upadesa Saram

by

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SRI RAMANASRAMAM

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## PREFACE

There are admirable translations of Ramana Maharshi's *Upadesa Saram*, that concise revelation of his teaching: those of Viswanatha Swami, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni and B.V. Narasimhaswami. There are the revealing commentaries of Sadhu Om and the excellent analysis of A.R. Natarajan, in addition to versions by other scholars. And just as there have been uncounted editions of the *Bhagavad Gita*, with varying interpretations, there may be in future other versions of the Maharshi's poem, which remains today a modern Hindu scripture, revered by his devotees.

I attempt here to convey what this great masterpiece of the Hindu tradition says about one's relation to life and to the Ultimate Reality. When we quote sources from the scriptures which support the Maharshi's statements, it is in no way to imply that he found the ideas there. His experience was prior to and superior to any scripture. He had no familiarity with them until much later when devotees brought texts to him and asked for clarifications. The quotations serve primarily to show the unity and consistency of the Hindu tradition in its ultimate aspects. I have not parenthesised words which have been added at times to the Sanskrit text to clarify the English meaning or provide continuity in the translation. Frequently I have let the Maharshi himself explain or expand the meaning of different verses. The sources for these comments are given in the notes.



## SRI MAHARSHI'S WAY

Back in the nineteen forties, when He was still physically among us, I remember as though it were yesterday, the daily recitation before Him of the Sanskrit verses of *Upadesa Saram*. In the late afternoons, with Arunachala, the sacred mountain, looming to the north above us and the long shadows softening the lines of the mango-shaded courtyard, a group of *brahmins* chanted the poem. The Maharshi, seated before them on His couch in the thatched *pandal* adjoining the Old Hall, listened to the rich cadences of the Sanskrit verses and seemed to be in some faraway realm of detached stillness, though He was instantly alert to the least variation of sound or stress. A white peacock in its cage\* above the couch watched over the scene. This was a regular routine then at the Ashram and, decades later, I was to hear the same chanting at the shrine since raised above His *Samadhi*.

Of all the works of the Sage, *Upadesa Saram* is considered the supreme legacy of His teaching. One might cite *Ulladu Narpadu* as an equally revealing exposition, but the former was composed as one integrated work in a single sitting, without revision, while the other was a collection of different verses that He wrote at various times and which were later assembled by Muruganar.<sup>1</sup>

*Upadesa Saram* was written by Sri Bhagavan not only in His native Tamil, but also in Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayalam — so important did He consider this ‘Essential Teaching’. Though He had made no study of Sanskrit grammar, His

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\* The cage was necessary to protect the white peacock from the multi-colour variety of peacocks which resented its presence.

spontaneous composition in the lilting *supratistha* metre of that classical language so impressed the great Sanskritist, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, that he promptly wrote a revealing commentary upon it.<sup>2</sup>

This Supreme Teaching covers the traditional four paths of *sadhana*: *karma*, *bhakti*, *raja* and *jnana yogas*, or those of action, devotion, mind control and knowledge respectively. By *raja yoga* Maharshi means essentially *pranayama* or breath control, as a means of quieting the wayward mind. He had little use for that aspect of *raja yoga* known as *hatha yoga*, which was most likely to prove a handicap to spiritual progress because its emphasis on physical movements and positions and functions made far too much concern with the body.<sup>3</sup>

The Maharshi does not present these four ways as equally efficacious practices since, for Him, only the last of these is ultimately essential. Three methods are described in the first fifteen verses, while the remaining fifteen are devoted to an exposition of *jnana yoga*. The others are seen as practices leading up to and qualifying the individual for the inescapable and direct path of *atma vichara* (Self-enquiry). *Bhakti*, however, in one sense holds a special position in His teaching, as we shall see later, and He has even stated that “*bhakti* and *jnana* are the same”.<sup>4</sup>

What has compelled my own interest in *Upadesa Saram* over some forty years has been the Maharshi’s answer to a question I asked Him about the meaning of the very first verse, about our control over and responsibility for our actions and their fruits. His answer was that our actions are all ordained by the Creator, but that the supposed problem of fate *versus* freewill is “only for him who thinks he is the body”.

The oft-told story of the origin of *Upadesa Saram* is this: The great Tamil poet, Muruganar, was composing a poem



based upon an ancient legend about a group of ascetics who were performing various rites in the Daruka forest. They hoped thereby to obtain special powers for the fulfilment of their worldly ambitions. Lord Siva, in the guise of a mendicant (seeing the error of their ways) and accompanied by Vishnu, as a beautiful woman, appeared before the ascetics. They were overcome with desire for Vishnu, and their wives were entranced with Siva. Driven by jealousy, the ascetics used the magic powers they had acquired through their austerities to send a tiger, deadly snakes, and an elephant against the mendicant. But when Siva used the snakes as a necklace and killed the other conjured beasts, the ascetic-magicians fell at his feet and asked for instructions as to how to achieve the bliss of liberation.<sup>5</sup>

Muruganar wrote the rest of his poem, but felt that only the Maharshi, as the very embodiment of Siva, could write the needed instructions. Thereupon, Ramana Maharshi composed thirty verses in Tamil, entitled *Upadesa Undiyar*, describing the various ways to liberation, culminating in His own prescription of Self-enquiry.<sup>6</sup> He then translated them into Sanskrit as the 'Essential Teaching' or *Upadesa Saram*.<sup>7</sup>

This treasury of instruction and guidance manages to summarise, explain, and integrate the great traditional *margas*, or paths, of Hindu religious discipline and then to show the unique way to human freedom which He, Himself, offered to contemporary humankind. *Karma*, *bhakti*, *raja*, and *jnana yogas* are each suited to a different type of individual or to a different stage of a person's spiritual development. *Atma vichara*, search for the Self, is the Maharshi's own way, sanctified by His own experience.

# THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

The Maharshi's answer to my question as to the meaning of the first verse of *Upadesa Saram* was specifically that, "The body is subject to destiny alone." This fate is dispensed by the will or *sakti* of Isvara, the manifested Brahman. It is not determined by the actions themselves nor by the 'will' of the individual who suffers or enjoys such fate. He has said elsewhere, "The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their *prarabdha karma*. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it.... All the activities that the body is to go through are determined when it first comes into existence. It does not rest with you to accept or reject them."<sup>1</sup> He applied this to even the smallest detail of one's life such as taking a drink of water at say, ten thirty-seven in the morning on November tenth.<sup>2</sup>

One might, intellectually at least, accept such an absolute were it not for His seemingly contradictory statements made to others such as, "Freewill exists together with the individuality. As long as the individuality lasts, so long is there freewill."<sup>3</sup> Another confusion was added, for me, when the rest of His answer to my question was, "The mind is subject to both destiny and freewill." Our mental attitudes certainly affect our actions. So, if the mind has even a little freewill, then we must have at least a little bit of control over our actions. I often pondered this dilemma; were these differing pronouncements made simply to accommodate the understanding of persons at different levels on the spiritual path?

Another answer, not always obvious at first, is that sometimes He refers to the individual, the *jiva*, and at other

times to the real Self, the *atman* — the former being bound by destiny and the latter utterly free.<sup>4</sup> We are, of course, in one or another sense, either of these and both. So far as the individual person is concerned, it is clear that Indian sages have unequivocally denied the possibility of freewill. Vivekananda insisted that ‘freewill’ is a contradiction of terms.<sup>5</sup> Nisargadatta Maharaj, when asked, “Is there no such thing as freewill? Am I not free to desire?” he replied, “Oh no, you are compelled to desire. In India the very idea of freewill seems so ridiculous that there is no word for it.”<sup>6</sup>

The Maharshi’s reply that the mind is subject to destiny and freewill is expanded in His earlier reply to a devotee: “The only freedom you have is to turn your mind inward and renounce activities there.”<sup>7</sup> But since the individual is an illusory entity, produced by the imagination of the mind, itself an illusory entity springing from the ‘I’ thought, your ‘mind’ cannot be stopped by ‘your’ will. The will that controls even the mind’s reaction to events, its ability to remain detached as mere witness, without the sense of ‘doership’, must be the one Supreme Will. This ability, then, from the individual’s standpoint cannot actually be freewill but rather freeing will. Is this the ultimate meaning of Ramana Maharshi’s, “The only freedom you have”?<sup>8</sup>

If we identify ‘freeing will’ as that power which restores the suffering individual to his original identity, returns him to his blissful source on a path prescribed by the Guru, then the power which launched him on the outgoing path of creation (birth, death, rebirth) may be designated as ‘binding will’. In any case, there is only one will, that of Isvara, the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

Then what of the struggle that takes place in a person between his desire for *moksha*, or liberation, and the pull of the *vasanas*, or tendencies, which hold him to the old patterns

of fear, and desire for pleasure, fame and comfort? We must view both forces in the eternal struggle as Divine Forces, each, the manifestation of Divine Will, of *sakti*. Both the enslaving and redeeming elements have but one origin. The lines spoken and the action done by the heroic and the villainous actors in a play come from the same playwright and cannot be changed by the players.<sup>10</sup>

The foregoing exposition, though true to Maharshi's own teaching, is almost inevitably 'unconvincing' because each of us is certain that we make choices and do, or can, exercise our own wills every moment of the day.<sup>11</sup> This is the wonderful play of *maya*, the basic mechanism of the world illusion. For the truth of the matter can only be convincing with surrender of our wills. Has the Maharshi not said that surrender is one of the two paths and that it does not really differ from *vichara*? You cannot surrender unless you know who you are, and you cannot know who you are unless you have surrendered the ego.<sup>12</sup> *Vichara* is *bhakti*, or rather *parabhakti*.

Sri Maharshi has said that we are, all of us, in essence really *jnanis*, moving on the outgoing or the incoming legs of life. We all live under the same imperatives, move toward the same redemption. Without the outgoing, there could be no mirror of creation, enabling Brahman to see Itself. The bound and the free are each 'necessary'. The bound cannot choose. The free do not choose. For there is no choice. *Upadesa Saram* describes the incoming path of return. To read and absorb its meaning is to receive His freeing will, His Grace.<sup>13</sup>

The ascetics of the Daruka forest were, they thought, exercising their own freewill to perform ritual austerities and actions intended to bring them power and happiness. The Maharshi explains in the first verse, however, that *karma*, or action, has no power in itself and that its fruits are

dispensed by Isvara, the real doer. But if the ascetics had not been so misled by the binding power of the Lord, they would not, as a result of their subsequent disillusionment, have asked for Siva's grace and received His freeing will.<sup>14</sup>

We, like the ascetics, are living and struggling under Isvara's binding will. We, like the ascetics, may also imbibe this Supreme Teaching, the *Upadesa Saram* of Sri Bhagavan Maharshi, who is Himself Siva, offering His freeing-will to those destined to accept it. And if we are transformed thereby, it is not through our freewill, but by His freeing-will.

When the Maharshi says that the body is subject to fate alone, He includes all bodies. Even the *jnani's* body is under the control of *prarabdha karma*.<sup>15</sup> When He says that the only 'freedom' one has is to turn inward and stop the mind's activity, He includes *jnanis* as well. So how does the *jnani* differ from the *jiva*, the individual bound by time and space and circumstance? The only difference is that the *jnani* knows who he is and no longer identifies himself with the vulnerable body because he has already 'turned inward' irrevocably. But do not devotees believe that the *jnani* can, if he so chooses, control the actions of his body, work miracles etc.? Of course, he works 'miracles' of love and grace because these are his very nature. But he has no 'purpose' or 'desire' to do such and does not even think of them as miracles. The very desire to exercise *siddhi*, supernatural powers, is a denial of *moksha*, of liberation.<sup>16</sup>

But one may yet say, "Ah, I *prayed* and *sacrificed* that I might come to Your Feet! Is all such effort useless?" Sri Bhagavan has replied, "Who says that efforts are not effective, but who made you do those things?" The last vestige of ego is to believe that the individual has, himself, the power to fall at His Feet. It is He alone who brings each to

Him. Sri Maharshi quotes Thayumanavar, “Oh Lord! Coming with me all along in each birth, never abandoning me and finally rescuing me! Such is the experience of Realization”.<sup>17</sup> Does all this convey a sense of futility and the uselessness of human effort? On the contrary, it reveals that when effort is needed in the Divine Scheme, effort will be forthcoming and effective — but it will not be our effort, however much our ego tells us that it is. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says, “I am the effort of those who make effort.”<sup>18</sup>

In stating that one has ‘freewill’, the Maharshi is addressing the eternal ‘I-I’ in each of us and not the illusory ‘ego-I’. This ‘freewill’ is what He tells us is the whole purport of the scriptures.<sup>19</sup> When He says, “The freedom you have is to turn inward,” He speaks to the real Self in all. He sees, He tells us, no difference between Himself and ourselves — that we are all ever free, bound only in our imaginations. And yet, in the ultimate sense, the real Self is beyond all pairs of opposites. Beyond bondage and beyond freedom as well. Who is it that is bound or free?

That is why He stresses always, ‘Who Am I?’ Until that question is answered, any other questions such as those concerning freewill and destiny can be answered only in a tentative way — offering tentative truth against persisting illusion, or *maya*. The answer can really be found, not in the inadequate medium of words, but only in *mouna*, that Stillness, that Silence which He represented during His lifetime and which remains His legacy.<sup>20</sup>

कर्तुराज्ञया प्राप्यते फलम् ।  
कर्म किं परं कर्म तज्जडम् ॥ १ ॥

kartur ājñayā prāpyate phalam  
karma kiṁ paraṁ karma tajaḍam

By the will of the Creator, action bears fruit. Is action, then, supreme? No, it is inert, unconscious.

This is the fundamental answer to the ultimate question. We cannot perform actions and expect those actions to result in the desired fruits. The Creator, Isvara or Siva, is the Lord of Action and determines what fruits and what subsequent actions will be forthcoming. We not only cannot control the fruits of our behaviour, we cannot even choose the actions themselves since these are influenced by an endless series of past actions. So action is, in itself, inert, unconscious. It and its fruits are Isvara's. Do we choose our dream actions? For the Maharshi, waking and dream have the same degree of reality.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Yoga Vasishtha* the *crow-yogin*, Bhusunda, was asked why he had survived for so many ages. He replied, "Who will be able to overstep the strict ordinances of Siva (Isvara)? His will was that I should act thus and other *yogins* should act in the way that they did. As every pre-ordained event should work out its results, such events will inevitably come to pass. Such is the nature of the law."<sup>2</sup>

The Sanskrit *jada* is translated 'inert'. Referring to this opening verse, the Maharshi says, "There is no truth in the insentient (*jada*). One whole Consciousness prevails over

all alone.”<sup>3</sup> And, “*Karta* means Isvara. He is the one who distributes the fruits of action to each person according to his *karma*. That means that he is the manifest Brahman. The real Brahman is unmanifest and without motion. It is only the manifest Brahman that is named as Isvara.”<sup>4</sup>



## II

कृतिमहोदधौ पतनकारणम् ।  
फलमशाश्वतं गतिनिरोधकम् ॥ २ ॥

kṛti-maho-dadhau patana-kāraṇam  
phalam-aśāśvataṁ gati-nirodhakam

The fruits of action are not everlasting and they cause one to fall into the great ocean of *karma*, blocking spiritual progress.

Our actions, good or bad, obviously bring results which cause us to experience pleasure and pain. Such are transient but they leave seeds of desire or fear in our minds, causing us to repeat or avoid the previous actions. These seeds or *vasa-nas* involve us in an endless series of commitments and events which bind us to the outer world and prevent us from turning inward and discovering our true nature. Therefore, no salvation or freedom from rebirth is to be found in activities, no matter how important or virtuous they may seem.

### III

ईश्वरार्पितं नेच्छया कृतम् ।  
चित्तशोधकं मुक्तिसाधकम् ॥ ३ ॥

īśvar-ārpitam necchayā kṛtam  
citta-śodhakam mukti-sādhakam

That action which is done without personal desire and whose fruits are surrendered to the Lord, purifies the mind and leads to Liberation.

Actions in themselves, together with their fruits, serve to bind the individual. This verse shows, nevertheless, how action may lead indirectly to salvation. If one acts in a detached and selfless manner, with no intention of obtaining personal benefit, this is a form of devotion to the Lord, benefitting His creation and freeing the mind from craving and restlessness.

The Maharshi, however, would sometimes point out the pitfalls of ‘unselfish action’: It is so easy to think of oneself as a generous and kind person, helping someone who is beneath him, that the ego becomes inflated and the fruits of praise, recognition, and self-satisfaction are accepted and expected, leading not to detachment but to greater bondage.

What is described in this verse is what the *Gita* calls *sattvic* action: “An action which is free from attachment, which is done without love or hatred by one not desirous of the fruit, that action is declared to be *sattvic*.”<sup>1</sup> A person is said to be a *sattvic* agent when he is “free from attachment, not given to egotism, endowed with firmness and vigour, unaffected in success and failure.”<sup>2</sup>

कायवाङ्मनःकार्यमुत्तमम् ।  
पूजनं जपश्चिन्तनं क्रमात् ॥ ४ ॥

kaya-vāṅg-manaḥ kāryam-uttamam  
pūjanam̐ japaś-cintanam̐ kramat

Ritual worship, repetition of sacred names, and meditation are done with the body, the speech, and the mind, and they progress in excellence in that order.

Clearly, in this verse, the Maharshi advises that the less physically active and exteriorised religious disciplines are, the more effective they become. He has said, “We project ourselves into idols and worship them because we do not understand true inward worship.”<sup>1</sup>

But when asked if such practices as bathing, prayer, chanting, and pilgrimage to sacred places were useful to spiritual aspirants or merely a waste of time, Sri Bhagavan replied, “All of them advance the purification of neophytes whose worldly propensities have just begun to lose force. Virtuous thoughts, words and deeds nullify their contraries in the past.”<sup>2</sup>

The Maharshi thus assigns a limited and preliminary value to rituals, but does not go as far as Vasistha in dismissing them: “The vain waste their time, like brutes, in the fruitless illusions of *tapas* (austerities), *yajna* (sacrifices), holy waters, visiting sacred shrines, the worship of gods, gifts etc. But you should abandon all these as tending to rebirth.”<sup>3</sup>

*Karma*, or ‘action’, in some contexts refers to religious ritual and, in this fourth verse, the Maharshi continues discussing the path of Action/Devotion. In this case, the path is that of the *karmakanda*, that portion of the Vedas which prescribes obligatory ritual and other activities.

जगत ईशधीयुक्तसेवनम् ।  
अष्टमूर्तिभृद्देवपूजनम् ॥ ५ ॥

jagata īśadhī yukta sevanam  
aṣṭa-mūrti bhṛd deva-pūjanam

To serve the world, looked upon as the manifestation of the Lord, is to offer worship to the Lord of the Eight Forms.

The ‘Lord of the Eight Forms’ is identified by the poet, Kalidasa, in the prologue to his famous play, *Shakuntala*:

Eight forms has Shiva, lord of all and king;  
And these are Water, first created thing;  
And Fire, which speeds the sacrifice begun;  
The Priest; and time’s dividers, Moon and Sun;  
The all-embracing Ether, path of sound;  
The Earth, wherein all seeds of life are found;  
And Air, the breath of life. May He draw near,  
Revealed in these, and bless those gathered here.<sup>1</sup>

To perform our ordained part in life, remembering always that in doing so we are serving the Lord’s own creation, is to worship Siva effectively.

Having described the path of action in previous verses, the Maharshi, in this and the next five, discusses the path of devotion and shows its relation to action and to meditative practices.

उत्तमस्तवादुच्चमन्दतः ।  
चित्तजं जपध्यानमुत्तमम् ॥ ६ ॥

uttama-stavād-ucca-mandataḥ  
cittajam japa dhyānam uttamam

Silent meditation, in the mind, is higher than the best devotional praise, or the uttering of sacred names, loudly or softly.

We see here, as in the fourth verse, a scale of excellence. Again, the Maharshi's theme is that the quieter and more internal the devotional practice, the more effective it is.

The Maharshi is not rejecting the singing of hymns or the recitation of devotional poetry. His devotees sang His verses while begging food in Sri Ramanasramam or walking with Him round the sacred Arunachala Hill.

## VII

आज्यधारया स्रोतसा समम् ।  
सरलचिन्तनं विरलतः परम् ॥ ७ ॥

ajya-dhārayā srotasā samam  
sarala cintanaṁ viralataḥ param

Like an unbroken flow of oil or a stream of water, continuous meditation is better than that which is interrupted.

The potential power of meditation is to be achieved only when attention is prolonged. The power is dissipated when the mind turns to exterior matters. The Maharshi has at times commented that fixed programs of meditation at certain hours are of limited value. One should endeavour at all times to hold on to the 'I' thought. He advised that meditation depends on strength of mind and must be unceasing, even when one is engaged in work. Special hours may be helpful but are meant for novices.

## VIII

भेदभावनात्सोऽहमित्यसौ ।  
भावनाऽभिदा पावनी मता ॥ ८ ॥

bheda-bhāvanāt so'hamityasau  
bhavana'bhidā pāvanī matā

Meditation on the identity of the individual and the Lord, “I am He”, is more purifying than meditation which assumes a difference between them.

To assume that there is an ultimate distinction between the Lord and the meditator is to deny His total presence and to limit His Being and Power and Knowledge. It involves the person in all the contradictions of dualism, causing one to wrestle with imagined problems of identity and behaviour which only strengthen the ego. Nevertheless, at a certain level of devotional meditation, the Maharshi accepted a dualist approach as helpful. He Himself wrote poems of great beauty and deep devotion to Arunachala. Sankara too wrote devotional hymns, seemingly dualist in tone but ultimately moving the devotee toward a sense of oneness with the Lord. In any case, the final necessity for the meditator is to turn his attention inward to the Self rather than outward toward any image or concept, no matter how sacred.

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (I, 4, 10) this same theme is found: “He who worships the Lord, thinking ‘He is one and I am another’ does not know.” And again, (IV, 4, 19) “He goes from death to death who sees difference, as it were, in Brahman.”



भावशून्यसद्भावसुस्थितिः ।  
 भावनाबलाद्भक्तिरुत्तमा ॥ ९ ॥

bhāva śūnyasad bhāva susthitiḥ  
 bhāvanā-balād bhaktir-uttamā

By the power of meditation, devoid of thoughts, one is established in true Being, and this is supreme devotion.

When asked by visitors for spiritual instruction, the Maharshi sometimes referred them to *Upadesa Saram* and gave its central message as, “stilling the mind and remaining free from thoughts.” The ending of thought is true *bhakti* and is the beginning of Wisdom and Bliss. It is supreme devotion because the Self and the Lord are identical. “Often he has told us that only a true *bhakta* can be a true *jnani* and only a true *jnani* can be a true *bhakta*.”<sup>1</sup> Total attention to the Self, unclouded by extraneous thoughts, is the same as surrender to the Lord – there being no activity of the ego.

This inactivity of the ego occurs when the meditator turns his attention away from all ‘other’ matters and focuses attention solely upon the ‘I’. Paradoxically, the ego is thereby destroyed, being deprived of the support it requires from otherness.

हृत्स्थले मनः स्वस्थता क्रिया ।  
भक्तियोगबोधाश्च निश्चितम् ॥ १० ॥

hṛtsthale manaḥ svasthatā kriyā  
bhakti yoga bodhaśca niścitam

The practice of fixing the mind in its own source in the Heart is, without doubt, true *bhakti, yoga*, and understanding.

Whatever path is used by the aspirant for Self-Realization, and whatever may be emphasised, whether action or devotion or breath control or knowledge, it all amounts in the end to the necessity of absorbing the mind and thereby freeing the *jiva* from the tyranny of thought. The ‘heart’ referred to here is not the physical heart on the left side of the body but the ‘spiritual’ heart on the right.

Yet this must not be taken too literally. When a devotee remarked that the Maharshi “specified a particular place in the body, that it is in the chest, two digits to the right from the median”, He replied, “Yes, that is the centre of spiritual experience according to the testimony of sages .... Truly speaking pure Consciousness is indivisible .... There is no ‘right’ or ‘left’ for it .... It is by coming down to the level of ordinary understanding that a place is assigned to the Heart in the physical body .... Since, during the bodiless experience of the Heart as pure Consciousness, the Sage is not at all aware of the body, that absolute experience is localised by

him within the limits of the physical body by a sort of recollection made while he is with bodily awareness.”<sup>1</sup>

When Maharshi was asked specifically about this verse by Devaraja Mudaliar, “What is the heart referred to...?”

Maharshi replied, “That which is the source of all, that in which all live, and that into which all finally merge, is the heart referred to.” Mudaliar continued, “How can we conceive such a heart?” Maharshi again, “Why should you conceive of anything? You have only to see from where the ‘I’ springs.”<sup>2</sup>

वायुरोधनाल्लीयते मनः ।  
जालपक्षिवद्रोधसाधनम् ॥ ११ ॥

vayu-rodhanāl liyate manaḥ  
jāla-pakṣivat rodha-sādhanam

The mind may be subdued by regulating the breath, just as a bird is restrained when caught in a net. This practice controls the mind.

Breath restraint (*vayurodhana*) is effected in rather violent ways by *hatha yogis*, resulting in complete stoppage or *kumbhaka*. The Maharshi did not recommend such extremes and used the word ‘*kumbhaka*’ in the sense of ‘regulation’, to be accomplished by watching the intake and outflow of breath. This causes the rate of respiration to slow down and in turn tends to quiet the mind, which is then able to keep its attention on the ‘I’ or Self. In any case, the Maharshi did not give breath control a high priority. He said, “One need not attempt breath control; mind control is enough. Breath control is recommended for the man who cannot control his mind straight away .... It may do as an aid but can never lead to the goal itself .... A more advanced man will naturally go direct to control of mind without wasting his time in practising control of breath.”<sup>1</sup>

चित्तवायवश्चित्क्रियायुताः ।  
शाखयोर्द्वयी शक्तिमूलका ॥ १२ ॥

citta-vāyavaś cit-kriyāyutāḥ  
śākhayor-dvayi śakti-mūlakā

Mind and breath, manifesting in thought and action, branch out from a common source, the Sakti.

Since breathing and thinking are rooted in the same life-force, the control of one amounts to control of the other. One might oversimplify by saying, “Each time an individual breathes, the mind cerebrates. No breath, no thought, no thought, no breath.” In the story of the goblin, Vetala, Vasishtha tells Rama, “Both are one only, like the flower and its fragrance or sesame seed and the oil in it. *Prana* [breath] and mind stand to one another in the relationship of the supporter and the supported. If either of them is slain, then the other will also cease to exist. The destruction of both will confer *moksha* on all.”<sup>1</sup>

The greatness of *Upadesa Saram*, lies not so much in the content of each verse as in the way that the poem ties together all the major *margas*, or paths of spiritual discipline. In this verse, for instance, there is nothing new. In the earliest of all his writings, *Who Am I?*, Maharshi says, “The source of the mind, on the one hand, and of breath and vital forces on the other, is one and the same.”<sup>2</sup>

लयविनाशने उभयरोधने ।  
लयगतं पुनर्भवति नो मृतम् ॥ १३ ॥

laya vinaśane ubhaya-rodhane  
laya-gataṁ punar bhavati no mṛtam

Absorption, or *laya*, and destruction, or *nasa*, are the two kinds of mind control. When merely absorbed, it emerges again, but not when it is destroyed.

When the *jiva* is able to bring about the temporary absorption of the mind by *pranayama* he experiences in that state a form of *samadhi* or experience of Reality in which the ego ceases to intrude and intense happiness is enjoyed. But as soon as breath control ceases, the “I am the body” sense resumes and the *jiva* returns to his ‘normal’ active state of bondage, with its pains and pleasures. Sri Maharshi describes it this way: “The involution of the mind in the Self, but without its destruction, is *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi* .... Even though one practises it for years together, if one has not rooted out the *vasanas* he will not attain salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

Again, referring to this verse, “Breath control can only produce *manolayana*, temporary suspension of mind. One-pointed meditation alone can lead to destruction of the mind.”<sup>2</sup>

प्राणबन्धनाल्लीनमानसम् ।  
 एकचिन्तनान्नाशमेत्यदः ॥ १४ ॥

prāṇa-bandhanāt līna-mānasam  
 eka-cintanāt nāśametyadaḥ

When the mind has been suspended by breath restraint, it may then be annihilated by single-minded attention to the Self.

Once the mind has been calmed by the regulation of the breath, one should hold one's attention on the Self, seeking the identity of the 'I'. If this practice persists, eventually all other mental activity will dry up and the stream of thoughts will disappear. Then, in the absence of the sense of separateness from the Lord and from the world — a sense which thought has sustained — one arrives at the knowledge that there is only one Consciousness, and the individual is only That.

नष्टमानसोत्कृष्टयोगिनः ।

कृत्यमस्ति किं स्वस्थितिं यतः ॥ १५ ॥

naṣṭa-manasot-krṣṭa yoginaḥ  
kṛtyam asti kiṁ svasthitim yataḥ

What action remains to be done by that great *yogi* whose mind has been extinguished, and who rests in his own true and transcendent state of Being?

Here the question refers to the state of the *jivanmukta*, or realized man. When asked about this, the Maharshi explained that, “The *jnani* is fully aware that his true state of Being remains fixed and stationary and all actions go on around him. There may be no difference between a *jnani* and an *ajnani* in their conduct. The difference lies in their angles of vision. The ignorant man identifies himself with the ego and mistakes its activities for those of the Self, whereas the ego of the *jnani* has been lost.”<sup>1</sup>

The liberated state is described by Sankara in his *Atma Bodha*: “I am attributeless, functionless, eternal, doubtless, stainless, changeless, formless, free and unconditioned.”<sup>2</sup>



दृश्यवारितं चित्तमात्मनः ।  
चित्त्वदर्शनं तत्त्वदर्शनम् ॥ १६ ॥

dr̥śya-vāritam citta-mātmanah  
citva-darśanam tattva darśanam

If one's attention is turned away from external objects of sense and focused on the light of the Self, that is the true vision of Reality.

To realize the Self, it is necessary to give one's attention solely to the 'I', the first person. This is possible only if one turns his attention away from otherness, from other things and other persons that make up the objective world — and away from images and ideas that relate to the world. This process is what the Maharshi has termed *atma-vichara* or self-enquiry. "If one leaves aside *vichara*, the most efficacious *sadhana*, there are no other adequate means whatsoever to make the mind subside. If made to subside by other means, it will remain as if subsided but will rise again."<sup>1</sup>

On 'external' and 'internal' the Maharshi has said, "Because your outlook is externally directed, you speak of a 'without'. In that state you are advised to look within. In fact, the Self is neither within nor without."<sup>2</sup>

## XVII

मानसं तु किं मार्गणे कृते ।  
नैव मानसं मार्गं अर्जवात् ॥ १७ ॥

mānasam tu kiṁ mārgaṇe kṛte  
naiva mānasam mārgaṁ ārjavāt

Again, if one persists in asking, “What is this mind of mine?” it will be found that there is really no such thing as ‘mind’. This is the Direct Path.

What the individual all along has thought was his ‘mind’ turns out to be nothing other than his Self. The mind has no existence of its own and ceases to function once its nature is revealed. To keep one’s attention on the Self is the direct way to know the mind. This is the *jnana marga* or *vichara*.

Sankara, also, insisted on the necessity for this path. “Compared with all other means, *jnana*, knowledge, is the only direct means to liberation as cooking is impossible without fire so is liberation impossible without knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

While knowledge is thus eventually essential to Realization, it is not always advisable for everyone regardless of the stage of understanding or spiritual development. When asked, “Can the path of inquiry be followed by all aspirants?” the Maharshi replied, “This is suitable only for the ripe souls. The rest should follow different methods according to the state of their minds.”<sup>2</sup>

## XVIII

वृत्तयस्त्वहं वृत्तिमाश्रिताः ।  
वृत्तयो मनो विद्वद्यहं मनः ॥ १८ ॥

vṛttayastvahaṁ vṛtti-maśritaḥ  
vṛttayo mano viddhayaḥaṁ manaḥ

What one has thought of as his mind is merely a bundle of thoughts. All these thoughts depend upon the one thought of “I”, the ego. Therefore, the so-called mind is the “I” thought.

The power of the ‘I-thought’ is limitless. In *Yoga Vasishtha*, Siva informs Vasistha that, “This idea of ‘I’ brings in its train the ideas of time, space and other potencies.”<sup>1</sup> The mind is the I-am-the-body illusion. The Maharshi says specifically, “The mind is only identity of the Self with the body.”<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, the core of the Maharshi’s teaching involves an understanding of the nature of the mind and its relation to human bondage and freedom. In the preceding verses the control or annihilation of the mind has been discussed. Now we are advised that the mind is simply a bundle of thoughts wrapped about a feeling of ‘I’ wrongly associated with the body.

## XIX

अहमयं कुतो भवति चिन्वतः ।  
अयि पतत्यहं निजविचारणम् ॥ १९ ॥

ahamayaṁ kuto bhavati cinvataḥ  
ayi patatyahaṁ nijavicāraṇam

If one asks himself, “Where does this I come from?” it will vanish. This is Self-enquiry, or *atma-vichara*.

Since the feeling, “I-am-the-body” is illusory, it cannot continue the masquerade under sustained scrutiny. The Maharshi has taught, “The thought ‘I am this body of flesh and blood’ is the one thread on which are strung the various other thoughts. Therefore if we turn inwards, [enquiring] ‘Where is this I?’ all thoughts [including the ‘I-thought’] will come to an end and Self-knowledge will then spontaneously shine forth within the cave (the heart) as ‘I-I’ ....”<sup>1</sup>

अहमि नाशभाज्यहमहंतया ।  
स्फुरति हृत्स्वयं परमपूर्णसत् ॥ २० ॥

ahami nāśa-bhajy ahama-hantaya  
sphurati hṛt-svayaṁ parama-pūrṇa-sat

Where this ‘I’ vanished and merged in its Source there appears spontaneously and continuously an “I-I”. This is the Heart, the infinite Supreme Being.

Devotees sometimes had difficulty understanding Sri Maharshi’s use of the term ‘I’, though in this and other statements, he makes his meaning clear. In the ultimate sense, ‘I’ is God’s name or the name of our own real selves. In reference to the limited, ignorant individual, ‘I’ refers to the ego or the “I-am-the-body” illusion. This illusory ‘I’ is discontinuous, broken in waking and dream, absent in deep sleep. The Maharshi refers to the true ‘I’ as “I-I” to indicate its continuous nature. Actually, there is no way that this infinite “I-I” can be grasped intellectually by anyone. The true ‘I’ appears, or is experienced, only when the mind is dead, either temporarily in deep sleep or permanently in case of the *jnani*.

Again, in the ultimate sense, “there is neither I [the ego] nor any other thing. Only Brahman exists always, full of bliss everywhere.”<sup>1</sup>

इदमहंपदाभिख्यमन्वहम् ।  
अहमि लीनकेऽप्यलयसत्तया ॥ २१ ॥

idamaham padā'bhikhya-manvaham  
aham-ilīnake'pyalaya sattyā

And this uninterrupted “I-I” is the true meaning of the term “I” because when the waking ‘ego I’ daily disappears in deep sleep, the real ‘I’ remains.

Each day, the *jiva* undergoes the equivalent of death when overtaken by sleep. Yet, as in the physical death of the body, his true identity remains. Therefore, the *jnani* has no more fear of death than of sleep, knowing that his pure Being and Consciousness are unaffected thereby. The same survival is true of all *jivas*, yet the ignorant know it not and live in a state of fear and desire — desire for a state of peace, security and happiness, which is already their true nature.

विग्रहेन्द्रियप्राणधीतमः ।

नाहमेकसत्तज्जडं ह्यसत् ॥ २२ ॥

vigrah-endriya prāṇa-dhītamah  
nāhameka-sat tajaḍam hyasat

This true 'I', the one Reality, is not the body, or the senses, or mind, or breath, or ignorance. These are all inert and insentient.

To discover this truth is the real purpose of human life. Pleasure, happiness, and satisfaction are certainly to be found in this world of sensual experience, but they are, sadly, only temporary conditions, bound by time and place – inevitably followed by frustration and pain.

In the *Manusamhita*, the student is advised, “Desire is never extinguished by the enjoyment of desired objects. It only grows stronger like a fire fed with clarified butter. If one man should obtain all those sensual enjoyments and another should renounce them all, that renunciation of all pleasures is far better than the attainment of them.”<sup>1</sup>

This verse of *Upadesa Saram* explains why this is so. The senses and body are not one's true 'I' or Self. Any attempt to use them for enjoyment is bound to end in futility. However, until Liberation, we feel compelled to repeat each attempt again and again.

One must stress in this verse the sense: “in themselves.” When asked why *Upadesa Saram* speaks of the body etc. as *jada*, or insentient, Maharshi replied, “[They are insentient] in as much as you say they are apart from the Self. But when

the Self is found, this body etc. are also found to be in the Self. Afterwards, no one will ask the question and no one will say they are insentient.”<sup>2</sup>

The verse concerns specifically the five sheaths which envelop the individual and prevent him from realizing his true nature. *Tamas* (*tamah*), ‘darkness’ or ‘ignorance’ refers to the *anandamayakosa*, or blissful sheath, which covers one during deep sleep.



सत्त्वभासिका चित्क्ववेतरा ।  
सत्तया हि चिच्चित्तयाह्यहम् ॥ २३ ॥

sattva-bhāsika citkva vetarā  
sattyā hi cit cittayā hyaham

There is only one Being that can know Reality.  
That one-only Being is itself Reality and is itself  
Consciousness.

This simple revelation sums up the whole of the *jnani's* experience and the whole metaphysics of *advaita*. The reference here is to the impossibility of the eye 'seeing' itself. The Self (Reality) cannot see itself for there are not two Selves, permitting one to see the other. The Self can only be itself. It 'Sees' itself only as a reflection in the cosmos, just as the eye requires a mirror to see its own form.

Sri Maharshi comments on this and the previous verse as to where sentience, or consciousness, lies. "In the former (verse XXII), the body, senses, breath, mind and nescience are described as *asat* (unreal) and *jadam* (insentient), while the 'I' is *eka sat* (the one Reality). Then the question remains: Is the 'I' *chit* (sentient) or *jadam* (insentient)? To this, the reply is given in verse XXIII. *Sat* (Reality) is *chit* (sentient)."<sup>1</sup>

Speaking to a young girl, five year old Indira, who had picked out some Sanskrit letters of *Upadesa Saram*, (verse XXII and XXIII), the Maharshi explained that they meant, "I am not the body. Who am I? I am He." (*deham naham koham soham*). The Maharshi asked her to make them her *mantra*, saying it was the essence of wisdom. Indira continued to recite these words for the rest of her brief life.<sup>2</sup>

ईशजीवयोर्वेषधीभिदा ।

सत्स्वभावतो वस्तु केवलम् ॥ २४ ॥

īśa-jīvayor veṣa-dhi-bhida  
sat-svabhāvato vastu kevalam

Both Creator and creature are essentially one and the same Reality. Their apparent differences are due only to differences in form and levels of knowledge.

The key to this and the following verse is *vesa* or ‘attributes’. *Vastu kevalam*, or Absolute *Brahman* is *Nirguna Brahman*, without any limiting attributes whatsoever. *Saguna Brahman* is the Ultimate Reality which appears to take on attributes in manifestation. God, the Creator, or *Isa*, has the attributes, ‘all knowing’ and ‘all powerful’. The individual, or *jiva*, is ignorant and weak. Yet, basically, *Isa* and *jiva* are the same substance.

So long as one thinks he is the body he shall be bound by attributes. When by the enquiry, “Who am I?”, he discovers he is not the body, he also discovers that he is, in reality, attributeless, like Brahman.

Referring to the triad common to all religious systems, the Individual, the World, and God, Sri Bhagavan says that these are all the illusions of the outgoing mind. When, however, they are viewed from the standpoint of Ultimate Reality they are seen as one. The Sanskrit text, *isajivayo* (between *Isvara* and the individual) identifies two persons, the Creator and created, and the verse concludes that they are both the same in essence (the Absolute *Brahman*), differing only in their attributes of power and knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

वेषहानतः स्वात्मदर्शनम् ।  
ईशदर्शनं स्वात्मरूपतः ॥ २५ ॥

veṣa-hānataḥ svātma-darśanam  
īśa-darśanaṁ svātma-rūpataḥ

When the creature abandons its illusory individual form and recognises itself as without attributes, it sees the Creator as its own true Self.

The solution to the ignorance and weakness of the individual is here revealed. It lies in the elimination of attributes (*vesa*), by recognising that one is truly not the body or the mind which are the vehicles of limitation. Such recognition is possible only after the ego is dead and one has surrendered himself to the Creator. Then both are known to be the same attributeless Reality or Self.

Ironically, our efforts to improve our own image and achieve fame and wealth and power serve actually to increase our limitations.

आत्मसंस्थितिः स्वात्मदर्शनम् ।  
आत्मनिर्द्वयादात्मनिष्ठता ॥ २६ ॥

ātma-saṁsthiṭiḥ svātma-darśanam  
ātma-nirdvayād ātma-niṣṭhatā

Being the Self is knowing the Self, because there is only one Self, and not two. This Being and knowing the Self is abiding in the Reality.

The same imperative is given in the Maharshi's *Forty Verses on Reality*. "Other than turning the mind within, and lodging it in the Self, how is it possible to think of the Self with the mind?"<sup>1</sup>

And elsewhere, "Can knowledge be other than Being? Being is the core, the Heart. How then is the Supreme Being to be contemplated and glorified? Only by remaining the Pure Self ...."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, it is futile to attempt to understand the Self by reasoning or intellectual arguments. Thought is an obstacle to 'Self-Realization', which in the end can be attained only when the ego has been destroyed and all conceptualising abandoned.

ज्ञानवर्जिताऽज्ञानहीनचित् ।  
ज्ञानमस्ति किं ज्ञातुमन्तरम् ॥ २७ ॥

jñana-varjit-ajñanhina cit  
jñānam-asti kiṁ jñātum-antaram

True knowledge is beyond what we think of as ‘knowledge’ or ‘ignorance’ because in the State of Non-differentiation what other thing is to be known?

The *jnani* is aware of everything as the Self. He does not ‘see’ objects as existing in themselves as objects, but only as reflections of the one universal Brahman. Hence, while the *jnani* is not ignorant, he does not have ‘knowledge’ of objects, since, unlike the *jiva*, he knows nothing as ‘other’ than the Self.

Sankara has insisted on this as the essence of *advaita*. “All modifications of clay, such as a jar, etc., which are always accepted by the mind as real, are in reality nothing but clay. Similarly, this entire universe, which is produced from the real *Brahman*, is *Brahman* Itself and nothing but That.”<sup>1</sup> And again, “All that is perceived, all that is heard, is *Brahman*, and nothing else. Attaining the knowledge of Reality, one sees the universe as the non-dual *Brahman*: Being, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute.”<sup>2</sup>

## XXVIII

किं स्वरूपमित्यात्मदर्शने ।  
अव्ययाभवापूर्णचित्सुखम् ॥ २८ ॥

kiṁ svarūpam-ityātma darśane  
avyayābhavā" pūrṇa-cit sukham

If one's true Self is known, then there is neither birth nor death, but eternal Being, Consciousness, Bliss.

The Maharshi often asked those who came to him with questions to find out if they had ever been born. Once they had been able to answer this fundamental question, he said, they would have no others. This verse puts the matter in a different order: When, by the *sadhana* prescribed in the preceding verses, one knows his Self, then he will discover that he was never born.

All earthly existence is experienced by an apparent entity which believes itself to have been born and to have enjoyed and suffered – an entity which will finally die. It is only as real as the subjects in a dream.

बन्धमुक्त्यतीतं परं सुखम् ।  
विन्दतीह जीवस्तु दैविकः ॥ २९ ॥

bandha muktyatītaṁ paraṁ sukham  
vindatīha jīvastu daivikaḥ

The *jiva* who attains the state of Supreme Bliss, beyond any thoughts of bondage or freedom is truly devoted to the Lord.

This verse is the Maharshi's conclusion as to the relationship between the *bhakti* and *jnana margas*, first mentioned in verse V. Abiding in the state of Supreme Bliss is true 'service' or 'worship' of the Lord because the divine *jiva* is not separate from Brahman and realizes his identity. Whatever he may 'do' is itself divine.

Devotion is not truly *bhakti* so long as the worshipper believes himself to be a separate reality, usurping thereby something of the universality of the Lord's Being and Consciousness. Only the utter surrender of one's individuality can be true *bhakti*, which is also true *jnana*.

अहमपेतकं निजविभानकम् ।  
महदिदं तपो रमणवागियम् ॥ ३० ॥

aham-apetakam nija-vibhānakam  
mahadidaṁ tapo ramaṇa vāgiyam

When the individual ‘I’ has disappeared and the real “I-I” has been found, that is excellent *tapas*. Ramana says this.

This final verse places the whole of *Upadesa Saram* in the setting of the story of the Daruka forest ascetics as used by Muruganar. The ascetics had practised austerities (*tapas*) for false purposes. The Maharshi affirms here that *atma vichara* is itself the “excellent *tapas*” that they should make use of for true happiness. Muruganar wrote the original Tamil version of this verse, stating Ramana Maharshi to be THE SELF. Sri Ramana did not himself say that he was ‘enlightened’, except by implication, and did not carry Muruganar’s statement over into the Sanskrit version of this verse. Nevertheless, it is as Lord Ramana, the Self, that He speaks in these Thirty Verses. And for those who understand and follow and are freed by this advice, it is He alone who teaches and guides and frees.



## NOTES

### SRI MAHARSHI'S WAY

- <sup>1</sup> Osborne, *Collected Works*, p. 79. One could also argue that since only the last fifteen verses of *Upadesa Saram* describe the Maharshi's own way of *atma vichara*, or 'search for the Self', that *Ulladu Narpadu* or *Sad Vidya* has some advantages. (See Sri Sadhu Om and Michael James, *Upadesa Undiyar*, p. 9). However, *Upadesa Saram* serves to relate the Maharshi's teachings to all the great traditional paths of Hindu discipline and integrate them with his own *Jnana Yoga*. The title of the poem is sometimes given as *Upadesa Sarah* (e.g. Visvanathan's translation). This accords with the Maharshi's original manuscript. However, the alternate neuter ending '*saram*' is usually used in references and titles in place of the masculine *sarah*.
- <sup>2</sup> "All these verses in Sanskrit composed by the Maharshi were elegant, flawless, perfect in all respects, conforming to the canons of Sanskrit poetry." Shankaranarayanan, in *Bhagavan and Nayana*, p. 43. Among the notable analyses of *Upadesa Saram*, Ganapati Muni's was the first and was done immediately after the Maharshi composed it. Muni was amazed at the Sanskrit work's perfection. Narasimha Swami, in his commentary, used his familiarity with the *sastras* to correlate much of the poem with *Vedic* passages. Visvanatha Swami whom Sri Bhagavan himself relied on for translating, provides an authentic and scholarly translation of the Sanskrit version, with a copy of the original hand-written text. Michael James, using the insights of the late Sadhu Om, has done, as editor, a remarkably fine commentary on the poem, based on the earlier Tamil text (*Upadesa Undiyar*).

3 Devotee: “Can *hatha yoga* be accomplished at my age?”

Maharshi: “Why do you think of all that? Why do you leave yourself and go after something external? The *hatha yogis* claim to keep the body fit so that enquiry may be effected without obstacles .... Their favourite example is: the screen must be perfect before the painting is begun. Yes, but which is the screen and which is the painting? According to them the body is the screen and the enquiry into the Self is the painting. But is not the body itself a picture on the screen, the Self?” Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 584.

4 Devotee: “May we proceed by *bhakti marga*?” Maharshi: “It is according to individual temperament and equipment. *Bhakti* is the same as *vichara* .... The one thought of God will dominate others. That is concentration. The object of meditation is thus the same as *vichara* .... After God is perceived, *vichara* commences. That ends in realization of the Self. *Vichara* is the ultimate route.” Venkataramaiah, *Talks*, p. 74.

Let it not be thought that Sri Maharshi’s way of *Atma Vichara* offers an easy solution to ‘human bondage’, requiring merely an intellectual feat, a clever grasping of a secret truth which outmodes other paths. It is true that He has cautioned devotees that *karma marga* may result in the conceit that the public benefactor is an heroic figure; that the *bhakti* path may make the individual proud of his piety; and that the *raja yogi* may become overly concerned with his body. But He has also warned that *jnana yoga* is not for everyone. If the individual, who already has the problem of an inflated ego, hears that he and Siva are identical, may not that same ego swell even more with its sense of power and importance? *Atma vichara* requires a high degree of fitness and discipline, ‘beyond’ the paths of service and devotion. The *sadguru* will recognise these

qualities in the *jiva*.

- <sup>5</sup> See Subbaramayya, *Reminiscences*, p. 39; Osborne, *Collected Works*, p. 74.
- <sup>6</sup> Originally, Muruganar had composed three of the thirty verses. These (16, 28, 30) were revised by the Maharshi and included in the whole. Subbaramayya, *Reminiscences*, p. 39.
- <sup>7</sup> Sri Maharshi himself often referred to this poem as “His Teaching”. See, for example, Venkataramiah, *Talks* p. 341 Maharshi’s own fondness for it is related by Ramanananda Swarnagiri: “Sri Bhagavan was correcting and aiding some youngsters of not more than ten years of age in memorising his Sanskrit work, *Upadesa Saram* and I was laughing, so to say, up my sleeve, at the futility of coaching these youngsters who could not understand the A, B, C of this highly metaphysical poetry. Without the utterance of a single word [about my silent laughter], Sri Bhagavan turned to me and remarked that though these children might not understand the meaning of these poems now, yet they would be of immense help to them, and would be recalled with great relief and pleasure when they came of age and were in difficulties.” *Crumbs from His Table*, p. 45.

## THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

- <sup>1</sup> Narasimhaswami, *Self Realization*, p. 66; Osborne, *Path of Self Knowledge*, p. 42; Mudaliar, *Day by Day*, I. 32
- <sup>2</sup> Mudaliar, *Recollections*, p. 89; also, p. 111, “If work is what is ordained for one, one will not escape it, however much one may try.”
- <sup>3</sup> Venkataramiah *Talks*, p. 393.
- <sup>4</sup> Ultimately, one cannot even say that the Atman is free, since bound and free are opposites and the Eternal is beyond or embraces all such pairs.
- <sup>5</sup> Vivekananda, *Works*, 1, 93. “Therefore we see at once that there cannot be any such thing as freewill; the very words are a contradiction.”
- <sup>6</sup> Nisargadatta, *I am That*, II, 108.
- <sup>7</sup> Mudaliar, *Day by Day*, I. 3<sup>2</sup>
- <sup>8</sup> When asked once about man’s freedom, the Maharshi replied, “If you want to go to fundamentals, you must enquire who you are and find out who it is who has freedom or destiny.” It is the Self, not the *Jiva* that is free. Godman, *Be As You Are*, p. 136. In verse 77 of Maharshi’s Poem, *The Marital Garland of Letters*, He has written, “Shine thou selfless (without ego) sapping the pride of those who boast of their freewill, oh Arunachala!” Osborne, *Collected Works*, p. 57.
- <sup>9</sup> This absolute control over all creation is unequivocally stated in Hindu tradition, as found in Bhishma’s answer to Yudhishtira’s question about freewill: “In this world, oh Bharata, acts good and bad attach themselves to man .... Is man, however, to be regarded as their doer, or not?” Bhishma replied by citing an ancient story of a discussion between the great Daitya, Prahlada, and Indra in which the former says, “He who regards himself as the doer of

acts, good or bad, possesses a wisdom that is vitiated .. All these flow from Nature. This is my settled conclusion. Even *Moksha* and Self-knowledge, according to me, flow from the same source. *Mahabharata* (Santi Parva CCXXII). See also *Bhagavad Gita*, III, 27, Actions are wrought in all cases by the energies of Nature.” Again in *Gita* IX, 7-8: “I again and again send forth this whole multitude of beings, powerless under the control of my *Prakriti*.” And in XVIII, 61: “The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, oh Arjuna, whirling by *maya* all of them, as though mounted on a machine.”

<sup>10</sup> The Maharshi has said, “Divine Will prevails at all times and under all circumstances .... Recognise the force of the Divine Will and keep quiet.” Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 546.

<sup>11</sup> A devotee said that he had concluded he was Supreme Consciousness. Maharshi replied, “It is one thing to conclude it by reasoning and another thing to be convinced.” Venkataramiah, *Talks* p. 403.

<sup>12</sup> The ‘impasse’ here is only apparent. True progress in knowledge brings progress in devotion. Greater devotion brings greater knowledge. “There is no difference between *Jnana* and absolute surrender to the Lord, that is, in thought, word, and deed. To be complete, surrender must be unquestioning. The devotee cannot bargain with the Lord, or demand favours at His hands. Such entire surrender comprises all: it is *Jnana* and *Vairagya*, Devotion and Love.” *Maharshi’s Gospel*, I, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Actually, the Maharshi considered all as Divine Grace. When Devaraja Mudaliar complained about happenings that disturbed his spiritual peace and asked if such troubles meant that Bhagavan had withdrawn his grace, the Maharshi replied, “You crazy fellow! The trouble or want of peace comes only because of Grace”. *Recollections*, p. 113.

- <sup>14</sup> For an analysis of the situation of the Daruka forest ascetics and theme of *Upadesa Saram*, see Sri Sadhu Om and Michael James, *Upadesa Undiyar*, pp. 7-8.
- <sup>15</sup> For a devotee's impression of the Maharshi's submission to the Divine Will, see Mudaliar, *Recollections*, pp. 133-134.
- <sup>16</sup> When asked if Jesus did not have occult powers because he cured people of disease, Maharshi replied that Jesus would not have considered that he was using such powers. Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 17.
- <sup>17</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 370.
- <sup>18</sup> *Gita*, X, 36. Krishna says, "I am effort." Sankara's commentary adds, "I am the effort of those who make an effort." The Maharshi insisted that effort binds only because one thinks that one is the doer of such effort. In fact, he says, "Help yourself, and that is itself according to God's will. Every action is prompted by Him only." Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 547. Sri Sankaracharya, in the Final Salutation to Gaudapada's *Commentary* on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, says: "I make obeisance with my whole being to my own great teacher, who, through the light of his illumined wisdom ... put an end, forever, to my appearance and disappearance in this terrible ocean of innumerable births and deaths; and who ENABLES all others, too, THAT TAKE SHELTER AT HIS FEET, to attain unflinching knowledge of the scriptures, peace, and the state of perfect non-differentiation." [Emphasis mine] Note that it is He, the Enlightened One who "enables" others who "take shelter at his feet." Nikhilananda, *Upanishads*, p. 369.
- <sup>19</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 393.
- <sup>20</sup> In verse 5 of his hymn, *Five Verses on the Self*, the Maharshi says, "The one Self, the Sole Reality, exists eternally. When even the Ancient Teacher, Dakshinamurti, revealed it through speechless eloquence, who else could convey it by speech?" Osborne, *Collected Works*, p. 96.

## UPADESA SARAM

### *First Verse*

<sup>1</sup> The unreality of both waking and dream states is the theme of the second part of the *Mandukya Upanishad*. See Nikhilananda, *Upanishads*, pp. 253-255.

<sup>2</sup> Aiyer, *Yoga Vasistha*, pp. 333-334.

<sup>3</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 415.

<sup>4</sup> Godman, *Be As You Are*, pp. 218-219.

### *Third Verse*

<sup>1</sup> *Gita*, XVIII, 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Gita*, XVIII, 26.

### *Fourth Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Self-Enquiry*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ganapati Muni, *Ramana Gita*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Aiyer, *Yoga Vasistha*, p. 319.

### *Fifth Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Ryder, *Shakuntala*, p. 3. Siva as “Lord of Eight Forms” is also hailed in Sankara’s *Hymn to Dakshinamurthi*, rendered into Tamil by Ramana Maharshi. Osborne, *Collected Works*, p. 140.

### *Ninth Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Mudaliar, *Recollections*, p. 44.

### *Tenth Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Ramana Maharshi, *Maharshi’s Gospel*, pp. 74-77.

<sup>2</sup> Godman, *Be As You Are*, p. 79.

### *Eleventh Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 418, 313, 134.

*Twelfth Verse*

- <sup>1</sup> Aiyer, *Yoga Vasistha*, p. 375.  
<sup>2</sup> Ramana Maharshi, *Who Am I?*, p. 14.

*Thirteenth Verse*

- <sup>1</sup> Swarnagiri, *Crumbs*, p. 42  
<sup>2</sup> Subbaramayya, *Reminiscences*, p. 126. This problem is discussed by Maharshi in more detail in Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 439.

*Fifteenth Verse*

- <sup>1</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 560.  
<sup>2</sup> Venkataramanan, *Atma Bodha*, Verse 34.

*Sixteenth Verse*

- <sup>1</sup> Godman, *Be As You Are*, p. 54.  
<sup>2</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 26.

*Seventeenth Verse*

- <sup>1</sup> Venkataramanan, *Atma Bodha*, Verse 2  
<sup>2</sup> Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Words of Grace*, p. 45. An alternate translation is found in *Spiritual Instructions*, p. 17.

*Eighteenth Verse*

- <sup>1</sup> Aiyer, *Yoga Vasistha*, p. 355.  
<sup>2</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 51

*Nineteenth Verse*

- <sup>1</sup> Sadhu Om, *Path*, p. 45.

*Twentieth Verse*

- <sup>1</sup> Sureshananda, *Yoga Vasistha Sara*, VIII. 10.



*Twentysecond Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Buhler, *Laws of Manu*, II, 94, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 269.

*Twentythird Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Subbaramayya, *Reminiscences*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Subbaramayya, *Reminiscences*, p. 94.

*Twentyfourth Verse*

<sup>1</sup> See Subbaramayya, *Reminiscences*, p. 101

*Twentysixth Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Mahadevan, *Ramana Maharshi*, p. 93 (verse 22)

<sup>2</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks*, p. 526.

*Twentyseventh Verse*

<sup>1</sup> Madhavananda, *Vivekachudamani*, Verse 251

<sup>2</sup> Venkataramanan, *Atma Bodha*, Verse 64.

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## GLOSSARY

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <i>Advaita</i>      | Non-duality. There is only one Reality. All forms of phenomenal existence are, in themselves, illusory.             |
| <i>Ajnani</i>       | An ignorant or unrealized person  |
| <i>Asat</i>         | Illusory or unreal  |
| <i>Atma</i>         | The Self  |
| <i>Bhakta</i>       | A devotee, worshipper   |
| <i>Bhakti</i>       | The path of devotion as a means of salvation  |
| <i>Brahman</i>      | The Ultimate Reality<br>Universal Consciousness   |
| <i>Chit</i>         | The One Reality   |
| <i>Eka Sat Guna</i> | Common name for the three attributes or qualities (dullness, activity, being) which characterise all created things |
| <i>Guru</i>         | A spiritual preceptor   |
| <i>Hatha Yoga</i>   | A type of <i>yoga</i> emphasising bodily postures and movements   |
| <i>Isa</i>          | Lord, a title of Siva   |
| <i>Jada</i>         | Inert, unconscious  |
| <i>Jiva</i>         | The individual, ego   |
| <i>Jnana</i>        | Wisdom, absolute knowledge  |
| <i>Jnani</i>        | A sage, or one who is Self-realized   |
| <i>Karma</i>        | Action, or its consequences, causality  |
| <i>Karmakanda</i>   | Sections of the Vedas concerning ceremony and ritual  |
| <i>Karta</i>        | The doer of actions   |
| <i>Kevala</i>       | The temporary absorption or merging of mental activities  |
| <i>Samadhi</i>      |   |
| <i>Kumbhaka</i>     | Suspension of breath after in-take  |
| <i>Laya</i>         | Absorption or inactivity of the mind  |

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>Manas</i>           | Mind   |
| <i>Manolaya</i>        | Temporary quieting of the mind   |
| <i>Mantra</i>          | A sacred utterance, to be repeated by the devotee  |
| <i>Marga</i>           | A path to Realization, especially those of <i>Karma</i> , <i>Bhakti</i> , <i>Yoga</i> and <i>Jnana</i> – or action. devotion, mind control and knowledge |
| <i>Maya</i>            | Illusion, or the power that creates the unreal world of forms  |
| <i>Moksha</i>          | Emancipation or Liberation from the bondage of <i>maya</i>   |
| <i>Mouna</i>           | Silence of mind rather than merely that of speech  |
| <i>Mukta</i>           | One who has attained <i>Moksha</i>   |
| <i>Nasa</i>            | Destruction  |
| <i>Nirguna Brahman</i> | The attributeless Ultimate Reality   |
| <i>Parabhakti</i>      | Supreme devotion, total surrender to the deity   |
| <i>Prana</i>           | Breath, the life force   |
| <i>Pranayama</i>       | Breath control   |
| <i>Prarabdha Karma</i> | That portion of one's destiny which is to be experienced or acted out in the present life  |
| <i>Raja Yoga</i>       | The system of <i>yoga</i> advocated by Patanjali, emphasising mental and physical disciplines  |
| <i>Rajas</i>           | The <i>guna</i> of activity or passion   |
| <i>Sadguru</i>         | The true Guru to be found ultimately within  |
| <i>Saguna Brahman</i>  | The Ultimate Reality, manifesting itself with attributes as the phenomenal world   |

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <i>Sakti</i>   | The creative and motivating power in the universe  |
| <i>Samadhi</i> | A super-conscious state in which thought is suspended and individuality is transcended               |
| <i>Sattva</i>  | The <i>guna</i> of goodness, being   |
| <i>Siddhi</i>  | Supernatural powers, acquired by yogic disciplines. Also an aspect of the state of Self-realization. |
| <i>Soham</i>   | The meditation, “I am Siva”  |
| <i>Tamas</i>   | The <i>guna</i> of ignorance, darkness, sloth  |
| <i>Tapas</i>   | Austerities, undertaken as aids to Realization or to acquire special powers or objectives            |
| <i>Vasana</i>  | Mental tendencies, leading to habitual activities  |
| <i>Vesha</i>   | Attributes, characterising various forms of being  |
| <i>Vichara</i> | The way of Self-inquiry (Who am I?) stressed by Ramana Maharshi                                      |
| <i>Yajna</i>   | Sacrifice  |
| <i>Yoga</i>    | Union with the Supreme Being, sometimes specifically <i>Raja Yoga</i>                                |