

Guru Pournima is a very important day for all sadhaks, especially for those who have had the good fortune to be under the guidance of a great spiritual teacher. One can never underestimate the contribution of a spiritual teacher to one's spiritual evolution. Actually there is no limit to which one can talk about the importance of a true spiritual teacher.

Let us first look into the meaning of the word 'Guru'. GU means 'Guhya', which means 'hidden'. It also means 'dark'-that which is not in the light. And RU is the destroyer of the darkness. It is from the root Rudra - the Destroyer. So Guru is the destroyer of darkness. The main function of a teacher is to dispel the inner darkness of ignorance. Always bear in mind that the main function of a spiritual teacher is to give spiritual knowledge. He need not give that knowledge through words only. His presence, his look, his touch - everything can bring about a spiritual change in the seeker. That great teacher who was touched the core of his consciousness which is of course the same thing as touching the Universal Cosmic Supreme Being - can sometimes with any of these, bring about a change in one's consciousness, from which one can then march ahead and reach the goal. But the seeker has to first work hard and prepare himself before he receives the touch. The Guru's touch gives a push. But it is only a push that he can give. After that the seeker has to work hard on it

A guru is here in this world only to teach and share the spiritual knowledge that he has. He is not here for any other purpose. A real teacher is not interested in collecting a number of disciples. That is not his business. Even if he has one student who understands perfectly what he is teaching, it is good enough for him. It is the spiritual development, the spiritual evolution of the individual that he is interested in. It cannot be a mass awakening.

There are no shortcuts to Self-realisation or God realisation. One has to put one's efforts into it. But there is one thing - when we have a spiritual teacher with us, we are able to get over the lean periods when we have problems with our sadhana - when we say, 'In the beginning the sadhana was wonderful. But now there are no spiritual experiences'. Then you need a spiritual teacher to define what you mean by 'nothing is happening to me'. What exactly do you expect to happen? And how? This is possible only if you have spiritual teacher, who has already walked the path and has seen all the pitfalls, who is by your side, or at least is available to you, to help you through.

Believe me, most people on the spiritual path need some guidance. We may say, 'Oh, one doesn't need a Guru. One doesn't need a teacher'. But it is impossible to move on the path without spiritual guidance. The teacher may sometimes behave like a friend, sometimes like a Master. He may test you. He studies you and finds out what is most suited for you, and gives that to you in small doses or in big doses, depending on how much you can absorb. This is very important. Sometimes out of great enthusiasm people say, 'Give me more'. But it is not possible to give like that. Because the student's body and mind may not be fit enough to receive so much. He may explode, and generally this affects the brain. So a spiritual teacher is very important. He guides each student according to his needs and according to his capacities, because everyone is not from the same background. He does not have the same nature and he does not have the same capacities. A true teacher finds out what is best for him and guides him accordingly, along the path most suited for him.

A teacher is like a polished mirror. He puts it in front of you. You look at him and you see yourself properly reflected. There are many layers of our subconscious mind that we ourselves cannot find out. We continue to live our lives with a false image of ourselves - conveniently, to suit ourselves. The teacher is able to reveal our true image of ourselves to us - by holding a mirror in front of us. Mind you, sometimes we may see a terrible image of ourselves. But unless you see that image, which is the reality, how can you change it? So the teacher's function is to first reveal that image. Sometimes the teacher's actions and words may appear to be harsh. But you should not mind it. Some teachers may be very tough in the way they remove the gold from the iron. Sometimes they put you through great ordeals. But don't give up. Because, without passing through ordeals one can never see the Truth. So it is very important that when you have found a teacher, hold on to him, no matter what the trials and tribulations are.

Another important point to remember is that the spiritual practice is not something that can be done by reading a few books. They can give you a theoretical idea of things. But for the practice it is essential to have a guide, who can take you step by step, along the path suited for you whether Jnana or Bhakti or Raja Yoga etc. For instance if you practice certain mudras or bandhans by reading a book, there is every chance that you could go haywire. This is because the body and mind of an average human being is not strong enough to receive the shock of the awakening. It is like putting a little torch light bulb into the main plug. It will blow up. So the practical guidance of a spiritual teacher, who knows where the problems are, is most essential.

Sometimes we may get interested in other things and mistake it to be spiritual progress. One may learn how to heal, how to cure or how to counsel. But this is not spiritual realisation. Spiritual realisation is in a different bracket. It is the progress of the mind, by constant purification, till it reaches a state of absolute quietude and calmness, when the inner spirit, which is our atman, reveals its identity. This is spiritual progress. All other things are incidental. Often we go into the frills of spiritual activity and get lost in it, and are unable to go back to the true meaning of spiritual progress. Our true path is to find our real Self, not to get siddhis.

If you really want spiritual illumination, you have to give a lot of yourself. Not anything else. Dedicate yourself fully to it. If you really want it you can do it. But first, basically, the interest has to come in the form of a seed. The planting of that seed is called 'initiation'. And once the seed is own, then it is the Master's duty to make the student nurture it. He has to help him do it. The master takes on a lifelong responsibility. When I say 'lifelong', it is not this life only. That bond cannot break for many lives. So when you have a real teacher, follow his instruction carefully and diligently, if you want to progress on the spiritual path and reach the goal. The Guru, being a kind-hearted person, generally gives what you ask. But what you should ask of him is spiritual illumination. That is the real thing that he can give you. Shirdi Baba used to say, 'People come and ask me for many things. And I give it to them, because may be after sometime they will ask me for the thing that I really want to give them.' What I am saying is not that one should not ask the teacher or God for some other things. It is quite legitimate. But bear in mind that the main function of the teacher is to give spiritual knowledge.

But all this need not frighten you. Live your life as you are living it. But always keep one goal in mind - that is that the ultimate aim of our life is to attain spiritual realisation. Keep that in mind and carry on. That is important. Keep this in mind throughout the year. Don't forget it once the Guru Pournima is over. Let the Pournima – the full moon of knowledge shine on each one. Let it not ebb.

Condensed from Sri M's talks delivered at Bihar School of Yoga and Indira Nagar Satsangs, July 5-6, 2001.

Transcribed by Mrs. Shoba Reddy

USA-Talks at Ann Arbor, Michigan

Sri M was invited by Mrs. Geeta Betrabet, Mrs. Sharada Kumar and Mr. Kumar to visit the university town of Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA for a series of talks and satsangs at the Chinmaya Avantika there between 15th of August and 2nd of September. The nine evening talks covered The Ishavashya Upanishad and Chapter 12 of The Gita. The talks were well attended by serious seekers. M stayed with the Betrabet family and enjoyed the serene forest life environs of their home.

Satsangs were held at the Betrabet residence at which many interesting questions about the balancing of spiritual and family life cropped up and Sri M was happy to share his experiences, himself being a family man.

The Shark

*The shark swims in the dark of the deep
It's eye gleams
And it sees streams of gold fish-bold fish
Swimming too near
For the shark is well aware
That here is a tasty dish of fish
And lies in wait-
No fisherman, no bait
And the fish swim past
The shark follows fast and swallows.*

Kedar Ratan, Madras

Teen Dham Yatra with Sri 'M'

**A pilgrimage to Gangothi- Gaumukh,
Kedarnath and Badrinath has been
organized by the Satsang Foundation from 19th September to 4th October.
This will be led by Sri 'M' and about
50 Satsanghis his will accompany him in this trip.**

HARI OM TAT SAT

**Second Satsang
Vidyalaya
inaugurated
at
Siriguntlavaripalli**

Now that the first school of Satsang Vidyalaya at Nakkaladinne with 50 children is two years old, Sri M has started a second school at Siriguntlavaripalli, a tiny hamlet a couple of kilometers up the Ponnutipalyam road. The first class was held in June 2001 in a makeshift thatched hut given by the villagers. A teacher trained at the nodal school takes class for about 30 tiny tots.

The Rotary Club of Bangalore has generously donated Rs.2 lakhs for the school building. About 15 kuntas of land has been identified for purchase and it is expected that a pukka school building will be ready later this year. The thirty children and their teacher attended the Independence Day celebrations at the main school on 15th August.

Teacher Training Centre opened

With one more Satsang Vidyalaya opened and more to follow, a need was felt to have a teacher training centre with boarding and lodging facilities for upto 10 trainees. With a generous donation of Rs.2 lakhs from Ramanarpanam Trust, headed by Smt. K.C. Anita Reddy, the training centre was formally opened on 10th August at a simple function at which M blessed the school children and staff and members of Satsang Foundation who were present. The quality of construction of the building and its appearance evoked praise from all present. Credit goes to the maistri Venkataramana and workers from the tribal village who worked under instructions from Sri M. Daily monitoring was done by Vijaybhaskar. Apart from training teachers for Satsang Vidyalayas, it is proposed to train teacher for other schools depending on the number of vacancies.

Visitor's Meeting Room

With the increasing number of spiritual seekers and well wishers coming to meet Sri M and get his guidance and blessings, it has become imperative for Sri M to have a separate visitor's room to maintain the privacy of his home where he looks after his family and does his work which includes writing correspondence with his numerous devotees, daily meetings with school staff, painting when time is available, receiving phone calls etc. He plans to have regular visiting hours and intending visitors are requested to stick to these hours.

Revival of Lambadi embroidery craft

The traditional mirror embroidery work of the Lambadi tribals is fast dying as a skill among the new generation. With an idea to keep alive this craft form Satsang Foundation has tied up with the DWARAKA programme of the Ramanarpanam Trust to fine students from the village to learn this skill from two village elders who are experts. The programme has been on for two months and is funded by Ramanarpanam trust. Smt. Anita Reddy is personally involved in this project which is still in its infancy.

Satsang Foundation News

The Satsang Foundation has now obtained the necessary permissions under The FCRA (Foreign Contributions Regulations Act) and can receive foreign funds from individuals and organizations abroad. Payments should be made out in the name of **The Satsang Foundation, Bangalore.**

To take care of donations and contributions within India **The Satsang Trust** has been formed with exemption under 80 G of the Income Tax Act. Well-wishers and contributors may kindly note this. Sponsorship forms for sponsoring the education of rural children at The Satssang Vidyalaya are now available from the Secretaries Surya Deo and Mohan in Bangalore or from the President Sri M at Madanapalli.

“MUNDAKA UPANISHAD” TALKS

Sri 'M' regularly gave talks at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Bangalore. For two years he had decided against holding any public talks. It was therefore his first talk after this gap and the topic was “MUNDAKA UPANISHAD” starting on 22nd March evening and ending on the 25th morning. Printed programme for the talks was posted to everyone on our mailing list. On the last day of the talks questions pertaining to the subject, were written out by people attending the talks, with their names and address. These were given to Sri 'M' who told them that he would personally reply to them as early as possible. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, had very kindly given ESV basement hall for the talks which was packed on all days.

Retreat: February 2001 TO RISHIKESH WITH A RISHI

In the second half of February this year Sri M invited a group of friends from Bangalore, Mysore Palamaner, Jodhpur, Chennai, Delhi, Germany and USA for a retreat to Rishikesh, at the foot of the Himalayas. En route food, accommodation and transport at Delhi were graciously provided by the sisters Bhavani Devi and Uma Devi. Vivek Mahendru generously provided the return bus transport at the end of the trip. On reaching Rishikesh by late afternoon of 15th February we checked into the sprawling Vedniketan ashram on the banks of the holy Ganga, with nearly hundred yards of river front and beach.

After settling in our respective rooms a meeting was called by Sri M to brief us as to how the next few days would be spent. Our daily programme was chalked out and each member was expected to keep up the schedule.

The day began at 5.30 AM in the satsang hall. Chanting of Om and 30 minutes of meditation were followed by yogasanas (optional). There followed a short break, during which many of us would stroll to the nearby chai shop, often accompanied by our Teacher, where we met many interesting seekers and travellers, both Indian and foreign. After breakfast in the ashram dining hall, we would assemble in the hall at 9.30 AM for one hour satsang on Ishavasya Upanishad conducted by Sri M. During the latter part of the retreat he took up Mundaka Upanishad for study. The free time before lunch was used for personal errands, group cleaning of the dining hall and the premises, walking in the nearby bazaar, bathing in the Ganga, writing etc. Lunch in the dining hall was followed by a short rest and satsang on Bhagavad Gita Chapter 6, Dhyana Yoga at 2.30 PM. He also covered chapter 13 later.

Evening walks with Sri M after tea an important part of the day, exercise for body, mind and the soul. On the second day we were taken by Sri M to a place about 400 yards from the ashram where there were a few caves, in the river bank, used by sadhus for tapas and residence. In one of them he and his great Babaji had spent many days in meditation. The cave was full of white, soft river sand and about a dozen of us sat with M and absorbed the peace and power of the cave. It was unforgettable. Another day we walked past the Ram Jhoola to the rocks and beach where Mastram Baba, a great saint, used to live and contemplate. M told about the joyous days when his Master and Baba used to roll on the white sands in childish ecstasy. Sri M went into an ecstatic mood himself as he recalled those days and blessed us.

One evening he took us to the Shivananda Ashram on the opposite bank, after crossing the Ram Jhoola (some took the ferry). We bowed down at his samdhi and spent some quiet time in the meditation room. In the bhajan room, an elderly sanyasini repeated Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama, Hare Hare, Hare Krihna... in a divine melody which went deep into our hearts. Some of us did not feel like leaving the room. We crossed the road and went to the rooms and ghat where Shivanand Maharaj used to stay before he moved to the main ashram. We sat with our Teacher on the steps of the ghat and at 6.00 PM participated in the Ganga Aarati.

One of the longer walks was to the Lakshmana Jhula, over two kilometers from the ashram. We sat in a small café well above the river, just next to the bridge on the far side and ate cinnamon rolls and drank excellent coffee and watched the river flow by down below.

After the walk we used to assemble for evening meditation and bhajans at 6.30 PM. The quality of sinning was good and everybody participated with feeling. Deepu with his harmonium, Shobha, Kamala, Jayanti, Bharathi, Knox and Judith, Hans with the harmonium were the singers. Dinner was at 8 pm and people retired early, happy and elevated by the day's activities and satsang with Sri M, eagerly waiting the morrow. First few days were cold but the chill eased towards the end.

Sri M received several visitors during the retreats. As is his wont he offered to help several aspiring sanyasins who were in material and spiritual need.

Sri M arranged several full day outings so that we mixed cheerful friendship and bonhomie with the intense and serious satsangs and talks. One day we chartered a bus to Haridwar. There we crossed the bridge and walked to Hari Ki Pauri and sat on the steps for a while watching the flow of the Ganga and pilgrims, who were not too numerous on account of the winter. After a delicious lunch of makki ki roti and sarason ka sag (a welcome change after all the aloo we were eating in the ashram) we visited the ancient Nath akhada in the middle of the town. The great Barthrihari and done tapas more than a thousand five hundred years back here in a small cave which is now a shrine. There were pictures of many great nath siddhas including the nave naths. We bowed down and made offerings at the dhuni there. After that we took cycle rickshaws and went up to the junction where the bus picked us up and drove us to the Ramakrishna Ashram. It happened to be Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's birthday! (what a coincidence, if there can be coincidences when we are with Sri M). We then went to the serene and vibrant ashram and samadhi of Sri Anandmayee Ma in Kankhal. We returned in the afternoon, stopping en route at Nim Karoli Baba's ashram and resumed meditation and bhajans in the evening.

A most exciting and fulfilling day was spent white water-rafting down the Ganga with Sri M. Several elders dared the cold and hurtling waters of the Ganga. We first visited the Vashishta Gufa and the Arundati Gufa, near by, where Sri M had spent blissful days with his Master. The peace that we felt there was astonishing, considering that it was open to the public.

The starting point of the rafting expedition, Shivpuri was a further half an hour beyond the Vashishta Gufa. For most of us it was a novel experience and we did not know what to expect. We negotiated about 6 stretches of rapids of varying treachery, one with a drop of about 14 feet, with screams of varying terror!...At the end even the most shaken and drenched were ready for a repeat run. We had a hot and tasty lunch at the halfway rafting point, Brahmmapuri. The rafts dropped us off right opposite our Vedniketan ashram.

The third outing was the trek up the steep Nilkanth mountain by more than 15 of us, led by M. Several of them were amazed they could do such a steep climb of more than four hours without feeling too exhausted. Everyone attributed it to the elevating company of the leader. The others took the circuitous road trip of 30 km by jeep and rendezvoused with the trekkers at the Nilakanteshwar temple. Lord Sankara himself is supposed to have done tapas here. A young radiant yogi was spotted inside the temple. He was wearing a close-necked sweater and trousers and sat self contained and smiling. Sri M gave him some money and few of us saluted him. He saluted M. After darshan and aarati we had a quick lunch and returned. En route M showed us a cave where his Babaji spent some time.

Katyayani sprained her ankle and we were worried if we would make it back before dark but with the help of husband Deepu and Hans and a kind glance from the Master, she made it back just before dark. The trumpeting of a big tusker could be heard as we hurried back to the main road in the dark, at the end of the trek. Just a few days before there had been a panther attack on a roadside mendicant. A panther had been sighted by a group of us few days before.

One day all the ladies dressed in their best clothes carried small earthen lamps to the bank of the river in front of the ashram. As dusk descended the diyas were lit and left to float downstream.. we watched the moving lights and sang Ganga Stuti.

21st February was Shivaratri. The ashram authorities requested that Sri M perform the abhishekh and puja to the sphaatik shivaling. On a commission from M, Vanajasana Naidu and his three friends from Palamaner crossed the river and found a young purohit from Gujarat and his four students who performed the puja with clear and enthusiastic chanting of shlokas and mantras, which we all appreciated and enjoyed. All night vigil was maintained with a havan and chantings. Sri M kept us company throughout the night. At dawn we all bowed down to our Teacher and received blessings and japamalas of different semi-precious stones, each to suit his or her temperament.

Each one would have his or her own account of the retreat but all of us were deeply touched and our lives transformed by M's love and his inspirational talks and satsangs about how to live in peace and harmony with one's self and those around in the new millennium. We were specially affected by his meticulous concern for each and every one of us, with our individual needs and aspirations.

Hyderabad Satsang

On 31st of March and 1st of April 2001, a large and expectant audience at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Hall listened to Sri M in rapt attention as he spoke for 90 minutes each evening, on the 12th Chapter of Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Bhakti Yoga. The two day satsang was inaugurated by Padmabhushan Dr. Shiva Reddy, the well-known ophthalmologist and philanthropist. Smt. Aruna Jayabharatha Reddy who was responsible for organizing all the functions during Sri M's visit introduced the speaker to the satsang. Prof. Raj Reddy of Carnegie Mellon University, who had just received the Padmabhushan from the President of India, garlanded the speaker.

Sri M spoke repeatedly on the primary qualification of bhakta - his keeping the interests of all living beings in his heart. The efficacy of bhajans, kirtans, pujas etc. comes after this quality is developed. He said if the cry of your suffering fellow human being does not affect you then your prayers to God can hardly affect him.

At the end of the second day, Sri M invited questions on slips of paper so that he could answer them individually after he went back to Madanapalli. And he kept his word and wrote letters in reply to all sincere questions. Smt. Aruna Reddy thanked Sri M for the wonderful discourse on Bhakti Yoga and also Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and its president Dr. Shiva Reddy Garu for generously giving the hall free of charge for the function. In reply Sri Shiva Reddy promised to extend the same favour for future talks by Sri M.

On the 30th of March Sri M spoke on The Ashtanga Yoga at The Swarajya Press, Padma Rao Nagar, Secunderabad. The talk was well attended and many questions came from the audience at the end of the talk. Smt. Aruna Reddy organized several bhajans and talks at her residence and many spiritual seekers had the benefit of Sri M's contact and blessings. He spoke to several people individually to answer their doubts. One afternoon he spoke to about 50 government officers in the PWD department. Sri Naeemullah organized this satsang.

Sri M attended a most absorbing get-together arranged by the J. Krishnamurthy study circle, which has a large membership of about 400 JK admirers in Hyderabad. About thirty attended the get-together and heard Sri M. give some interesting anecdotes from his days with JK.

Words of Wisdom

1. "True knowledge makes a man realize that he is the 'soul' with a body, but now in his ignorance, he thinks he is a 'body' with a 'soul'"
2. Chinese proverb- "When you drink from a stream, remember the source."
3. In the words of the Holy Mother (Sharada Devi) "Continuous meditation will make the mind so steady that you will not feel inclined to give it up. When the mind is not in the mood to meditate, do not force it to do so. In such conditions, get up from the seat of meditation after making prostration. Real meditation is of a spontaneous nature."
4. From Verse 2 of Chapter 6 of the Bhagavad Gita- "O Pandava please know Yoga to be that which they call renunciation; no one becomes a yogi who has not renounced thoughts."
5. Both worldliness and liberation depend on God's will. It is God alone who has kept man in a state of ignorance and man will be free when God of His own sweet will calls him to Himself. It is like the mother calling her child at meal times, when he is out playing. When the time comes for setting a man free, God makes him seek the company of holy men. Further it is God who makes him restless for a spiritual life. It is as 'M' told us at one of his talks, "We should do our sadhana as conscientiously as we can and leave the rest to God. It is like keeping all the doors and windows open to let the breeze come in when it does."
6. From a talk given by M at Brig. Narayanan's house... "If we examine the mind, we find that the mind does not tolerate itself without thoughts. It must occupy itself with some thought or the other, whether good or bad. As we said earlier, breathing can be made use of to quieten the mind. How do we achieve this. We can first become aware of breathing, consciously. Generally speaking we are not aware of our breathing, but we can become aware of it, become conscious of it. Thus we will be moving slowly towards 'THAT' which is controlling the breath. Breath is the link between 'THAT' which is looking after us and our breathing. As you watch your breathing the breath automatically slows down and becomes calm. Watch it for some time when your attention is on the quiet breath. The distractions, the thoughts particularly, are suspended for the time being. The energy loss due to the distracting thoughts is reduced and energy is gathered to one thought i.e. watching the breath and you feel a calmness. Usually there is a deep sigh and at this moment you will be able to apply this energy of the mind to whatever you are doing - meditation or any other spiritual practice. Samadhi is that state in which the meditator and the idea or object that is meditated upon become one. This can happen quietly, if you observe your breath."
7. In the Maitri Upanishad we have a striking passage that shows that the idea of rebirth or reincarnation had already found a spiritual interpretation: "Samsara, the transmigration of life takes place in one's mind. Let one therefore keep the mind pure, for what a man thinks, that he becomes."

Compiled by Late Ratnakar S. Sanadi

The passing away of **A Founding Satsangi**

For Sri. Ratnakar S. Sanadi, an ardent follower of Sri 'M' and a founding member of the SATSANG FOUNDATION, April 23, 2001 was the appointed day for his noble soul to leave behind his mortal remains and merge with the Paramatama. The event was the culmination of a series of ailments which he underwent, first physical and then psychological following the sudden demise of his wife Nirmala in November 1999. Finally came the doctor's diagnosis of cancer; but this was accepted by Ratnakar with remarkable equanimity, which not only enabled him to bear the illness with utmost patience and good cheer but also ensured the necessary peace of mind to this daughter Gayatri and the other close family members who lovingly catered to all his needs right to the end.

Ratnakar's enlightened understanding of earthly life, which sustained him through those difficult days, is a tribute to his continuing and dedicated efforts at spiritual self-development. Weekly satsangs in the form of group discussions were being held every Sunday over the years at various places in Bangalore, under the auspices of The Satsang Foundation. From 1997 onwards, when Ratnakar's physical condition prevented him from moving out of his home, the participants in the weekly satsang unanimously decided to shift the venue to his residence on a regular basis, in deference to Ratnakar's enthusiasm and express desire to participate in every weekly meeting. His keen attention, alertness of mind and clarity of expression in the discussions were noteworthy even during the final phase of his affliction, when the venue of the satsang had to be shifted from the sitting room to his bed room.

A voracious reader of philosophical literature, Ratnakar realized the need to comprehend as far as possible the basic universal and eternal truths to ensure one's inner peace and contentment, rather than adhering merely to the path of dogma. In his continuing quest for knowledge and efforts at developing awareness, if any difficulties or doubts arose in his mind he always turned to Sri M for guidance and enlightenment. It is possibly his open minded approach to spiritual life that helped him to accept the fact that one who enters the physical world without choice, cannot have control over one's departure from it. And thus, preceding us, passed away a noble soul from our midst.

An evening to Cherish

It was a packed house on the evening of the 18th as the Rotarians gathered to hear the founder of Satsang Foundation, Sri Mumtaz Ali (better known as Sri M to his disciples). A person who has commenced his spiritual journey from the tender age of 8, Sri M, had traveled right up to the Himalayas in his quest to explore the culture of India. Apart from being an authority on Vedanta and Vedic scriptures, Sri M is also a journalist and philosopher.

Sri M commenced his speech by listing out the different types of meditation, namely Zen Meditation that has its roots in Japan, Tantrik meditation that focuses on the body's energy points or the 'chakra', meditation for healing and meditation done by monks etc. He gave a brief explanation about each of these forms of meditation.

He then acquainted the audience with the concept of meditation. He said it helps to calm the mind and to get in touch with one's inner self. After this, Sri M spoke on the instrumental role that 'dhyana' of yoga plays in calming the mind. He further elaborated by saying that with a calm mind, one could get in touch with one's core of consciousness, the 'aatma' or the soul. He then spoke on Patanjali's work on yoga, the 'Yogasutra'.

Sri M then introduced the audience to some concepts in meditation namely, 'dharana' (a state wherein the mind is fixed on the thought, idea, image, etc.), 'dhyana', (the capacity continue the state of dharana) and 'samadhi' (the culmination of dharana and dhyana).

Sri M concluded his interesting talk by explaining a simple meditation technique to the audience. The members of the audience then tried meditating for a few minutes. It undoubtedly was an enlightening evening.

Divya Janardhan

Retreat at Pulicherla

One 29th of December 2000, we set out with Sri M from Bangalore at 9AM and reached Pulicherla, a village in Chittoor District (A.P). We were warmly greeted by Shobha Reddy's mother, Smt. Indiramma, the gracious matriarch of the Reddy family.

After lunch and short rest we assembled at 4 PM in the hall. Sri M took up a text on Patanjali Yoga Sutras. He spoke on the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga i.e. Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Sri M read and explained from commentaries on the text by Swami Sadashiva Brahmendra and Swami Vivekananda. Later he read out a few pages from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, in his own inimitable way. Meditation followed at 6.30 PM after which Deepu, Katyayani and Shobha sang the kirtans.

Next day we were all up by 6.30 AM for meditation. After that a few more of Patanjali's yoga sutras were covered. After breakfast several of those attending had one-to-ones with M to clear personal doubts and to get personal instruction. Each of us has to bear our own personal cross but with Sri M's kind attention the burden somehow felt lighter. The rest of the day was filled with readings from The Gospel, evening walk, meditation and bhajans.

The last day of the year 2000 and of the millennium had a similar schedule as the previous day except for a visit to the nearby Nutrine sweet factory where we got to sample hot candy right off the quaint coal operated machines.

At 4 PM we drove to the Shiva temple amidst the sugarcane fields. An old lingam was found near the spot and the Reddy family had the lingam installed with the help of the Paramacharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. The priest performed aratis at Shiva's and Mother's shrines there. We sang bhajans and returned home for the evening session on the yoga sutras, meditation and bhajans.

After dinner everybody relaxed. At 10.30 PM all of us sat on sand, out in the garden. A havan was started and it burnt brightly after Sri M invoked the gods because the wood was damp from rain and the fire wouldn't start initially. Sri lead the chanting with 'Om Namah Shivayah' and then we chanted the Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra, Om Namo Narayana and a few other chants. The new millenium was brought in amidst the fervent chanting of mantras and crackling warm fire under twinkling stars and The Guru's kind gaze.

Next morning, 1st Jan 2001, we had our regular meditation at 6.30 AM and reading from The Gospel. After breakfast we bowed down to Sri M in gratitude for being with us at the break of the new millennium and giving us his blessings and direction. We thanked the gracious host Smt. Indiramma and departed to our different destinations. In all we were twenty-five of us from Bangalore, Chennai and Mysore.

Kamal Aswani

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