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Ramana Ashtottaram

1. *Ōm Mahāsenā Mahōmsēna Jātāya Namah*

Prostration to the one who is born from the great luminosity of Skanda.

(Lord Subramanya is worshiped as Jnana Skanda, who destroys the demonic forces of ignorance. Skanda, commander of the divine forces (Mahasena), destroys the *vasanas*, the *asuric* desires and memories, that turn the mind away from the Self within. As does Sri Ramana).

2. *Ōm Sri Ramaṇāya Namah*

Prostration to the one who always rejoices in the Self of Pure Consciousness

(The Name, Sri Ramana, reminds us that Bhagavan rejoiced in the Self of Pure Awareness and that his message is *Ramaniya*, the experience of bliss or beauty. The inner comprehends and transcends the outer. Hence introversion, or turning towards the Self within, restores wholeness to the psyche and finds joy in work in the world as well as in pure contemplation).

3. *Ōm Guravē Namah*

Prostration to the Sadguru who removes the darkness of ignorance and who authenticates the knowledge (*jnana*) through His own presence.

(The Sadguru is like the sun, self-luminous. Wholly identified with Awareness-Bliss, he is at once universal in the validity of his teaching and uniquely efficacious in drawing the disciple towards the Self).

4. *Ōm Akhaṇḍa Samvidākārāya Namah*

Prostration to the one who is the universal unbroken Awareness.

(He is substratum of the manifest word, the individual self and the personal God. He is the world aware of itself as I, I).

Change

CHANGE dominates the world we inhabit today. Both in the external world and within ourselves there is an uninterrupted sense of change and, like divers contemplating a plunge into cold water, we tend to greet it with a mixture of eagerness and panic. The old traditions, the landmarks of our childhood, the certainties of our culture have been pushed aside in the modern insatiable hunger for something new. No longer can we take anything for granted, no longer can we expect any sense of enduring continuity and the process is accelerating. Our parents spoke of the difference between their own time and that of their grandparents. We speak of the difference between our own time and that of five years ago, and the gap is shrinking.

Nevertheless the need is felt for that of stability, and the search for it goes on. One way this manifests itself is in the worldwide hunt for gurus and that tantalising concept, enlightenment. What we seek is a reassurance that we rarely find.

If by good fortune we encounter Bhagavan's teachings we discover a rock of certainty, offering us a true refuge. These teachings can be adapted to any circumstance of our lives since they are not

dependent on a special time or place. They touch that still point within us all which remains unruffled by circumstance. The only qualification is sincerity. The teachings are simple though much has been done to make them complicated! In fact, so much has been written *about* Bhagavan's teachings, that one might assume *everything* has been written and thus developed it's own jargon, losing the simplicity of its original essence in the process.

Bhagavan himself repeated again and again his fundamental, constant question, 'Who am I?' This is called *atma vichara*. He explained that this reiteration was like the 'sruti' or underlying note of music played in concert by the *tambura*, the one droning sound uniting the disparate portions of the musical work into a coherent whole. It is the one certainty from which the lead performer launches out and creates from his imagination the elaborate line of the raga.

Each moment of our lives contains infinite possibilities if we are but aware. Until we rest in our still centre there is a ceaseless search for answers to resolve the restive twitching and uncertainties of the mind. It is a conundrum and yet we want to exchange our uncertainty, our restlessness through the transformation of our inner or outer turmoil by the catalyst we call change! We think we will be the better for it. In some ways we are, albeit temporarily. Then we start all over again.

Can we alter ourselves into something better as if we are a commodity subject to modification?

Bhagavan's response would be invariable: Who is it who wishes to change? He did not advise anyone to renounce the world, as they would simply be exchanging one attitude for another. The person who made the request still comprised of the same tired set of habits.

The startling power of the question 'Who am I?' goes to the heart of our dilemma. The first time we truly *hear* this question is memorable. It is actually a blessing, because in our search for the answer we can never totally return to the delusion in which we were drowning. A lifeline is thrown to us and if we are alert we cling to it.

Our mind in its ceaseless struggle can never fully observe itself. Something else discerns such alterations. It is for this reason we call our immutable core the Self, because it is the impartial witness of all our actions, and it seems, the source of all our activity. For would actions occur if we were not there to be aware of them?

The aim of our practice is to remain focused in the moment. When we understand that there is deep within us something very real but, unlike everything else, is not subject to change, we recognise the true nature of ourselves what we call Self. The equivalent philosophical term, *purusa* means that which sees. Our aim in the practice is to bring about a change in the quality of the mind. We do this by either *atma vichara* or other techniques, which clear the mind of its restlessness and introduce a *sattvic* state. An analogy would be the mirror that is cleaned so its reflection is pure. The essential purpose is to reduce the ignorance (*avidya*), so that the understanding that was always there can come to the surface. We know this has occurred when there is peace and contentment deep within us.

In our modern world we are confronted by many challenges: the challenge to be educated, the challenge to find a job and, what is more, keep it; the challenge of fulfilling family relationships, of health, of remaining balanced despite the contrary tensions in our lives. We may have progressed beyond the insecurities of famine and plague, but nonetheless the challenges are there and more subtle.

We read today about cloning and the global quest to map the human genetic code. It may sound like science fiction but eventually it will be possible for designer babies to be created. Then, who are they in the flux of existence? We are told in Vedanta we are not our bodies nor our minds but who are they who are born with a

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deliberate intent by scientists to create specific characteristics in an individual? We may be revolted by these scientific explorations but it begs the question. Who are we?

The whole fabric of human identity has and will continue to change. This phenomenon is visible all over the world. We know this not only by intimations from scientific research, but also in society itself where there are dramatic shifts. We can see this in the current mania to value everything according to money: there is a race to gather as much as possible in the hope that its accumulation will give both happiness and security, even though the most cursory look at those who have achieved riches proves the fallacy of that idea.

In tradition, the crucial concept of Vedanta is the idea of Brahman. The word comes from *Brih*, to grow, expand; and *man*, to think, thought. There is no end to Brahman. There is no end to its conception or thought. It cannot be defined or encapsulated and no matter how far or fast man manages to travel, that is not even a fraction of the speed or scope of thought, which is limitless. From this, we derive the notion that Brahman is changeless since it appears static relative to the endless fluctuations of our superficial minds. This is a misunderstanding because Brahman is actually very much alive. It is pure consciousness not limited by any concept, and that includes the misguided idea that it is frozen in time.

Brahman has two aspects: *saguna*, with form and *nirguna*, without form. By the very idea of its supreme quality of expansion, it's *saguna* aspect, it encompasses all activity; and we think of its *nirguna* aspect of being as that which is unaltered by all circumstances because it has no form and therefore, no limitation.

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Brahman is both these so-called qualities and yet, as in all these Vedantic concepts, it is neither.

On a personal level, when we ask 'Who am I?' it is a direct appeal to that untroubled, clear centre within us. The fullness in the Heart. We know it is there. How we know it exists, we cannot rationally say because it defies our normal faculties.

Similarly, we cannot place Brahman in the grip of a narrow vision. We can either expand our minds to the infinite or, as we more often do, bring Brahman down to a petty level by misidentification with some thought. This anthropomorphism is called *ajnana*. It is ignorance. It confuses the absolute with the relative.

Though people nowadays seek to change their circumstances to the point where they feel that they are avid for anything new, they confuse apparent change in exterior stimulation with true inner change. The desire for change, for translation into what we instinctively feel is our true nature, is fundamental to us all. However, the fear of fundamental change allows us to seek out, and be content with the superficial excitement of cosmetic stimulation. It is to do with the apprehension we feel at the supposed loss of individual identity. Bhagavan is there as a constant reminder that what we achieve is gain rather than loss, but it is hard to think of letting go of the only distinctiveness we know.

The first rough draft published by the Human Genome Project concluded that the human has about 30,000 distinct genes, and that 99.9 per cent of these are identical in all humans. We are all much the same and yet the apparent differences are tremendous and accounted for by less than .01% of our total genetic material.

Although we are aware that each moment is unique, we resist this knowledge because we try in our ignorant way to repeat the regular, familiar, motions, namely the *samskaras*. When everything is unaltered, including our search for change, we feel secure. Actually, all we do is freeze our perception into a tight band of limited consciousness. We become insulated to change and dwell in the delusion that our static existence replicates Brahman. It does not. It

reveals an opposition to life by reinforcing our conditioning. We neither grow nor expand. Our knowledge is limited.

In this respect, we should be grateful for true change because when it does come we are taken out of ourselves. Our illusions are shattered and our eyes opened to a new world. Moreover, change can be expected once we enter the circle of Bhagavan's grace.

An extreme example of radical change is depicted in Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search For Meaning*. The book relates his harrowing experiences in a Nazi concentration camp. A professional doctor, he was assigned to the crude infirmary where he had little more than a few weak pain killer tablets for the numerous patients.

He writes: "Some details of a particular man's inner greatness may come to one's mind, like the story of the young woman whose death I witnessed in a concentration camp. It is a simple story. There is little to tell and it may sound as if I had invented it; but to me it seems like a poem.

"This young woman knew she would die within the next few days. But when I talked to her she was cheerful in spite of this knowledge. 'I am grateful that fate has hit me so hard', she told me. 'In my former life I was spoiled and did not take spiritual accomplishments seriously.' Pointing through the window of the hut, she said, 'This tree here is the only friend I have in my loneliness.' Through the window she could see just one branch of a chestnut tree, and on the branch were two blossoms. 'I often talk to this tree,' she said to me. I was startled and didn't quite know how to take her words. Was she delirious? Did she have occasional hallucinations? Anxiously I asked her if the tree replied. 'Yes.' What did it say to her? She answered, 'It said to me, *I am here—I am here—I am life, eternal life.*'"

In the beginning, we would fear change but now with Bhagavan illuminating the still centre in our hearts we are courageous and are ready to face the unknown, the infinite possibilities, and the inevitability of change. The grace is always available. All we need do is ask. As Swami Vivekananda paraphrased the Katha Upanishad (1.iii.14), "Arise, awake! (And) stop not until the goal is reached!"

After all, what have we to lose? ▲

KEYWORD

SPHURANA

Sanskrit. *Glittering, sparkling; springing or breaking forth, starting into view, expansion, manifestation. The act of trembling, throbbing, vibration, pulsation.*

"The Supreme Being is unmanifest and the first sign of manifestation is *Aham Sphurana* (light of 'I'). The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says *Aham nama abhvat* (He became 'I' named). That is the original name of the Reality." *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 518.

Sphurana is the inner awareness of pure 'I' which shines as a divine radiance (sphurana). It has been described as a rapture, the ever-fresh spring of pure being which delights in itself. It needs for nothing, it asks for nothing. It is complete within itself. This energy burns away the false identification with the body and with it the body of thought. It is the *yagna* in which the body is the offering.

The seeker who succeeds in identification with the *Aham vritti* (I-thought) within, experiences the subsidence of thought into the heart (hridayam) which in turn unfolds a powerful pulsation of consciousness, a rapture and illuminating brilliance that expresses pure being. It is unqualified by time or space.

See also *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talks Nos. 62, 307 & 363. ▲



PHOTO SHOWS RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA IN A STATE OF SPHURANA

Padamalai

MURUGANAR

MMURUGANAR'S Tamil-verse record of Bhagavan's teachings, Guru Vachaka Kovai, is well known to Bhagavan's devotees. What is less well-known is that Muruganar recorded many other teaching statements by Bhagavan. Over fifteen hundred of these two-line verses can be found in a long, 3,059-verse Tamil poem entitled Padamalai. This work was first published in 1996 by the Delhi Ramana Kendra in volume nine of Ramana Jnana Bodham. In Padamalai, which can be translated as 'A Garland for the Feet', the direct statements by Bhagavan are all indicated by the words 'en Padam' that occur at the end of each quotation. These can be translated as 'So says Padam'. In these direct teaching statements Padam refers to Bhagavan himself.

Elsewhere in the work, when Muruganar writes about Padam, he is referring to the formless Self, as the following few verses indicate:

That which is known as *Padam* is not something that is limited. It is complete perfection, the form of pure consciousness.

Because it bears and sustains the whole world, the completely perfect being-consciousness is termed *Padam* [the feet].

True *Padam*, the space of consciousness, abides and

shines as the pure consciousness that is beyond knowledge and ignorance.

Padam is the true light that shines as the basis for all that is seen as sentient and insentient.

The extremely wonderful *Padam* has fashioned the entire world from the clay of shining consciousness, one's real nature. [*Padamalai*, vv. 1810, 1044, 2834, 1213, 2551.]

As he was composing this work, Muruganar made no attempt to organise the material in a sequential or thematic way. This is what he had to say in his introduction to the poem:

What is said early on [in the work] gets mentioned repeatedly later, making it appear that repetition is its theme. Unlike the work of great ones, this does not contain in large amounts an extensive and deep philosophy that would give the work solidity and subtlety. Even if a few subtle ideas have serendipitously appeared here, like the letters seen in snail tracks, they are not present in any orderly and connected sequence. Can the words uttered by the mad, the ignorant and the devout be subject to a critical analysis? Following on from this, I can say that this work has been sung as a peculiar expression of my mental inclinations. However, in its own way, it is a congenial support for the extremely purifying remembrance of the divine feet of the Lord, the reality. For this reason alone, let devotees, the wise ones who possess love, recognise and preserve this *Padamalai*, which has come into being through grace-madness, as an auxiliary means for remembrance, chanting it with the above-mentioned attitude.

Muruganar's attempt to minimise the importance of this work and its philosophical depth is a typical example of his self-deprecating nature. Overall, the work is a major statement of Bhagavan's teachings on a wide variety of topics.

A partial translation of this work will be published later this year in English. The translation is being done by Dr T. V.

Venkatasubramanian and Robert Butler, while the editing and annotation will be by David Godman. The verses are being arranged by subjects under many different headings. Supplementary comments by both Bhagavan and the editor, whose comments are italicised, elaborate on the original text.

Editing and translating are still in progress, which means that the final published version may be a little different from what appears below. The extract we are now publishing has been taken from a section entitled 'The Guru and the jnani'.

The Guru

The true form of the Guru

1. The true form of the Guru can be known only if one realises, through the grace of the Guru, one's own real form.¹

Question: How is one to decide upon a proper Guru? What is the *swarupa* [the real form or true nature] of a Guru?

Bhagavan: He is the proper Guru to whom your mind is attuned. If you ask, how to decide who is the Guru and what is his *swarupa*, he should be endowed with tranquillity, patience, forgiveness and other virtues capable of attracting others even with the bare eye, like the magnetic stone, and with a feeling of equality towards all – he that has these virtues is the true Guru. If one wants to know the true Guru *swarupa*, one must know one's own *swarupa* first. How can one know the true Guru *swarupa* if one does not know one's own *swarupa* first? If you want to perceive the true Guru *swarupa*, you must first learn to look upon the whole universe as Guru *rupa* [the form of the Guru]. One must have the *Gurubhavam* towards all living beings [that is, seeing everything as the Guru]. It is the same with God. You must look upon all objects as God's *rupa*. How can he who does not know

his own Self perceive Iswara *rupa* or Guru *rupa*? How can he determine them? Therefore, first of all know your own real *swarupa*. [*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 27th February, 1947.]

2. Do not imprison the true form of the Guru within a cage but seek inwardly and realise it to be the formless, omnipresent expanse of consciousness.
3. Only the divine grace that wells up in abundance in the form of the Guru can very easily put a stop to the dizzying whirl of the infatuated mind.

In the Saiva Siddhanta tradition there are three impurities – *anava* (ego), karma and *maya* (illusion) – that prevent devotees from attaining the ultimate goal, oneness with the consciousness of Siva. Those who have all three impurities (*malas*) need a human Guru to realise *Sadasivam*, consciousness of Siva. Those devotees who are only afflicted by *anava* and karma can reach *Sadasivam* by having Siva appear before them in a physical form. Many of the devotees from the *Periyapuramam* would come into this category. Those in the third category, whose only *mala* is *anava*, can get enlightenment through the power of the Self within, without needing either a human Guru or the *darshan* of an external God. Bhagavan would be a good example of someone who became enlightened through the power of the Self alone. Since devotees who fall into the second and third category are quite rare, the necessity of a human Guru is stressed.

The above explanation has been taken from an editorial note on page 118 of Sri Ramana Darsanam. The implication of this threefold division is that the human Guru is the most powerful vehicle through which grace can operate. Muruganar subscribed to this Saiva philosophical view since he has written the following words on Bhagavan's enlightenment:

The fact that the enquiry 'Who am I?' spontaneously arose in his [Bhagavan's] heart as a result of practice in past [lives], and the fact

¹ To avoid tedious repetition, the 'en Padam' phrase that concludes each verse has been omitted in these translations.

that he attained the ultimate state of perfection very easily merely by that enquiry – from these [facts] the discerning ones can realise that only a trace of *anava* remained as a cause for his final birth.²

Earlier in the same essay Muruganar made a similar comment about Bhagavan: 'As a result of tapas performed in the past, only a little of the anava impurity was left over, and this was as thin as the wing of a fly...'

4. That which dwells within as the supreme Self is indeed that which sports before [you] as the very visible form of the Guru.

Guru Vachaka Kovai, verse 656: Those who have not realised the truth declare that reality does not have any form. You should know that the form of the one who abides as truth, who has enquired into and realised the truth – the space of consciousness as it truly is – is indeed the form of truth.

Vilakkam: Bhagavan here denies the fact that truth has no form. How? One who is in the natural state, having known the truth as it really is, and who abides as That, will not differ from that truth, and hence he is indeed the form of truth. This verse is an elucidation of the statement that 'the *jnani* is himself the Self'.³

5. The form of the *jnana*-Guru that bestows an abundance of grace is *Sivam*, who abides within oneself as pure consciousness.

Bhagavan: *Jnana* is given neither from outside nor from another person. It can be realised by each and everyone in his own Heart.

² Taken from a Tamil essay by Muruganar on Bhagavan's life, entitled 'Sri Ramana', which appeared in appendix six of volume nine of *Ramana Jnana Bodham*.

³ Muruganar made expanded prose renderings of the verses from *Guru Vachaka Kovai* that bring out more fully the meaning of the original text. He also made comments on some of these verses. In the quotations I have cited the expanded prose renderings, entitled '*Pozhippurai*' while Muruganar's own comments on the text are preceded by the word '*Vilakkam*'. The original Tamil texts of the *Pozhippurai* and *Vilakkam* were published by Sri Ramanasramam in 1998 in a new edition of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*.

The *jnana* Guru of everyone is only the Supreme Self that is always revealing its own truth in every Heart through the existence-consciousness 'I am, I am'. The granting of being-consciousness by him is initiation into *jnana*. The grace of the Guru is only this Self-awareness that is one's own true nature. It is the being-consciousness by which he is unceasingly revealing his existence. This

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divine *upadesa* [teaching] is always going on naturally in everyone. As this *upadesa* alone is what reveals the natural attainment of the Self through one's own experience, the mature ones need at no time seek the help of external beings for *jnana upadesa*. The *upadesa* obtained from outsiders in forms such as sounds, gestures and thoughts are all only mental concepts. Since the meaning of the word *upadesa* (*upa* + *desa*) is only 'abiding in the Self' or 'abiding as the Self', and since this is one's own real nature, so long as one is seeking the Self from outside, Self-realisation cannot be attained. Since you are yourself the reality that is shining in the Heart as being-consciousness, abide always as a *sthita prajna* [one who is established in wisdom] having thus realised your own true nature. This firm abidance in the experience of the Self is described in the *Upanishads* by such terms as 'the import of the *mahavakyas*', 'Supreme silence', 'Being still', 'Quiescence of mind', and 'Realisation of one's true nature'. [*Sri Ramana Darsanam*, pp. 38-9.]

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Worship of and surrender to the Guru

6. Since the divine form, the form of the Guru assumed by Iswara, is actually a physical embodiment of grace, that form is worthy of being worshipped.

7. Siva-*jnana-yoga* is remaining still through the never-diminishing grace of the Guru who bestows true *jnana*.

Question: While sitting near you, what sort of mental state should we have so as to receive the transmission from your Self?

Bhagavan: Keep your mind still. That is enough. You will get spiritual help sitting in this hall if you keep yourself still. The aim of all practices is to give up all practices. When the mind becomes still, the power of the Self will be experienced. The waves of the Self are pervading everywhere. If the mind is in peace, one begins to experience them. [*The Power of the Presence*, part one, p. 230.]

8. Grace will freely flow in a heart that, meditating upon the Guru as the true form of Lord Siva, becomes lost in adoration.

9. The greatness of noble disciples is that they obtain clear knowledge by trusting and believing in their heart that the Guru's form is the embodiment of grace.

10. It is not ordained that noble disciples who have obtained the grace of the Guru, and who are therefore rejoicing in the Heart, shall feel fear and despair.

11. The disciple who completely surrenders himself to the Guru will attain the life of true *jnana*, the auspicious life.

12. If, like the goddess Uma, you offer only a half of yourself to the Guru, that will not be sufficient for attaining *jnana*.

I suspect that Bhagavan may be speaking ironically here. Uma surrendered so completely to Siva that he bestowed on her half of his physical form. Alternatively, Bhagavan may be suggesting that, for full surrender to be effective, one must cease to exist as a separate entity. Union with God is not the aim of true surrender; the real goal should be the complete extinction of the sense of being an individual who can unite with God. This interpretation is supported

by the following verses, which are a continuation of the previous one about Uma.

13. The immaculate true *jnana* will only shine if you renounce the ego, the sense of individuality, leaving no remnant behind.

14. Know that the surrender of the ego is in no way commensurate with the immortal state of perfection that one then attains.

15. Attaining the Self by sacrificing the ego is like a business transaction in which one receives the true, ancient, primal essence in return for the reflection, the ego.

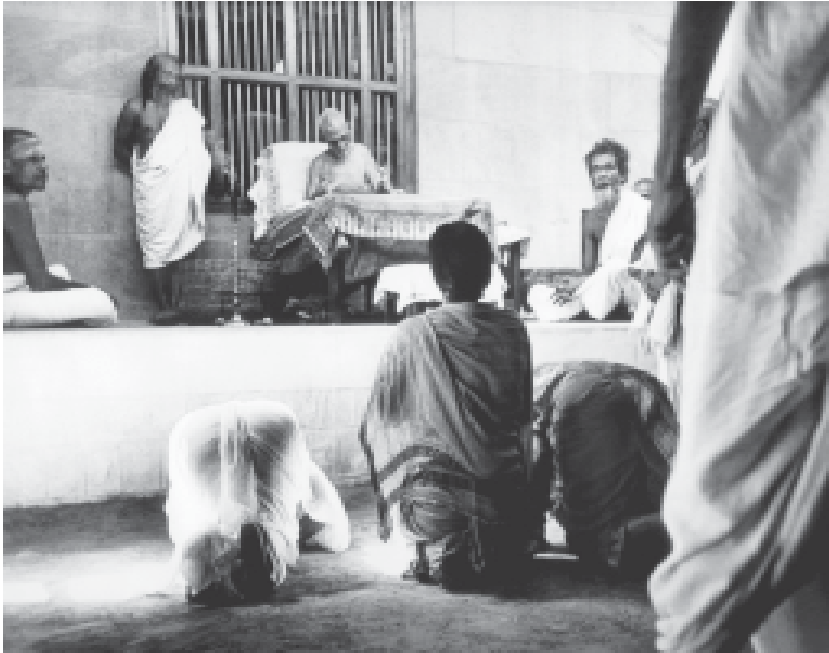
Namaskaram

16. The true meaning of *namaskaram* is the ego bowing its head and getting destroyed at the feet of the Guru.

Namaskaram is a gesture of obeisance, often a full-length prostration on the floor. Sadhu Natanananda made the following observations on this practice:

Some of those who came for Maharshi's *darshan* used to perform *ashtanga namaskaram* in the traditional way. It was their belief that this practice, done devoutly, was indispensable for those who wanted the grace of the *Sadguru*.

In order to drive home the point that in spiritual life mere mechanical observance of any *sadhana*, without knowing its inner meaning and without experiencing its fruit, will not make one blessed, Sri Bhagavan, addressing one such devotee, said, 'The benefit of performing *namaskaram* to the Guru is only the removal of the ego. This is not attained except by total surrender. Within the Heart of each devotee the gracious Guru is giving *darshan* in the form of consciousness. To surrender is to offer fully, in silence, the subsided ego, which is a name-and-form thought, to the *aham-*



MURUGANAR, SITTING AT SRI BHAGAVAN'S LEFT, FACING THE CAMERA

sphurana [the effulgence of "I"], the real holy feet of the gracious Guru. Since [this is so], Self-realisation cannot be attained by a bowing of the body, but only by a bowing of the ego.'

In this way Sri Bhagavan explained the truth of *namaskaram* and further explained that if spiritual practices are to yield their fruits without fail, they should be observed with a full awareness of their purpose. [*Sri Ramana Darsanam*, pp. 40-1.]

Muruganar has also recorded Bhagavan's views on this subject in two verses from Guru Vachaka Kovai:

207. This is the significance of the *namaskaram*: when the *jiva*, the imperfect one, places his proud head beneath the divine feet of his possessor, he is subduing the ego consciousness that says 'I' and merging with the Siva consciousness, which then rises and flourishes.

310. The great delusion caused by the ignorant ego creates the sense of separateness, which conceives differences such as Guru and disciple, Siva and *jiva*, and so on. The most meaningful *namaskaram* that one should make towards one's Guru is the attainment in oneself of the state of silence in which such a state of separateness never arises.

17. When the ego is totally destroyed at the feet of the Guru, it will then shine as the unsurpassed sea of *mauna* [silence].

Bhagavan: Only the Supreme Self, which is ever shining in your Heart as the reality, is the *Sadguru*. The pure awareness, which is shining as the inward illumination 'I', is his gracious feet. The contact with these [inner holy feet] alone can give you true redemption. Joining the eye of reflected consciousness [*chidabhasa*], which is your sense of individuality [*jiva bodha*], to those holy feet, which are the real consciousness, is the union of the feet and the head that is the real significance of the word '*asi*'.⁴ As these inner holy feet can be held naturally and unceasingly, hereafter, with an inward-turned mind, cling to that inner awareness that is your own real nature. This alone is the proper way for the removal of bondage and the attainment of the supreme truth. [*Sri Ramana Darsanam*, p. 35.]

18. *Padam* [Bhagavan] communicates this truth: 'The meaning of the word '*nama*' [obeisance] is abiding as the Self, with the ego destroyed.'

Question: Swami, I have only one desire, namely to put my head on Bhagavan's foot and do *namaskar*. Bhagavan must grant me this favour.

Bhagavan: Oh, is that the desire! But then which is the foot and which is the head?

⁴ This refers to the *mahavakya* '*tat tvam asi*' (you are that). *Asi* means 'are'. Bhagavan's metaphor indicates that the inner state of being is revealed when individuality is merged in the 'holy feet' of pure consciousness.

Questioner: No reply.

Bhagavan: Where the self merges, that is the foot.

Question: Where is that place?

Bhagavan: Where? It is in one's own Self. The feeling 'I', 'I', the ego, is the head. Where that *aham vritti* [the 'I'-thought] dissolves, that is the foot of the Guru. [*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 24th April, 1947.]

The primal Guru, Dakshinamurti

19. The excellent teaching that the primal Guru Dakshinamurti gave to the great ascetics was *mauna*, his own unique method.

Bhagavan: Silence is never-ending speech. Vocal speech obstructs the other speech of silence. In silence one is in intimate contact with the surroundings. The silence of Dakshinamurti removed the doubts of the four sages. *Mauna vyaakhya prakatita para brahma tattvam* ['Who expounds the knowledge of supreme Brahman through silence']. Silence is said to be exposition. Silence is so potent.

For vocal speech, organs of speech are necessary and they precede speech. But the other speech lies even beyond thought. It is in short transcendent speech or unspoken words, *para vak*.⁵

Bhagavan: Silence is ever-speaking; it is a perennial flow of language; it is interrupted by speaking. These words obstruct that mute language. There is electricity flowing in a wire. With resistance to its passage, it glows as a lamp or revolves as a fan. In the wire it remains as electric energy. Similarly also, silence is the eternal flow of language, obstructed by words.

What one fails to know by conversation extending to several years can be known in a trice in silence, or in front of silence – e.g., Dakshinamurti, and his four disciples.

⁵ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk no. 68. I have amended the Sanskrit quotation a little since the original citation was incomplete.

That is the highest and most effective language. [*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk no. 246.]

20. That silent speech untied the *chit-jada* knot [the connection between the insentient body and consciousness] of the disciples and destroyed their minds that ramified with differentiating thoughts.

21. If the doubts that could not be dispelled by the many oral instructions were dispelled by that *mauna*, what power that *mauna* has!

In none of the traditional accounts of Dakshinamurti's life does Dakshinamurti ever speak. However, when Bhagavan narrated this story, he sometimes said that Dakshinamurti initially attempted to communicate his teachings verbally, but without success. It was only when he sat in silence that his four rishi-disciples understood what his teachings were and realised the Self. When Muruganar once remarked that that he had never read this version of events in any book, and asked Bhagavan for the source of this story, Bhagavan replied that he could not give any scriptural authority for this account. However, he added, 'But this is exactly what happened'.

*Muruganar concluded from this that Bhagavan was Dakshinamurti himself, and that his knowledge of this particular incident was a personal memory of having sat in silence in front of the four sages.*⁶

22. No one has the ability to describe the power of the grace of the Guru abiding in *mauna*.

Question: What are the marks of the Guru's grace?

Bhagavan: It is beyond words and thoughts.

Question: If that is so, how is it that it is said that the disciple realises his true state by the Guru's grace?

⁶ A more detailed account of this exchange between Bhagavan and Muruganar can be found in *The Mountain Path*, 1982, pp. 11-12.

Bhagavan: It is like the elephant which wakes up on seeing a lion in its dream. Even as the elephant wakes up at the mere sight of the lion, so too is it certain that the disciple wakes up from the sleep of ignorance into the wakefulness of true knowledge through the Guru's benevolent look of grace. [*Spiritual Instruction*, chapter one, questions five and six.]

Bhagavan's declarations and promises

Knowing and experiencing me

31. *Padam* tells and reveals: 'Instead of knowing well by enquiry that I myself am present as your 'I', why do you despair?'

32. To become established as the Self within the Heart is to experience my real nature, which is pure bliss.

33. Know me as the true essence of *jnana* that shines uninterruptedly in your Heart. Destroy the objectifying awareness of the ego-mind that arrogantly cavorts as 'I'.

34. When I am shining in your Heart as 'I-I', your attempt to 'attain' me, your own real nature, is indeed a great marvel!

35. To meditate on my *swarupa*, which possesses the light that is the source of life, all that is needed is your one-pointedness of mind.

36. Whether you retire to the forest or remain in the midst of everyday life, attain my *swarupa* in the home that is the Heart.

37. Your search to attain me is like searching all over the world, ceaselessly straining to find the necklace around one's own neck.

38. Just as you know that the necklace is there by touching your neck, seek the treasure of the Self, your real nature, within the Heart, and know it.

39. Those who have come to my feet with love, and without delaying, are those whose birth has been graced by God. [Theirs is] an eminent and true life.

40. Through the thought of the feet of the Guru who has reigned over devotees, the intense darkness of ignorance [present in the] hearts of devotees will perish and ultimate liberation will be attained here and now.

Give me your burdens

41. *Padam* [Bhagavan], who possesses the munificence of grace, has given the assurance that his greatest duty is that of affording protection [to devotees].

42. *Padam* lovingly said: 'It will be a duty well done if you place all your duties upon me.'

The remaining verses in this section are direct quotes from Bhagavan. They are forthright and unequivocal declarations of Bhagavan's willingness to assume all the responsibilities of his devotees.

43. Like the children of an emperor, my devotees are heirs to abundant rejoicing.

44. For the cruel disease of burning *samsara* to end, the prescribed diet is to entrust all your burdens to me.

'Prescribed diet' is a translation of pattiyaam, an ayurvedic term. Ayurvedic practitioners say that their medicine will not work unless the

pattiyam, *the prescribed diet, is also followed. The implication in this verse is that the medicine is one's sadhana, such as enquiry or surrender, while the accompanying prescribed diet is entrusting all of one's burdens to Bhagavan.*

This explanation is supported by Lakshmana Sarma's Tamil commentary on verse 17 of Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham. Lakshmana Sarma received this explanation directly from Bhagavan while he was having private lessons on the meaning of this work:

One should, with faith, hand over to Iswara all of the burdens, such as the family and the body, which naturally appear, and then remain without anxiety. Otherwise one cannot perform, with a one-pointed mind, either devotion or self-enquiry. [*Ulladu Narpadu*, p. 142, 1979 ed.]

45. In order that your needless anxieties cease, make sure that all your burdens are placed on me through the courageous act of depending totally on grace.

46. If you completely surrender all your responsibilities to me, I will accept them as mine and manage them.

47. When bearing the entire burden remains my responsibility, why do you have any worries?

48. Why do you still retain this attachment to the mental concepts of 'I' and 'mine' when, on that day, you had offered up all those things to me, avowing them to be mine?

Guru Vachaka Kovai, verse 317: After surrendering one's body and possessions to the *jnana*-Guru, to regard the body as 'I' and the possessions as 'mine' constitutes the sin of stealing back what has been given away as a gift. You should know that avoiding this fault is the impeccable worship of the *Sadguru*.

49. If you enquire and know me, the Self within, in that state there will be no reason for you to worry about the world.

Question: Before and after meditation I get many thoughts about the unhappy people of the world.

Bhagavan: First find out whether there is an 'I' in you or not. It is this ego 'I' [*ahankara*] that gets these thoughts and, as a result, you feel weakness. Therefore find out how identification with the body takes place. Body consciousness is the cause of all misery. When you conduct the enquiry into the ego 'I', you will find out its source and you will be able to remove it. After that there will be no more questions of the type you are asking. [*The Power of the Presence*, part one, p. 234.]

50. Abandon the drama [of the world] and seek the Self within. Remaining within, I will protect you, [ensuring] that no harm befalls you.

51. Seek my grace within the Heart. I will drive away your darkness and show you the light. This is my responsibility.

Meditating on me

52. Splendorous *Padam* declares: 'Meditating on me with no sense of difference [between us] is accepting my grace and offering yourself to me. This in itself is enough.'

53. If you worship me by meditating well on the excellence of my true nature, the greatness of your own true nature will well up in your Heart.

54. Knowing that what abides in your Heart is the Self, my true and real nature, you should search for it there. Only this can be regarded as meditating on me with devotion.

55. *Padam* advises: 'Keeping one's attention on the subtle consciousness that is experienced by the extremely subtle mind is personal service to me.'

The following story is narrated by Kunju Swami:

In 1932, after spending about twelve years in personal attendance on Sri Bhagavan, I began to feel an urge to devote myself entirely to *sadhana*. I wanted to spend all my time alone. However, I could not easily reconcile myself to the idea of giving up my personal services to Sri Bhagavan. I had been debating the matter for some days when the answer came in a strange way. As I entered the hall one day I heard Sri Bhagavan explain to others who were there that real service to him did not mean attending to his physical needs; it meant following the essence of his teachings. That is, concentrating on realising the Self. Needless to say, that automatically cleared my doubts.

I had heard Sri Bhagavan speak like this before. Once I had heard him say, 'It is no use saying to oneself, "I am doing personal service to Sri Bhagavan; I am dusting his bed; I have served him for so many years". In addition to serving the Guru physically, it is also important to follow the path shown by the Guru. The best service to the Guru is engaging in *vichara*, *dhyana* and other practices with a purity of body, speech and mind.'

When Sri Bhagavan spoke like this he would often point out verse eighty-seven of *Kaivalyam* in which the disciple asks the Guru how he can repay him for the grace he has received. The Guru replies that the highest return the disciple can render to the Guru is to remain fixed in the Self without being caught by the three kinds of obstacles that obstruct it. Hearing Sri Bhagavan speak like this made me resolve to find a new attendant so that I could devote myself full-time to meditation. [*The Power of the Presence*, part two, pp. 84-5.]

Sadhu Natanananda has also recorded Bhagavan's views on this topic:

Some of the devotees coming to the ashram from far off places to spend their holidays had a tendency to engage in ashram service.

They were always directing their attention towards various activities. They would seize even the smallest opportunity to get immersed in activities throughout the day. They felt satisfied that such service would alone be sufficient for their salvation. Whenever Bhagavan happened to notice their attitude, he would refer to them by saying: 'In the name of service to the Guru, they should not waste their time in activities and become disappointed later. Such people will have cause to regret their ignorance in their last days. One should not forget, even for a moment, the aim of *satsang*. Having the belief that residence in the ashram will make realisation, which is most difficult to achieve in other places, easy to attain, one should always remain intent upon the realisation of one's true nature. There is no meaning in people who are not interested in that [Self-realisation] taking this place to be a special place. The spiritual service that devotees render to themselves by exerting themselves on the spiritual path for the attainment of their goal – that alone is sacred service to the Guru.'

Through these words he made it clear that he cannot be pleased by anything other than stilling the mind. The real benefit of coming to him was the subsidence of the mind. Because of this, he would exhort devotees to try to attend to the Self all the time. [*The Power of the Presence*, part one, pp. 114-5.]

56. The compassionate heart that flows from me to you will never fail except when you cease to have remembrance of 'me', who command and conduct everything.

57. You can know and experience my grace, which is my nature, if you remember me with no forgetfulness in your heart.

Union with me

58. Seeking my true nature in your Heart, discovering it and rejoicing in it by bathing in the bliss of my *jnana swarupa* – this is union.

59. Only *bhakti sadhana* performed continuously with love will facilitate easily, in a gradual way, this union.

60. Enter with love the temple that is your own Heart and experience the bliss of being absorbed in my *swarupa*, becoming one with it.

61. I myself will command and actuate a mind that has died by the sacrifice of the ego.

Give me your mind

62. ‘You should offer up to me the bright ruby of your mind. That is the gift that will bring me delight.’

63. ‘The sweet love I have for such a mind I do not have for anything else.’ *Padam* desires this.

64. *Padam* receives the minds of loving devotees as an offering, swallowing them through a ruby-red light.

65. *Padam* accepts only the mind as a fitting offering, rejecting everything else as being incompatible.

Many visitors came on one occasion and they all saluted Sri Bhagavan with the single prayer, ‘Make me a *bhakta*. Give me *moksha*.’ After they left Sri Bhagavan said, thinking aloud: ‘All of them want *bhakti* and *moksha*. If I say to them, “Give yourself to me” they will not. How then can they get what they want?’ [*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk no. 543.]

This extract from Padamalai concludes with the final benedictory verse from the poem:

66. *Padam* bestows grace upon those who recite, praise and adorn him with this *Padamalai*, uniting them permanently with the *Atma-swarupa* that forever remains one with them in their hearts. ▲

Childhood Days

D. RAJARAM

SITTING before the glorious temple and the Holy Mountain of Lord Arunachala on the Sivaratri day (2003) I look back to the golden days of the 1940s and try to recapitulate the serene spiritual atmosphere then prevailing in this temple town of Tiruvannamalai. At that time I was only in my teens, a school-going boy, well versed in my study subjects, but far removed from other worldly activities. In my mind, all activities of this town were predominantly connected with the big temple and Sri Ramanasramam. My life runs like a fast moving feature film when I recall the events.

During the 1940s, this holy township of Sri Arunachala was not so bustling with commercial and religious activities as we see nowadays. At that time, it was a small, quiet town which lead a somewhat rural cum semi-urban life. My house is situated near the entrance to the big temple where we see today, as in that period, there exists a big open ground. In those days there was no electric light nor blaring noise from loudspeakers, the atmosphere still and quiet. In the evening, my mother used to sit with myself and my younger brother in the front of our house, and she would tell stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata or about Lord Arunachala (from Arunachala Puranam). She narrated stories about Bhagavan Ramana or Sri Seshadri Swamigal

who had blessed our house on many occasions with his presence. This would go on upto 7 p.m. when it would become darker outside and the streets deserted, and my mother would lock the front gate and take us inside and ask us to do our evening school homework, after which we took dinner and went to bed. When I recollect those unforgettable moments, I feel wistful today and feel the enormous changes which have occurred and the then inconceivable losses we now bear in the present-day world. There was no radio, nor TV: what an amount of free time we had at our disposal! We spent it in useful spiritual and cultural activities in a creative way, which went a long way to strengthening our body as well as our mind.

Similarly, in those bygone days, i.e. in the 1940s, in what a state was our big temple! As the temple happened to be situated next to my house, it served to be my second place of residence in those days. I, along with my schoolmates would spend most of our free afternoon hours after school in the *prakarams* of the big temple. We used to play badminton, handball or hide-and-peek. The stalls where *vahanams* are being kept were the most secure place to hide. The Patala Lingam shrine had not been renovated at that time: it was in a dilapidated state, full of vegetation, dust and debris and was inhabited by snakes. Even the adjoining thousand-pillared *mantapam* was in a ruined condition and had many snakes and scorpions. But as children we were not deterred by them. The temple was our second home and we were familiar with the temple topography. We knew its each nook and corner.

During school holidays we would be staying practically the whole day in the temple. In the morning after taking bath and a little breakfast, we would eagerly rush to the temple to start our games. One of my classmates happened to be the son of the chief cook of the temple kitchen (*madapalli*). During holidays, this boy would assist his father in his work. On those particular days, we were privileged because during the forenoon, we four or five boys alone would be sitting before Lord Arunachala at the noon *puja* (*uchikala abhishekam*), witnessing with fervour all the rituals. But for us and the temple employees, the temple would be almost deserted and

empty. What a contrast to the present days! Sometimes after the *puja* we would be fortunate enough to receive sumptuous *prasadam* like tamarind rice, sweet rice, or *panchamritam*. Under the temple tree we would assemble and relish these items. Like Lord Arunachala, the big temple had become our household and, without our really being conscious, had become a part of our body, mind and soul and thus inseparable from us.

During the same period, I visited Sri Ramanasramam frequently, sometimes with my friends, and sometimes it was my responsibility to accompany my relatives and family friends who came to our house on pilgrimage. On those occasions it was a privilege to act as their

What a
wonderful sight
and divine
experience to
have the
darshan of
Bhagavan

guide, and I took them around the ashram and showed them all the important places such as the Mother's shrine, the kitchen cum dining hall, office and *gosalai*. Then they would be led into the divine presence of Bhagavan and receive his blessings, but without knowing and understanding the vast potential and divine incarnation appearing and blessing us with his direct and profound teaching. I was drawn into his powerful eyes like iron filings to a magnet and had unknowingly become blessed with his *chakshu diksha*. It was an activity of his divine grace which brought me face to face with him and as well part of my last birth's privilege (*purva janma prarabdham*). At that time as I was a school-going boy in his teens, I was unaware of spirituality, Vedanta philosophy, and the various religious cults and dogmas attached to them. Now only as I look back and try to recollect the various incidents and encounters that took place during those years do I realize the importance and glory of those beautiful and blissful experiences encountered by me and I feel elated. In those wonderful days, Sri Ramanasramam was a haven, an ashram as picturesquely described in the *puranas* and *itihisas*. Bhagavan resembled the great sages such as Vasishta, Gautama, Kanva in whose

presence one felt a quiet and soul-stirring silent atmosphere. What a wonderful sight and divine experience to have the *darshan* of Bhagavan sitting in his unique, slightly reclining posture on the divan before a group of seated devotees who had the privilege of receiving the gaze of his graceful eyes and drinking the nectar of his teachings. Only now I realize Bhagavan was a living embodiment of a *sthitaprajna*, described in the *Gita* or *Viveka Chudamani* who practically demonstrated the highest truths before our very eyes as he was always positioned in *sahaja samadhi*. He naturally imparted the inimitable technique of Self-enquiry for the attainment of *Nirvana*, *moksha* or whatever name it is called, and proved beyond doubt, that this is the safe, sure and easiest method to achieve enlightenment here and now itself. It is easy to preach but difficult to practise, so goes the saying. But here we find our Bhagavan who not only preached and gave his replies to questions according to the concerned person's knowledge and capacity but also practised the same by becoming a role model for his devotees to follow.

It is no wonder we find great personalities and celebrities not only from various parts of our country but also from various parts of the world come and throng at the ashram for his *darshan* and hear his spiritual instructions. Bhagavan never left Arunachala since he first came here and when he first arrived here, never touched money after he had thrown the little change he had in the Ayyankulam tank. Though he had no interest, his name and fame spread splendidly throughout the world and is attracting even today thousands of devotees from every part of the world. Though I have read almost all his original works, I still could not forget the first two books I received as a present from one of my relatives when I took him to the ashram during the 1940s. Sri Ramana Maharshi's teaching for children and *Who am I?* (Tamil book). Now, I think, that was my initiation into Bhagavan's teachings.

The single most powerful memory of those days in my personal experience of Bhagavan occurred one day when I accompanied my mother to the ashram. I was about 5 years old at the time. Bhagavan was sitting on a small *pial* (raised platform) in the thatched room

adjoining the Old Hall. The place is where Bhagavan's samadhi is now. The platform faced east whereas in the Old Hall Bhagavan faced south. My mother prostrated before Bhagavan in the traditional way and I who was standing next to her, suddenly climbed on her back, and sat there as if riding a horse or an elephant. My mother became very angry and tried to push me down. But Bhagavan, seeing my innocent mischief, smiled and enjoyed the fun. He bade my mother not to scold or push but stay in that prostrated posture for a few seconds more. When I recollect this incident I become enthralled at the memory of his beautiful, smiling countenance. He loved children and their playful mischief. Because of his lightheartedness the atmosphere around him was lighter than the rigid and heavy environment existing in the ordinary religious mutts. He imparted spiritual instruction by sugar-coating the sometimes bitter pill.

The memory of his smile is always green in my mind and whenever I recollect it I feel revived and fresh.

His voice was soft and gentle. Though he answered questions, generally he was quiet. He would recline back in that distinctive posture of half sitting, half lying down among the numerous pillows. His eyes would be three quarters shut as if half asleep, though we knew he was very much aware of what was going on around him. He did speak at times with hand gestures. I remember his head shake. He walked with a stiff gait and sometimes because of the rheumatism, the walk was reduced to a tiny shuffle.

In 1949 at the time of the Kumbhabhisekham of the Mother's temple I was one of the boy scouts who assisted the ashram. On the climatic day, the entire troupe of boy scouts controlled the crowds and helped in the poor feeding. Bhagavan came and noted the activities going on and gave suggestions. A bunch of people invariably walked around with him. There was a large crowd to direct and feed and though we worked all day, we were not tired. We were enthusiastic and enjoyed the occasion. At the end of the festivities, Bhagavan went on his usual walk on Arunachala. All of us boy scouts climbed up the first slope and waited for him to return. After he came down, we requested him to be present in a group photograph. He



RAJARAM IS SEATED BENEATH YOGI RAMIAH WHO IS
STANDING TO THE LEFT OF SRI BHAGAVAN

immediately agreed. For those days it was quite unusual for a person to be photographed as much as was Bhagavan. Orthodox people opposed the taking of their photographs because they believed that their life will be shortened. In fact, some said that because Bhagavan gave himself so freely, his health was affected and his life shortened.

Now I come to that last chapter in Bhagavan's life. My heart grieves, my hand shakes and shivers, tears flow from my eyes when I recollect the tragic hour. Bhagavan made so many remarks about our ignorant identification with the body and the glory of Atma. He prepared his devotees to meet his last days and physical death (*Nirvana*). Often he ridiculed those who were distressed when they realized that the inevitable hour fast approached. He did so by remarking that all his teachings had become useless when his devotees still identify the physical body with the soul, and lament and weep when the soul departs from the body. As already observed, we ordi-

nary human beings, who by ignorance, immersed up to our necks in this ocean of life (*samsara sagara*) are not realized souls like Bhagavan and were unable to observe this tragedy in a detached manner. Once again I have to repeat the saying: It is easier to preach than to practise and we are not Bhagavan.

On that fateful day 14th April 1950, in the night around 8-30 p.m. or so, myself and my friends were standing in the open courtyard of my house, talking with each other. Suddenly at about 8-45 p.m., all of us witnessed a celestial phenomenon, something like a glowing star travelling in the sky. It came from the south-west direction and went towards the north-east. Little did we realize the great importance behind it. Since modern communication facilities, such as the phone or radio or TV, were not available in those days, we were not aware of this sorrowful event. Only in the late night, the news spread throughout the town like wild fire. People from all walks of life came out from their homes, exchanged the news and with a heavy heart started towards the ashram.

The next morning all the members of our family and my friends' family, had our coffee and went straight to the ashram for our last *darshan* of Bhagavan's mortal remains. Already crowds from various parts of the country started pouring in. *The Indian Express* newspaper published a special edition carrying the *Maha Nirvana* of Bhagavan. All of us moved hither and thither in the swirling crowd and observed the various preparations being made for the *Maha Samadhi*. The scene was so compelling we never thought of anything else. Throughout the dramatic events we did not even drink a drop of water let alone eat. We were all completely ignorant of our bodily needs. Though I was only in my teens on that most unfortunate and miserable hour and too young to understand the extent of the calamity which felled all of us that fateful day, yet my sorrow and grief knew no bounds. Many people were crying. It was an emotionally charged atmosphere. Though people were griefstricken, they were calm. Throughout the day I wandered about the ashram observing all that occurred. In the afternoon the quiet, dignified procession carried Bhagavan's body round the Mother's temple and

interred the body in its present site at about 4-30 P.M. The air was filled with Vedic chanting. You would think that the atmosphere was dramatic and tense, but actually, it was quite serene. It was impossible not to be moved by the occasion. After Bhagavan's body was interred people went home with a feeling of emptiness. My mother said, "*Periya Mahan siddhi adaindu vittar*" (A great soul has attained *siddhi*). Certain moments stand out in one's mind. This was one of them. What she said struck a deep chord which is still with me today.

At last the inevitable, which we all abhorred, actually took place. Bhagavan had cast away his human body. As Tiruvalluvar observed in his *Kural*, the bird had flown away from its cage. But all of us lost our living friend, philosopher and guide, who answered all our queries and gracefully bestowed his divine grace on us. He gave solace to all of our sufferings in this mundane world and showed us all his simple, sure and direct path for our ultimate salvation.

If we still lie deeply immersed in this *samsara*, completely covered by the thick mist of illusion (*maya*) and identify the body with soul, we do lament for the soul of a great saint leaving his body because we are still under the false impression that Bhagavan had left us permanently and forever. Then all his efforts to impart the correct spiritual instruction have become useless as water intended to irrigate standing green crops is diverted and flows toward weeds. Once Bhagavan replied to a query about his after-life situation, "Where can I go from here? I will always be here, though not in this present physical form but will spiritually guide you all and give solace and peace". So if we really want to remain his true devotees and fulfill our obligation of understanding him and lead a life as directed and guided by him, then we have to believe his teachings and advice strictly and correctly without an iota of doubt, and feel and experience his omnipotent omnipresence forever — not only in Sri Ramanasramam but everywhere. We should study his teachings deeply and understand their true sense and meaning, and last but not least, practise regularly sincerely and ceaselessly Self-enquiry and try to become a *jivanmukta*. This is the one and only way open to us to show our faith and gratitude to him. ▲







The Flow of Soma

DAVID FRAWLEY

IN the following article we will discuss the Vedic principle of Soma and its related principle of Agni in order to help us understand the internal alchemy behind the process of Yoga. This may introduce a different angle of approach than most practitioners are familiar with, but hopefully it can provide a new perspective to aid their practice. The ideas here can also be complemented by the author's previous article on Agni and the Fire of Self-Inquiry.

SOMA AND ANANDA

The Vedic ritual reaches its climax in the Soma offering, in which specially prepared plant juices are offered into the sacred fire (Agni) as the drink of the Gods. But this ancient ritual reflects a deeper internal ritual or alchemy of awareness that is its real import. In exploring this process, we will discover many secrets of the practice of Yoga, including the path of Self-inquiry or Jnana Yoga.

Soma is first of all part of a great universal symbolism. Soma pervades the outer world as water in its various forms on the earth and in the sky, as the sap of plants, the vital fluids in animals, the Moon, and even the waters (vibratory field) of space. Soma exists inside ourselves as a psychological principle of feeling, love and

inspiration which includes our creativity that we manifest in diverse forms.

Yet beyond this, Soma is a spiritual principle, an aspect of the infinite and a key to immortality. In the state of meditation, the brain and mind naturally secrete a special type of Soma or nectar of peace and contentment, which reflects this spiritual Soma. Ultimately Soma is the bliss of all existence, the Ananda through which the universe is created and into which it must return. It is this Soma or Ananda that is the prima materia or ultimate substance behind the entire world.

SOMA AND AGNI: BLISS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

However, to really understand Soma, we must also understand Agni, the fire, light or energy principle, which is its counterpart. In Vedic thought, the twin principles of Agni and Soma are behind all workings in the universe on all levels. On an outer level, they refer to the great elements of fire and water, but their inner symbolism goes much deeper. Such a twofold division of reality takes many forms like Purusha and Prakriti, Vishnu and Lakshmi, and Shiva and Shakti. Indeed, Lord Shiva, the supreme Godhead, is said to be Agni-Somatmakam or both Agni and Soma in nature. His right side is Agni in nature—fiery, harsh or masculine. His left side is Soma in nature— watery, gentle or feminine. These are the basis of his two manifestations as fierce (*ghora* or Agni) and gentle (*saumya* or Soma).

Yet even as elements, Agni and Soma are more than any outer symbolism. Agni as fire represents light (*jyoti*) in the broadest sense, which includes the light of perception and the light of consciousness, not simply light as a material principle. Soma as water (*apas*) is the medium on which light can be reflected, which is ultimately a quality of light itself. In this regard Soma is not only water, but the mind and ultimately, the reflective power of consciousness itself.

Soma as a cosmic power, however, is not simply watery in its nature. It has an oily quality that can nourish and sustain fire. In this regard it has been compared to ghee (*ghrita*) in texture. All objects that we see are like fuel for the flame of our awareness. Soma also has

a sweet quality and has been compared to honey (*madhu*). All that we see is like a flower, from which the honey of bliss can be extracted. These properties that can sustain light and provide joy pervade all of space. Great yogis can access them with their subtle bodies (the *linga* or fire body) and move at will through all the worlds, finding nourishment and delight in all that they perceive.

Soma is the delight which is the counterpart of light. On the deepest level, Agni is the fire of consciousness (*chidagni*) that is reflected in the Soma or water of bliss. In this regard Agni and Soma are ultimately the same, two complementary aspects of Brahman.

OBJECTLESS DELIGHT

The highest Soma is the delight inherent in existence itself (*Brahman*), not simply the pleasure produced by contact with external objects. Soma is the 'pure delight' that we are truly seeking in all that we pursue, not mere temporary pleasure that wears away the senses and is only its reflection. Any happiness that is based upon contact with an external object must be fleeting and must eventually end in pain. This higher 'objectless' joy or Self-delight can only be perceived by an internal consciousness beyond the fluctuations of the

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mind, by the unwavering flame of awareness. We can achieve that through taking the state of the witness (*sakshi-bhava*), which provides the joy of perception and avoids the pain of involvement. As long as we rely on external contacts to gain our Soma or happiness, we cannot escape from the wheel of sorrow.

We are all seeking some form of happiness in life. We all want lasting bliss. This seeking of Soma is inherent in the soul, which is ever seeking to return to its origin in God. Similarly, we are always extracting some form of Soma out of our life experience. This essence or *rasa* is ultimately delight. That is why the Upanishads refer to the Self as *rasa (raso vai sah)*.

The Self is said to be the fluidity of water, the heat of fire, the power of the wind to move, the power of the earth to hold and the power of space to pervade. It is the unique quality or special essence, that is the highest and best in all things. This unique essence is Soma. We discover the Self by going to the essence of our own nature. The Self is the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind. It is the truth of truth. This extraction of the essence from all that we know is extracting the Soma that is hidden in all things. This extraction process occurs in the purification filter (*pavitra*) of the heart, by the light of which we can discern the heart or core of all things.

THE SEER AND THE SEEN

Relative to the Yoga of Knowledge (*Jnana Yoga*), Agni is the seer and Soma is the seen. Seeing has a fiery quality and works through light. The seen is the field illumined by light and is actually only light or consciousness reflected externally. Our very power of seeing is a power of fire while all that we see is potentially fuel for it. If our seeing is clear then it can disclose the Soma or Ananda hidden in all that we see. The fire of seeing is able to ripen, cook or bring out the essence of all that we observe. The key to the alchemy of *Jnana* (Self-knowledge) is that whatever we look at with full attention, with a fully energized Agni or fire of awareness, will yield Soma or delight, not as an external enjoyment but as the very bliss of the Self.

When we look at things directly, without division, their essence comes forth, which is Ananda. This is the state of Samadhi, which is the flowing of Soma at an inner level. The unity of Agni and Soma is the unity of the perceiver and the perceived. When we learn to look at our inner self wholly and fully, through the practice of Self-inquiry, then the delight inherent in the Self must come forth as the ultimate Soma or Self-delight.

THE FIVE KOSHAS

The five sheaths or *koshas* are a common yogic teaching going back to the Taittiriya Upanishad. Each of these five levels of our nature has its own form of Agni or fire, which is its essential energy.

Each has its equivalent form of Soma, which is its main fuel. Agni is the eater or enjoyer, while Soma is the food or substance enjoyed.

At the physical level (*annamaya kosha*), the digestive fire (*jataragni*) is the Agni, and the food and drink we take in through the mouth is the Soma. Higher physical forms of Soma include special rejuvenating foods, beverages and herbs that can revitalize the body, brain and nervous system.

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At the pranic or vital level (*pranamaya kosha*), Pranaagni or the vital fire is the Agni and our vital enjoyments of exercise and activity are the Soma. Higher Pranic forms of Soma include Pranayama practices that can revitalize our internal Pranas and balance their energies towards transformation.

At the level of the outer or sensory mind (*manomaya kosha*), the mental fire (*manasika agni*) is the Agni and our various sensory enjoyments are the Soma. Higher mental forms of Soma include mantra, visualizations and meditations that bring in a higher level of experience into the mind.

At the level of the inner or discriminating mind (*vijnanamaya kosha*), the *buddhi* or discriminating intelligence is the Agni and the various principles, beliefs, ideas or dharmas that we pursue in life are the Soma. Special types of Soma for the higher mind include formless meditations on truth, unity, bliss and harmony.

At the level of the soul (*jiva* or *anandamaya kosha*), our inner consciousness (*chitta*) is the Agni, and our entire life experiences and memories are the Soma. Special types of Soma for it include the practice of Self-inquiry in which we digest our life-experiences, burning up our *samskaras* (internal karmic tendencies) and turn them into pure awareness.

In this way, the soul or Jiva takes in substances, impressions and ideas from the external world and extracts the nectar of Ananda

from them, just as a bee gathers pollen from various flowers and turns them into honey. The ultimate result is the essence (*rasa*) of our experience that becomes the Ananda or Soma Kosha, in which our karmas and *samskaras* are held. Those who have cultivated the fire of awareness are able to turn all their experience, including that of sorrow, into Soma or Ananda. This takes them beyond the field of all the koshas.

AGNI AND SOMA AND THE PRACTICE OF YOGA

In the practice of Yoga, Agni is the fiery Kundalini force that dwells in the root or earth chakra below. It is the power of aspiration that rises from below and ascends to the heavens above. Soma is the watery nectar that dwells in the crown or head chakra. It is the power of Divine grace that descends from above. As Agni rises, Soma descends. The oily drops of Soma provide the fuel for Agni to aid in its upward movement.

The Yoga tradition teaches us that the crown chakra is the region of the Moon or Soma (*Chandra Kanda*), just as the lower three chakras are the region of fire (*Agni Kanda*). Soma, according to the Vedas, flows in a thousand streams. These are the thousand currents of the crown chakra, the Sahasrara or thousand petalled lotus. Physiologically, Agni relates to the solar plexus, while Soma relates to the soft palate in the head, the source of saliva and other secretions in the head. Balancing these two energy centers is an important Yoga practice.

SOMA AND THE HEART

Yet in Vedic thought, Soma descends and flows through the purification filter (*pavitra*) of the heart, which is also the original home of Agni. The heart is the meeting place of the dual principles of Agni and Soma, fire and water, or consciousness and delight. In this regard we must remember that the spiritual heart or *hridaya* is not simply a location in the chest. It is also linked with the center of the thousand-petalled lotus.

Everything is contained in the small space (*dahara akasha*) within the Heart, including all the other chakras. It contains the entire

universe, all worlds and planes of experience, all time and space, and what is beyond all manifestation as well. It is the ultimate abode of God and the soul. In fact, the soul is Soma or the food for God in his creation. In this supreme place, God is the inextinguishable fire and the entire universe is its unending Soma offering.

SELF-INQUIRY AND SURRENDER

Agni is the striving of the soul upward towards the divine, while Soma represents the descending grace of God. Agni represents our will or aspiration to the truth, while Soma represents what inspires us and the goal that we seek. That is why Agni or fire is represented by an upward facing triangle, while water or Soma is represented by a triangle that faces downward.

In this regard, Agni represents Jnana Yoga or the Yoga of Knowledge, which proceeds through the heat and friction of introspection and Self-inquiry. This is the main upward movement of the soul. Similarly, Soma represents Bhakti Yoga or the Yoga of Devotion, which proceeds through the flow of surrender. This is the main descending movement of grace.

Self-inquiry (Jnana Yoga) is the best, simplest and most direct method for cultivating our inner fire and reaching the supreme light. Surrender to God or devotion (Bhakti Yoga) is the best, simplest and most direct method for opening up to the flow of grace and reaching the highest delight.

The practice of meditation should always strive to be a dual cultivation of both Agni and Soma, with both deepening perception and joy. A balanced practice should address both Agni and Soma aspects of the practice. Cultivating Agni means cultivating the flame of our awareness, concentration, perception and discrimination. It means increasing the power of the mind to inquire, perceive, penetrate and transform.

Cultivating Soma means cultivating the fuel of devotion, receptivity, love and surrender. It means increasing the power to feel, dissolve, merge and become one with all. We must eventually realize

that all things are offerings to the divine light of awareness within us. Then there will be nothing that is not Soma for us.

An internal questioning or Self-inquiry is always naturally occurring within our minds, though broken up or concealed by other habits, impulses and considerations. Our core consciousness is always looking into the meaning and purpose of our lives. We are always reflecting upon ourselves in various ways, through which various feelings and insights or Somas arise that may afford us either pleasure or pain.

Self-inquiry is not about imposing some philosophy upon the mind or even practising a certain technique, however helpful such factors may be. It is about opening this inner flow of Self-examination that is connected at a deep level with an inner flow of grace. We must cultivate our flame of inquiry but also open up to the flow of grace that makes it possible to sustain it. We must let our inner flame come forth to meet the grace that pervades the entire universe which is also connected to the core of our being.

In this regard there is a helpful metaphor: The mind is like a wick. Knowledge (*jnana*) is like the flame, but Devotion (*bhakti*) is the oil (*ghee*). Without the oil to sustain the flame, it will merely burn up the wick. So too, a mind that does not have that flow of grace or devotion, can be burned up or dried out by the flame of knowledge. We should remember to keep our Soma flowing. ▲



VARADA HASTA

When the *abhaya hasta* is held upside down with the palm facing outward, it is known as *varada hasta*. This *hasta* expresses tenderness and the act of giving. This gesture is expressive of benevolence and kindness and the effect is one of overall tenderness and gentleness.

FROM OUR ARCHIVES

SUNDARAM IYER

This is a faithful reproduction from the notebooks of B. V. Narasimha Swamy. We have retained wherever possible the original grammar and punctuation.

I was reading in the third standard in the Taluk Board school at Tiruchuzhi when Maharshi was reading in the fourth standard. He was about 10 or 11 then.

His father was well known as the prominent *vakil* of the place. There were no certified pleaders then. He was obliging and sweet and agreeable in speech and manners. He was also handsome. His complexion was very fair and he was of medium stature and size. Those who wanted to have *vaideeka* meals or quarters for a while to stay would go to him and he invited as a matter of course. His house was terraced and had two compartments. His practice and income were good. He was not especially religious. There were no readings of *Puranas*, *Kalakshepam* (religious discourses) etc., in his house so far as I know.

I was, as brother of the teacher Srinivasier in that school, invited to Mr Sundaram Iyer's for a dinner on the occasion of Nagasundaram's (Chinnaswami) *aksharabhyasa* (beginning of education). There was no hotel at that time. I have known his maternal uncle Ramalingam who went away to Malabar and P. N. Krishnier who is still a *vakil's* clerk at Dindigul. I had lost touch with him (Maharshi) after he went to Madura to study. I had heard of his being suddenly missed and of his being found at Tiruvannamalai. I saw his features (as at 30) in a print with someone and was well impressed. Gopi Chetty at Chidambaram spoke highly of him. I heard also from others.

I went and saw him first at Skandashram about 1917, one or two years after he had moved finally to that ashram. I stood and wept and did not take a seat though bidden. I felt too shy and nervous. He did not recognize me. Then I went outside and saw his mother. I asked her if she recognized me. She did not. I then told her I was the younger brother of Srinivasier, the teacher at Tiruchuzhi and she then enquired about all of our relations and I answered. He overheard me and said, "I thought I saw some familiar face. I now see why." I visited Maharshi three or four times but did not query him at all as I was not sufficiently learned or experienced to possess doubts. Later I went on reading Advaita works in Tamil such as *Vichara Sangraham*, *Prakaranam*, *Panchadasa Prakaranam* etc. They had all been dazing to me. By his kindness these began to get clearer in my mind.

I asked him once why *pranayama* and yoga were so superficially touched and taught at *upanayanam* (the ceremony when brahmin boys are given the sacred thread). Maharshi answered that just a taste was then given and symbols were taught, e.g., touching the nose, ears etc., in infancy and that later in the serious period form the starting points from which developments can be obtained. "You are now getting interested in that, for instance." But *pranayama* is not all of one sort. It is not for all *adhikaris* either. For Maharshi himself, he had not been attracted by that. If however anyone should be strongly drawn towards *hatha* yoga or *laya* yoga, he will find the necessary teacher to guide him onward in his path. But for the royal road of *jnana margam*, *pranayama* is not necessary.

I never saw or heard from himself (Maharshi) or reliable sources of any *siddhi* vesting in him such as clairvoyance etc. One or two have however said things of a sort but I do not consider their general character reliable.

I knew his uncle Nelliappayyar who was also a pleader. We entrusted some cases to him. He also was very fair in complexion but a big burly figure like Dhandapani Swami, though very quiet.

Neither the mother's side nor the father's side of all could be considered rich, nor were they poor. They had a modest competence and were in easy circumstances. ▲

Sri Ramana Maharshi

An American Perspective

DENNIS HARTEL

OVER the decades Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings have slowly seeped into the awareness of seekers in North America. Though his teachings appear to be well known, valued for their directness, purity and simplicity, the continued presence and power of the messenger, the Maharshi, remains yet to be discovered or understood to any great extent.

A small number of Americans, upon reading Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*, did venture to make the voyage to India and visit the Sage in his Ashram. None returned with the ideal of spreading the Master's teachings or setting up an institution dedicated to him.

It was not until January 1961, when Bhagawat Singh (known also as Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat), on an extended visit to India from the USA, came to Sri Ramanasramam and Arthur Osborne planted the seed, suggesting that when he returned to America he might start weekly meetings in the name of Bhagavan. Bhakta Bhagawat returned in 1963, but it was not until 1965 that the weekly meetings began. Before long a room was rented for daily meetings and in 1966 the group was incorporated as Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. This appears to be the first organized effort in the name of the Maharshi in North America.

There was a slow, but steady, growth of interest in the years that followed. The Maharshi never told us to go out and spread his teachings to the world, but rather to go inward and realize their truth. With this ideal prevailing, Arunachala Ashrama was not inclined to take a firm outward step to expand its activities. Nevertheless, this ideal did attract – and still does attract – a core of serious sadhakas who realize that to experience the Self, as taught by the Maharshi, is the sole purpose of human existence.

For many devotees of the Maharshi in North America their spiritual aspirations and practice are a private affair. They shun organizations. This is but natural since Sri Bhagavan bequeathed to us a path that can be followed unseen amidst the bustle of society. It is, after all, an inner journey, which we alone must take.

There will always be some who wish to gain inspiration and support from like-minded seekers, following the path laid down by the Sage, or to serve him, by serving his devotees in an ashram where they may more easily harmonize their inner aspirations with their outer activities. For these aspirants an ashram dedicated to the Guru serves a definite purpose. These ashrams are centers of distribution where what the Sage has given to mankind is passed on to sincere seekers. Sri Ramanasramam in India serves that purpose, and has the distinction of being the one place on earth where the perpetual presence and guidance of the Master is most felt.

In North America, during the last ten or fifteen years, we have seen a considerable increase of interest in Sri Ramana, not only as the teacher, but also as the Guru. With a greater number of books, videos and CDs published and distributed, organizations forming and teachers traversing the country training students in Self-enquiry, more interest in Sri Ramana Maharshi has been generated.

Also, the recent, large wave of Indian nationals, especially from South India into the North American society has brought many serious devotees to our shores. This has resulted in greater interest in the expression of devotion to Sri Ramana Maharshi and also a genuine sincerity to practise the teachings while living in society. Ironically, many of these Indians comment that since coming to America,

or Canada, they find better opportunities and a more conducive environment to live a spiritual life than they did in India. It is only in North America that their spiritual interest blossomed, they say. These same Indians on investigating into Sri Ramana Maharshi while abroad find little common ground with the Western teachers and groups that profess Sri Ramana's teachings but have limited traditional Indian understanding or sympathy to the path of Surrender and Devotion. Indians appear to have an inherent understanding of the synthesis of Devotion and Knowledge espoused by Sri Bhagavan, and have difficulty equating seminars, lectures and workshops with a sincere spiritual practice that they believe to be essential for the devotee. A number of them have made the Maharshi the guide and goal of their lives and hold Ramana Satsangs in their homes where they recite the Master's compositions, read his teachings and meditate.

So what is the future of Sri Ramana Maharshi in the West? If asked, the Maharshi would most probably assert, "Future? Where is the future? There is only the present."

Still, there is little doubt that Sri Ramana Maharshi's name and teachings will continue to grow at a steady pace, though we cannot say whether this pace will accelerate at some point and take the form of an organized movement. First of all, his teachings leave little room for a formal ritual to hold a religious movement together. Also, there exists no scope for a successor to the Maharshi, nor has there been an organization formed with ordained teachers. Moreover, his teachings stress an intense, inner sadhana, which the masses are unlikely, or incapable, to attempt.

But there is one thing, the Living Guru. If the continued guidance and grace comes to be understood and experienced by a growing number of aspirants, it could possibly, at some point, create an avalanche of interest. Furthermore, during the last few centuries there may not have lived a spiritual personality whose teachings were so universal and so thoroughly rational, direct and devoid of any sectarian roots or overtones, and whose life demonstrated the teachings so completely as the Sage of Arunachala. All these elements form a

potential foundation for raising the recognition of the Maharshi from the foremost Sage of the 20th Century to a dominant influence upon the hearts and minds of millions of seekers for centuries to come. Whether this will happen – or can happen – we cannot say. But what we do know is that the spiritual force released to the world during Sri Ramana Maharshi’s physical existence is definitely gaining momentum and will continue well beyond our generation.

Two thousand years ago a Guru lived. He was crucified, and yet survived to ascend from the earth. Society worships him as a saviour, one who taught the way to salvation and can grant it, even today. Could it happen in the case of a quiet ascetic who lived at the foot of an obscure holy hill in South India? Is that hill still obscure now in the year 2003? Visit it on a full-moon night and see for yourself. Anything is possible. ▲

BHAGAVAN'S HERBAL REMEDIES

SARASWATHA CHURNAM

Ingredients required: dry ginger, liquorice, rock salt, the long pippali, cumin seeds, turmeric, barberry, calamus root, saussurea, omum. — All these should be bought in equal measure.

Preparation: All the above ingredients should be carefully ground, made into fine powder and mixed together. Take a teaspoon of ghee (clarified butter) and a half teaspoon of the powdered mixture and mix thoroughly. Consume twice a day. Alternate for ghee is milk.

Parts of herbs used in the above: roots, seeds and salt.

Body parts for which the above is used: Brain and nerves.

How does it act? Soothes nerves, restores calmness to an agitated brain and mind, acts on tissues, restores vitality.

What are the symptoms and indications that will necessitate the use of the above medicine? Loss of memory, sluggish brain, insomnia, weak muscles and tissues.

Precautions: None, there are no side-effects.

The Pundits and the Peasant

K. SWAMINATHAN

ONCE during a visit to the Ashram in the 1940s I was sitting outside the Old Hall with many devotees, facing Sri Bhagavan who was reclining on a couch. A group of learned pundits were discussing certain passages from the Upanishads with great enthusiasm and profundity. All, including Bhagavan, appeared to be attentively listening to this interesting discussion when, all of a sudden, Bhagavan rose from his couch, walked thirty metres to the north, and stood before a villager who was standing there looking lowly with palms joined.

Immediately the discussion stopped and all eyes were turned to Bhagavan and the villager standing at a distance. They appeared to be conversing, but at such a distance no one could tell about what. Soon Bhagavan returned to his couch and the discussion resumed.

I was curious about this villager and why Bhagavan had gone out of his way to meet him. So, while the discussion continued I slipped away and caught up with him before he left the Ashram. I asked the villager what he and Bhagavan had talked about. He said that Bhagavan had asked him why he was standing there so far away. “I told Bhagavan, ‘I am only an ignorant, poor villager. How am I to approach you who are God incarnate?’”

“What did the Maharshi say then?” I asked.

“He asked me my name, what village I was from, what work I did and how many children I had, etc.”

“Did you ask Him anything?”

“I asked Him how I could be saved and how I could earn His blessings.”

“What did He tell you?”

“He asked me if there was a temple in my village. I told him there was. He wanted to know the name of the deity of that temple. I told Him the name. He then said that I should go on repeating the name of that deity and I would receive all the blessings needed.”

I came back to Bhagavan’s presence and sat among the devotees listening to the learned discussion, in which I had now lost all interest, realizing that the simple humility and devotion of this peasant had evoked a far greater response from our Master than any amount of learning. I then decided that, though a scholar by profession, I should always remain a humble, ignorant peasant at heart, and pray, like that villager, for Bhagavan’s grace and blessings. ▲

The ashram has recently published a complete edition of the Ribhu Gita, a classical Advaitic text. It was frequently recited in Bhagavan’s presence. Bhagavan emphasised the importance of six verses from this work, one of which is given below.

The idea that conceives “I am the body”
 May be said to be the inner senses.
 The idea that conceives “I am the body”
 May be said to be the perplexing samsara.
 The idea that conceives “I am the body”
 May be said to be the cause of massive fear.
 That idea that I am the body
 Is not the least bit real. All is of the nature of Brahman.
 — Chapter V, verse 17.

BOOK EXCERPT

Hill of Fire

MONICA BOSE

SUZANNE ALEXANDRA CURTIL, known in India as Sujata was born in Paris on 13 December 1896. She was a talented dancer, doctor and diviner. Her quest for Truth began at an early age. When she was eighteen she joined the Theosophical Society and in 1925 was sent as a delegate from the Paris Lodge to the Jubilee Convention held at Adyar. At Adyar she met the Swamiji, Sri Jinawansaswamy, a High Priest of the Theravada or Southern Buddhist order. His specific mission was to revive Buddhism in India. He became her teacher and knowing that with her strong intellect she could help him in his work, he persuaded the Chief High Priests of Ceylon to admit her into the Theravada order. She became the first Southern Buddhist nun in 800 years.

Soon after she had clad the yellow robe Suzanne was sent to the Himalayan region on an ecumenical mission. In a northern monastery she met and was instructed by the renowned Tibetan Buddhist Master, Tromo Geshe Rinpoche.

In May 1926, she was appointed by the Southern Buddhist authorities as their representative to H.H. the Dalai Lama. She was to request him to accept joint patronage with the leader of the Southern Buddhist Church. She joined a caravan to Lhasa, travelling in forbidden

territory dressed inconspicuously as a Nepali young man. But she did not reach Lhasa, she fell ill and had to return to India.

In 1927, she left her monastic life to marry an Indian army surgeon, Ranjit Sen. She hoped to be guided by him in her work for the poor and suffering of India. But after the birth of their daughter, Monica, the marriage was dissolved. She then returned to the Swamiji. But in 1934 the Swamiji died.

At a time of bafflement and distress, Suzanne saw a newspaper article about Sri Ramana Maharshi, the Sage of Arunachala whose realisation through discriminating intuition had brought back to mankind the reality of the ancient seers. Suzanne went to meet him in December 1936, along with two other western ladies.

As Suzanne made the journey by train to Tiruvannamalai, kilometre after kilometre of arid splendour unfurled before her eyes. She saw tawny earth and tawny hills and giant piles of rocks that were the skeletal remains of ancient mountains. A desert vegetation of thorn-scrub and cactus-like euphorbia scabbled for existence in the dry, unrewarding soil. Unexpectedly, there would be a copse of tall trees revealing the presence of underground water, the sudden brilliant green of paddy standing waist high, or the mellow gold of mustard fields.

Early in the morning the train slowed as it approached a mountain taller and standing apart from the rest. She did not recognize it at once and thought only that it looked very denuded and ancient. Its soil was eroded and the rocky structure beneath was exposed like the ribs of a skeleton. It was only when they had gone around it and she saw its less rugged eastern aspect that she recognized it to be the Hill Arunachala. In the early sunlight it glowed a fiery red and she remembered that Arunachala was held to be the manifestation of Shiva in the form of Fire.

She would learn that the entire Hill is worshipped as a Tejo Linga, the blazing mark of truth absolute. Declared in the Skanda Purana to be the secret, sacred Heart-centre of Shiva and hence the spiritual centre of the world, for centuries it has been a much-

frequented place of worship and pilgrimage, as well as the abode of saints and sages.

Suzanne and her two companions alighted at the small, neat station of Tiruvannamalai. Outside the station they found a horse-drawn cart to take them to the ashram, which was about five-and-a-half

kilometres from the town. Their vehicle took the Big Street, the main residential street of the town, which went up to meet the road skirting the base of the Hill.

The thirteen-kilometre-long circumambulatory road first passes between the massive wall of the Lord Arunachaleswar temple on the left, and the majestic Hill on the right. Once the road leaves behind the town and comes to open country, there opens for the traveller the vista of an antique landscape of temples,

shrines, sacred tanks and pilgrim halls. Some temples have filigree carved domes; others, more primitive, are of rough-hewn rock. In these simple dolmens the deity is usually not free-standing but carved in the solid stone, seeming to emerge only reluctantly into the airy dimension of form. Stone is everywhere in evidence in Tiruvannamalai; from the rock of the Hill itself, through the stone foundation of the great temple where it has a complex symbology, and the diverse stone shrines with their stone-stepped tanks, to the mandapams constructed from massive blocks of granite which have stood the onslaught of the elements for centuries. Without the need of words, the stone transmits to the onlooker the message of the fundamental, full and enduring nature of Being.

Their vehicle passed a simple stone shrine which was dedicated to Shiva as Dakshinamurti, the divine yogi who teaches the ineffable Truth in silence. He is the deity who faces south, and since south is the direction of death, He is also known as Mrutyunjaya, the con-

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queror of death. Death, indeed, is conquered by awakening to the ultimate truth of ourselves and our world.

Just after passing the shrine of Dakshinamurti they reached their destination, announced by an archway bearing the words 'Sri Ramanasramam'. Entering the grounds they dismounted from their vehicle under a big illupai tree. To their left there was a pond surrounded by trees, and ahead of them a small whitewashed building which turned out to be the ashram office. The Maharshi's younger brother Nagasundaram greeted them there. He had changed his name to Niranjanananda Swami after taking *sannyas* so as to dedicate himself completely to the running of the ashram, but most people addressed him as Sarvadhikari or Manager. He asked them a few particulars about themselves and Suzanne gave her name as Sujata. He gave them small packets of holy ash as *prasadam*, then instructed Raja Iyer, the genial postmaster of the ashram to take them to the Maharshi. They crossed a small courtyard and came to a long hall with all its doors open. They went up a few steps and there, seated before them on a couch, was the Sage of Arunachala.

Suzanne saw a slender, golden-skinned man in his late fifties. Except for a loincloth he was completely bare. She thought that his face was very beautiful, not only because of the brahmin fineness of the features, but above all because it had the highest expression of awareness that she had ever seen. There was about him a certain indefinable

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described it best

quality; the splendour of Realization perhaps described it best. She saw how the psychological labels which the modern mind tended to affix to spiritual experience turned out to be irrelevant and unworthy when one was confronted with true achievement.

When Raja Iyer introduced them to the Maharshi he nodded in acknowledgement and for a moment gave them his attention, but

did not speak. Suzanne was so engrossed in her contemplation of the Maharshi that at first she did not hear when one of the attendants told them that they should take their place among the women who sat on his left. The men, who were more numerous, sat facing him down the length of the hall.

The hall in which they found themselves was simply decorated and furnished. A frieze of blue flowers ran along the walls. A clock hung on the wall facing the devotees. Below it, on a shelf, there were a few tin containers. Presently, she saw the Maharshi take some nuts out of one of the containers for the squirrel that had run to him along the back of the couch. Next to the couch was a revolving bookcase and further down the hall stood two plain wooden cupboards holding more books and a small store of stationery. Little attempt had been made to create a mystical or spiritual background for the Maharshi. The furniture was functional, the surroundings ordinary. Yet the banal setting could not detract from the grandeur of the Sage. He was exceptional first of all in just being himself. In every action he made, whether he was correcting a manuscript or reading a letter, there was a complete naturalness and absence of pose. This is very rarely seen, for few are those who, being rooted in their true identity, have no need to seek a flattering image of themselves or confirmation of what they are from the impression they make on others.

Once during the morning the Maharshi turned and looked directly at Suzanne. She would write to us about his wonderful gaze, his brilliant eyes shining like stars. She was sure that she had found her Master. At eleven o'clock the Maharshi and the devotees rose and left the hall, for it was time for the main meal of the day. Someone from the ashram invited Suzanne and the two ladies with her to join the others. The meal was served in the communal dining hall where rows of freshly washed plantain leaves had been laid out on the spotlessly clean stone floor. The Maharshi took his place among the devotees. The brahmins sat on one side of him and the non-brahmins on the other, thus respecting religious customs. The Maharshi though, did not wear the brahmin thread, and she remem-

bered that on arriving in Tiruvannamalai he had thrown away the thread worn by the hereditary sacerdotal caste that indicated superiority over others.

They were served rice, vegetables, pepper-water and milk-curd. The Maharshi ate very frugally. He asked Suzanne whether the food was not too pungent for them. These words of solicitude were the first words he spoke to her. In the hall she then joined the devotees who had come to spend the afternoon with the Maharshi. She did not see some of those who had been present in the morning, but several newcomers were there. She was surprised to hear that devotees might come into the hall as early as four o'clock in the morning, though seven o'clock was the time most morning visitors gathered. They spent a few hours with him, but he was accessible to them all day.

As in the morning, the mood was rather informal. To these pupils aspiring to attain the highest grades of knowledge, the Maharshi apparently did not give any discourses. He replied to questions when they were put to him, usually very succinctly. As if to let the one word or the few words he said make their way directly into the understanding of the questioner. On the other hand, when a young man struggled to grasp what the Self was, the Maharshi with great patience guided him through his reasoning until at last he got some glimmering of what the Maharshi meant. Of course, the answer to the nature of the Self is only to be found on the intuitive level, but the breakthrough of intuition can be hampered by faulty reasoning. Apart from these exceptions to silence, there were long quiet moments when the Maharshi said and did nothing, but which were more effective in conveying transcendent Truth than any lecture or sermon would have been. The afternoon ended with a twenty-minute break.

The Maharshi and the devotees gathered in the hall again at five o'clock for the evening session. Suzanne found that the atmosphere now was quite different; much more solemn and charged with more energy than earlier on in the day. First there was the recitation of the Vedas by a group of young brahmin boys and their preceptor. As the powerful sanskrit syllables vibrated in the hall, the Maharshi's

appearance underwent a remarkable change. His expression became austere, his gaze turned inwards. His face appeared translucent as if lit by inner illumination, whilst the constant slight trembling of his body which Suzanne had noticed earlier, had now completely stopped. Yet even in this state it was evident that he was not oblivious of his surroundings, and that he had an awareness of both the inner and outer reality. Suzanne was to write about her impression of the Maharshi in these words: 'He is an Adept of the highest order, a king of Yogis. The splendour of his Realization radiates like a sun... Robed in ether his Yogic powers are unique, subtle and rare. He lifts you far above the world.'

After the Vedas, the devotees sang together a hymn to Arunachala. Then they sat in deep silence, capturing the force emanating from their Master, a force so strong as to be almost tangible. To her surprise she now saw all the women rise, and after prostrating to the Maharshi file out of the hall. She did not go with them. One of the men came and explained to her that the ashram management had made the rule that women must leave the ashram before 6.30 p.m. so that they could safely return home before dark. She protested that she was not afraid of the dark and asked to be allowed to stay as long as the men. The Sarvadhikari, alerted that there was some trouble in the hall, arrived and told her himself that the ashram rules must be respected. The Maharshi did not intervene at any time during this incident.

Very upset, Suzanne left the hall. She found her two friends from Adyar waiting for her outside. They looked dejected because they had just found out that there was no guesthouse for women at the ashram and they would have to find some accommodation in town. They tried to persuade her to go with them, but since she refused they left without her. Suzanne declared to the small group of ashramites who were trying to pacify her, that since she could

His face
appeared
translucent
as if lit
by inner
illumination

not stay at the ashram she would go and spend the night on the Hill.

She climbed some way up the Hill and without difficulty found a cave in which to shelter. She entered its dark interior, in spite of her bravado a little afraid of finding herself confronted by some wild animal. But she was alone. She had meant to spend the night in meditation, but it was impossible for her to meditate so great was her feeling of indignation at what had happened. Meeting a true Master had been the event she had longed for and she had so much hoped to receive some indication from him that he had accepted her as his disciple. Instead, at what had been the most significant moment of the day for her, she had been made to leave his presence because she was a woman, which in this society obviously meant someone weak and inferior. The incident aroused in her an old impulse to revolt against exclusion because of arbitrarily determined inferiority, a reaction which went back to her student days when more than once she had been indignant at the unfair discrimination against women. In fact, the feeling went still further back to her early childhood when she had first understood that her parents valued her less than her brother and that, whatever she might do, she would never be able to take his place in their pride and affection. It was strange that on her very first day with the Maharshi her oldest pain and anger should have risen to the surface.

Her anger drove all other thoughts from her mind. It was then that she had a vision of Arunachala as a Hill of Fire. In its many caves, *siddhas* or realized beings in their pure and invulnerable bodies sat or moved unharmed in the flames. In her vision she was taken into the Hill and passed through its fire but felt no fear, no pain. And she saw many worlds existing within the Hill, in a series of extraordinary revelations.

Some time afterwards, she confided what she had seen to another devotee, Mrs. Lucia Osborne. At the time, Mrs. Osborne did not think it was important, but a few years later when another person reported a similar experience, she asked the Maharshi about it. As she would write in her editorial in the January 1974 issue of the



SUZANNE CAN BE SEEN AT THE BOTTOM RIGHT HAND SIDE.
MAJOR CHADWICK IS SEATED BEHIND SUZANNE
AND S. S. COHEN STANDS BEHIND SRI BHAGAVAN

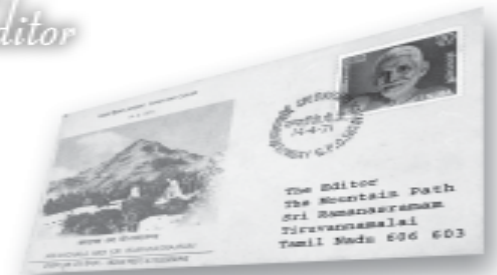
ashram journal, *The Mountain Path*, 'Sujata was taken into the hill and found a whole universe there. When I asked the Maharshi if it could be so, he replied, "Yes", and then added, "The Hill is the Heart."

While Suzanne was on the Hill that night, the Maharshi, knowing that there were wild animals such as cheetahs, leopards and jackals on its slopes, asked Mr. Cohen, a former Theosophist who had known her at Adyar, to go and persuade her to come down. When Mr. Cohen and his party found her she was calm, being still under the influence of her wondrous vision. Without further protest she agreed to spend the rest of the night in a hotel in town.

The next day she came to the Ashram somewhat embarrassed by her impulsive action and wondering whether she would be reprimanded for it. But the Maharshi did not say anything about it. When somebody asked to take a photograph of the Maharshi with the foreign devotees at the ashram, he agreed, although he did not always agree to be photographed. Seeing that Suzanne hung back a little diffidently, he made a sign to her that she was to join them. In this photograph, the devotees are grouped before Arunachala as if forming a hill with the Maharshi at the centre.

This is the last photograph in which Suzanne appears clad in the Buddhist robe, for she stopped wearing it shortly afterwards. In Bangalore and in the Buddhist monasteries in the north where she had been accepted unquestioningly as a Buddhist nun, she had not felt self-conscious when wearing the habit. Here, in this predominantly Hindu milieu, her Buddhist robe was not understood and as a result she felt self-conscious and on the defensive. The Maharshi did not ask her to stop wearing it. That was not his way. There were never any dictates from him. His teachings did not lay down rules of conduct; they provided guidance as to how to achieve selflessness which was the basis of Realization. She had read some of his teachings before coming to Tiruvannamalai and had grasped enough to know that in the quest which required the abandonment of all thought of self, there was no place for self-consciousness or even for self-defence. ▲

Letters to the Editor



In this issue we publish a letter from a 16 year old spiritual aspirant, Jacob Music of the USA, who has sought clarifications on the method of spiritual practice as taught by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Question: *The concentration on the feeling of 'I', I understand, is the method of Vichara. But, how can the 'I' concentrate on itself? Isn't this a logical fallacy? Wouldn't the 'I' that is focused upon be an objective entity, and thus be no different as focusing upon a mantra or some other object of meditation? What is the real practice of Vichara? Is it as simple as keeping aware of the silence from which a thought arises, and subsides into, until the point of Self-Realization?*

Answer: Sri Bhagavan teaches us that the practice of Self-enquiry of 'Who am I?' is not a subject-object method of meditation. The moment the ego-self tries to know itself it begins to partake less and less of the body in which it is immersed and more and more of the consciousness of Self.

There are not two 'I's, one to realize the other. There is only one Self. Self-enquiry is holding onto the subject 'I' by the 'I', thus preventing thoughts to rise. Without thoughts, the individual 'I' cannot remain and will resolve itself into its Source. This is the 'I' underlying the waking, dreaming and deep sleep states. It is our true and natural state and is ever-present.

If the ego 'I' turns inwards and simply holds onto itself, without letting other thoughts arise, the individual 'I' becomes absorbed into its Source, the Self. Just hold onto the 'I' thought and go on searching for its source. Then you will find there is really no such thing as the ego 'I'. On its source being sought, it disappears.

Question: *Another thing, I am a 16 year old high school student. I understand that Vichara involves the elimination of thoughts, but I wish to practice Vichara all the time. However, I find this impossible, because schoolwork requires thought (for instance, when solving a math problem). So then, is there any sadhana that I may perform even during school that would aid me?*

Answer: The mind has long been in the habit of going outwards, towards the objects of the world. It doesn't easily turn inwards for any length of time. Only by the steady practice of Self-enquiry or meditation does the mind gradually come under control. You are a student. Your present-life situation requires you to study and attend school. This is certainly no obstacle to the path of Self-enquiry. Whatever work you have in front of you, concentrate on that work alone, fully, to the exclusion of all else. Do this with detachment, without letting your thoughts run ahead to the fruits of the work. Be indifferent to the results, but do the work as perfectly as you can. That is the way to gain greater concentration and spiritualize your activities.

Question: *And lastly, is the fact that I live in the United States any hindrance to my spiritual progression to atma-jnana? I understand that people feel the presence of Sri Bhagavan still to this day at the Ashram, but is it possible for me to feel his presence here in America?*

Answer: Living in the USA is definitely not a hindrance to *Atma Jnana*, spiritual practice or the guiding grace and presence of the Master. Many from America and countries the world over have testified to this fact. The Self is ever-present. We need only turn to It with all sincerity, humility and devotion. For those practising *Atma Vichara*, Sri Ramana Maharshi is the Guru who guides and clears the path for seekers treading on this royal journey to the Self. He is available, even now, for sincere seekers.

OTHER LETTERS

I received *The Mountain Path* in the new format and reduced pages. '*kadugu siruthaalum kaaram kuraiyaadu*' (Even though the mustard seed be small, its pungency is strong).

La. Su. Rangarajan, Chennai.

I must admit I found the new format a poor descendant to its magnificent predecessor. There is very little reading material.

M. O. Menon, New Delhi.

The new format of *The Mountain Path* is wonderful. I would like to send my appreciation to the editorial team for the get up and the contents.

S. Ramamoorthy, Trichy.

I enjoyed the photos of Bhagavan and the news that *The Mountain Path* will again be a quarterly. Bhagavan will give you the strength to carry on.

Karsta Schneider, Germany.

Could you please consider increasing the type size in the folio line? This comment should in no way detract from the otherwise high quality and standard and the journal's format.

P.R. Gupta, Delhi.

Thank you for your suggestion. The font size of the folio line is being increased from this issue — Editor.

I heartily congratulate you for the new and beautiful build up of *The Mountain Path* which reflects the simplicity of the Maharshi.

S. Sreehari, Hanamakonda, A.P.

To begin with, Bhagavan's wonderful sketch of the hill makes for a most appropriate cover. The simple design and subtle colour of the cover seem to immediately convey to the reader the sense of dignity and simplicity which Bhagavan himself represents. As well, we have the impression that the new format is in keeping with the vision of the founding editor, Mr. Arthur Osborne.

Erica & Jonathan Bader on e-mail from Australia

BOOK REVIEWS

THE DICEY PROBLEM OF NEW AGE SCIENCE:

Einstein, Hawking and God at the Casino: by Dwaraknath Reddy. Pub: author, Nutrine, Chittoor 517001, India. pp105, Rs90

Elevating, thought provoking and delightful from the points of view of spirituality, science and literature respectively, Reddy's new book may also be considered a valuable contribution to the field of consciousness studies. While enriching the available literature on parallels between science and spirituality, Reddy's book all the same drives the scientist to the wall and makes a strong case for (spiritual) Philosophy's supremacy. And be it said to his credit, he does it not by leaning on unsustainable recourse to "faith", but by re-examining and extrapolating the scientist's own assertions (facts).

He explains, drawing from a rich repertoire of logical and artistic skills, that consciousness is the truth that exists independently of the brain or any other physical substance. The energy of consciousness appears as the mind. The brain is the equipment in association with which the energy (of consciousness) becomes particularized as the individual person (p.32).

"Is the observer of physics conscious?" The author's very appropriate metaphor considers a painted scene of nature in which the painter is also shown painted in a corner. Can we say that the painter-in-the-picture painted the picture? So too, no part of this creation can be God. Creation is one with God, while we can at times appreciate God as the intelligence 'behind' a creation.

The book throws wonderful light on the nature of time. It shows how the 'now' alone is true. There again, the presence of the conscious 'I' makes the 'now' come alive. At the end, this laudable work pays a tribute to Sri Ramana Maharshi, "long before Time could write Ramana Maharshi's obituary, he wrote Time's obituary."

Spiritual seekers and scientists alike will benefit much from a reading of Sri Reddy's work.

— Sw. Chidānanda, The DLS

PORTALS OF VEDIC KNOWLEDGE: Kireet Joshi. 2000. Pub: <aurovillePress@auroville.org.in>, pp53

IS INDIAN CULTURE OBSOLETE?: pp60, Rs40
KALI YUGA OR THE AGE OF CONFUSION: pp64, Rs45

SRI AUROBINDO AND INDIAN CIVILISATION: pp55, Rs45

THE INDIAN MIND THEN AND NOW: pp94, Rs50

last four by Michel Danino. Publisher: Mira Aditi Centre, TK Layout, Mysore 570009

India's vibrant ancient roots in easy steps. Debates are raging today on the Aryan invasion theory, Saraswati river civilisation, the intent of Vedas, the practice of secularism and the 'passivity' of Hindus. A series of slender, low priced, volumes brought out by Mira Aditi, Mysore cover the whole breadth of these subjects and clarify these issues simply and quickly.

In *The Portals of Vedic Knowledge* Kireet Joshi explains how the recursive chanting of the orally received verses ensured a faithful transmission over centuries. "The Veda is difficult to understand. It is written in an algebraic form. We all know what 'cow' is in the ordinary sense, but in the algebraic form, 'cow' means 'light'. And if you read the Veda throughout, whenever the word cow comes, you put the word 'light' it will fit very well".

Did this Sanskrit come from beyond India with the Aryans? If it did, how come there are no traces of it where it is supposed to have originated, whereas in India it refuses to die despite neglect? The controversies swirl around ancient India. It is difficult to take a position unless one is prepared to wade into the deep and organized waters of Indology, philology, cosmology, cryptology, archaeology, forensic sciences and what have you.

Now there is help. Michel Danino is a Frenchman who has spent 25 of his 46 years in India devoting himself to looking at India from Sri Aurobindo's point of view. He has been ceaselessly lecturing all over India bemoaning the lack of esteem Indians have for their cultural

heritage. The four slim books under review are in fact a collection of his lectures. One asks *Is Indian Culture Obsolete?* and goes on to argue India is scarcely an effete culture. India's classic works emphasize action, positive action. In *Kali Yuga*, Danino is saddened by the confusion that has enveloped a whole Indian generation. He attributes that to the exercise of comparisons between 'Gods' of the various religions as though they were brands from which one must make a consumerist choice. To the Indian mind, God is an all pervading, eternal idea that is not in a competitive race. A Hindu cheerfully engages a hundred Gods because he knows that they are all only special instances of an immutable idea.

In *Sri Aurobindo And Indian Civilization* Danino points out that the European appears to have convinced the south Indian that his land was over run by an invader. Countering that theory, Danino asks you to take a look at *Silappadikāram* having "vivid references to Siva, Vishnu, Krishna, Indra, and several mentions of the Veda".

Finally, don't ever make up your mind about ancient India without reading the 45-page lead essay in *The Indian Mind Then And Now*. It is illustrated, brilliantly argued and dares you to contend with many riddles. The essay demolishes the invasion theory created solely to explain the rise and fall of Harappa. Danino highlights the many chronological gaps and proves Dr. B R Ambedkar's words: "The theory of [Aryan] invasion is an invention. It is a perversion of scientific investigation."

DV Sridharan <goodnewsIndia.com>

UNDERSTANDING IS REALIZATION: Master Strokes of Sri Ranjit Maharaj's Teachings. 2003. Pub: Sri Sadguru Siddharameshwar Adhyatma Kendra, Dubash Lane, VP Rd, Mumbai 400004. <RanjitMaharaj@hotmail.com> <aurenceledoare@wanadoo.fr>, pp80, Price?

Ranjit Mahārāj was born in 1913. When but a lad of 12 he met his guru Siddharāmēshwar Mahārāj who was of the Nāth *sampradāya* and who attained *vidēha* 13 years later. From the abiding 'flavour' of Siddharāmēshwar Mahārāj's disciples, of

whom this reviewer had the fortune more than once, to converse with Sri Nisargadatta and Sri Ranjit, one could infer that the received teaching of guru Mahārāj was a lineage rooted around the mystery and sense of being, and additionally, it commanded a 'chosen few' to offer the guru-*dakshina* in the form of singing kīrtans to the lineage. And this was to be done daily till death.

A contrasting sample from the 'master strokes': (i) All worship God but they don't know what God is.....the realized person knows: "God is only my thought. If I, the reality would not have been there how would God have come into existence?" (p67). (ii) After liberation one should worship. Once you have understood what is left for you to do? There is nothing to be done. Only pray to the one who has taught you these things. He is in your heart no doubt, and you and He are one. Make duality there, make incompleteness, but only for the thanking (p65). [*We are reminded of Bhagavān Ramana's penultimate verse of the Forty Verses Supplement*]. (iii) Certain worms when you cut them they don't die, ego is just like that (p29). (iv) The one who works with the mind is man, and the one who woos mind is the woman (p20).

This very neat gift-booklet is a pithy compilation by Kishore Chopda, of Ranjit Mahārāj's words interspersed with some excellent b/w photos of Sri Ranjit and the well-known one of Sri Siddharāmēshwar.

— J.J.

GAMES: An inviting collection of games and group activities for families, groups, and people of all ages: Comp. Mary Hohenstein. 2000. Pub: Asian Trading Corp, Bangalore 560025 <atc@mcdnet.ems.vsnl.net.in> <ISBN 81-7086-258-2>, pp298, Price?

Mary Hohenstein has compiled a delightful collection of activities that can be played by most age groups and both genders in a variety of settings. Intended as a resource for group leaders, *Games* is full of both new and time-honored activities. There are games of fun for people that already know each other, and others to 'break the ice' quickly within a group of strangers.

The activities are classified under ten major headings with each heading containing a further subset of headings providing easy navigation through the index of activities. There are games that can be played either indoors or outdoors, with large or small groups and that contain considerable or minimal physical exertion. Many of the games are designed to build relationships, encourage the developments of creativity and/or mental dexterity and promote teamwork.

Each activity is presented in a standard format that describes the objective of the game, the number of players required, length of time the game takes to complete and clear instructions on how to play.

With over 200 activities, *Games* is full of easy to facilitate activities for all age groups in most settings. If you are a group leader, parent, teacher or just looking for a resource full of great games and group activities, *Games* is worth perusing.

— John McManus

SRI CAKRAM—ITS GEOMETRY AND METAPHYSICS by Gurajada Suryanarayana Murty. 2001. Pub: Pranav Bharati Foundation. Ahmedabad 380015. pp61, Rs80

Srī Cakram is the genetic code of the cosmos and individuation. It is the body of Siva and Sakti. Worship of *Srī Cakram* is a part of *Srī Vidyā Upāsana*. This method of Sakti worship was propagated by Ādi Sankara. This *yantra* is a symbolic presentation of Goddess Tripurasundarī, the universal mother. The goddess, formless in ultimate, is known as *Srī Rajēshwari*, *Srī Lalitā*, *Srī Mahātripurasundarī*, *Srī Kāmēshwari*, and so on. Mother worship (*Srī Vidyā*) is through her mantra-form (*mantrātmikā*); as geometric projection (*yantrātmikā*); and as idol (*vigrahātmikā*).

Mantrātmikā is causal worship. The other two are *saguna* worships — idol, the gross; and *Srī Cakra*, the subtle.

The process of construction of *Srī Cakra* is given by Kaivalyāshrama and Lakshmīdhara in their commentaries of Sankara's *Saundarya Lahari*. The present author has shown an easy way to construct *Srī Cakram* in a systematic and scientific way by applying geometrical rules. He points out that in building *Srī Cakram* only

two concepts, point and line, are used in profound manner. The construction of *Pūrṇa Pranava Srī Cakram* at the end of the book is a unique and original contribution of the author. His analysis and interpretation of the cardioid (heart-shaped locus of any circle rolling over another equal but fixed circle) and the Pranava symbol, vis a vis the *Cakram* are unique. The metaphysical aspects of *Srī Cakram* are well discussed.

The book really is a delight to *Srī Vidyā Upāsakas*.

— Dr. TN Pranathārthi Haran

THE RAMANA WAY TO THE NEW DAWN: A.R. Natarajan; Pub. Ramana Maharishi Centre for Learning, Sanjay Nagar, Bangalore 560 094; pp111, Rs 85

In this masterly analysis of the teaching, A.R. Natarājan has dealt with the purpose and method of Self-enquiry, the obstacles to its practice and the benefits flowing from it. Human beings, like the musk deer chasing its own fragrance, seek happiness and peace in external sources without realizing that this 'state' is inherent in themselves. Self-enquiry as taught by Bhagavān is common property, accessible to all. "As one treads on the Ramana path, the mind works on all cylinders. One is energized all the time, for there is no dissipation of its energy through purposeless thoughts. Unconscious power is there as an undercurrent, enabling one to be tentative, detached, while at the same time being totally involved in the job or while relating to people. In the transformed life, everything is clothed with the Lord's beauty. The mind is floating in bliss and the heart is overflowing with love".

The New Dawn a subject most dear to the author's heart, pulsates with intense, fervent, authentic experience.

— S. Jagadīsan

THE HILL OF FIRE: Monica Bose; Pub. Orchid Press, PO Box 19, Yuttitham Post Office, Bangkok 10907, Thailand; pp163, Price?

Every so often a special book comes along which inspires the reader. This is such a one.

Monica Bose is the daughter of the heroine

of this biography. She has written a marvellous, sensitive story of an exceptional human being who, in her quest for enlightenment did not forget others and dedicated her medical skill and energy to relieve suffering where ever she was.

Born in Paris she survived the vicissitudes of childhood illness and the death of her father. Life was not easy for her mother and herself but somehow they endured and the suffering deepened her awareness. A brilliant student she enrolled at the medical faculty of the Sorbonne while at the same time explored her talent as a dancer. It was during this period she came across Theosophy. Its proclamation 'There is no religion higher than the Truth' satisfied her need for a wider perspective than the Catholic Church at the time. She graduated and added a post-graduate qualification in tropical hygiene and medicine. After a crucial meeting with Rukminī Dēvi who revived Bharata Nāṭyam in India, she met J. Krishnamūrti who set her on the journey to India, the land in which she most felt at home.

What I would like to emphasise is the courage and perseverance of Sujata as she was later named and the commitment she made to pursue her star whatever the cost or circumstances. A doctor, a Buddhist nun, eventually a married woman and a mother, and always a seeker, she remained true to her quest.

She died in India in 1965, her body exhausted from the unremitting labour that relieved others in physical pain. A person who experienced all the highs and lows on the path without flinching, she comes across in this loving biography as an exceptional soul.

An extract from this book appears on page 57 of this issue.

— Michael Avalon.

MYSTICS AND SEERS OF INDIA: Dr. V. Gaurishankar. 2003. Pub: Ramana Kendra, Lodi Rd, Delhi 110003. ph:(011)2462.6997 <PNVijay@vsnl.com>, pp84, Rs25 (add Rs5 for postage).

A worthy compendium covering 8 ancient Rshis, Ādi Sankara, Ramana and the Kānchi Paramāchārya. Nuggets of Rshi-lore, purānic

and modern, delightfully flavoured with Sanskrit verse quotes. A tiny reminder of the late *vidwān* Bulusu Venkatēswarulu's 8-volume *Lives of Ancient Indian Sages*, covering alphabetically over 60 Rshis, published by him in the '80s, and of course Vettam Mani's classic *Purānic Encyclopædia* (Banarsidass).

— J.J.

OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

VERSES (The Essential Teachings of Advaita): Tr. by S.S. Cohen, Intro. by Alan Jacobs. ISBN: 1-84293-042-7. Pub: Watkins Publishing. <www.watkinspublishing.com> pp 160, Pds.9.99

SRI RAMANA UPANIDADAM (*Ulladu Nārpadu*): (Ānmiga Cintanai Tohuppu #9): free copy: Rajam Maligai Jewellers, 65 South Avani Mula Veethi, Madurai 625001. pp56 <ph:2344202> [includes *Jnānēswar-Vithōbhā dialogue in Tamil*]

MAHĀNGAL ARCHANAIMĀLAI (Poems & Talks by Colombo K. Rāmachandrā): Compiled by A. Ratnā Vadivēl. Pub: 'Ananda Sagara', 42, Sirapari Gardens, Colombo-4. pp xii+102, Price?

CHENGŌTTAI SRĪ ĀVUDAI AKKĀL PĀDAL TIRATTU (Tamil): ed. by Sw. Nityānanda Giri. <www.gnanananda_niketan.org> [ppxxvii+324 at an unbelievable Rs 60 for the message of *Upanishad and Yōga Vāsishtha in irresistible, colloquial Tamil verse of Āvudai Akkā, woman jnāni of Tirunelveli; 17th century disciple of Srīdhara Aiyāvā*].

THE WISDOM TEACHINGS OF NISARGADATTA MAHĀRĀJ: A Visual Journey. pp125, US\$16.95.

THE ESSENTIAL TEACHINGS OF RAMANA MAHARSHI: A Visual Journey. pp123, US\$16.95

both books ed. by Matthew Greenblatt. 2003. Pub: Inner Directions Publishing, <www.innerDirections.org>, [Pithy quotes from the teachers, enshrined amidst excellent b/w photos, make the 'visual journey' series slick gift items for intended recipients to dip into at leisure. One is reminded of the potent, very successful, and accessible-to-all Thus Spake... series from *Srī Rāmākrishna Math, Chennai*]. ▲



ASHRAM BULLETIN

DEV GOGOI

Sri Vidya Havan at Ashram

Sri Vidya Havan is performed annually at the Ashram in the Tamil month of *Panguni* (Feb-March) to commemorate the conducting of Sri Chakra pujas. The rituals are elaborate and take about ten hours to complete. Ten varieties of materials are offered as oblation to the sacrificial fire including coins, clothes etc.

As in previous years, this year too, devotees participated in large numbers in the function which was conducted on March 21. The main items of the programme are: *Navavarana puja*, *Lalita Sahasranama Homa*, *Lalita Trisati Homa*, *Kanya Puja* and *Suvasini Puja*. The *Aarati* was the grand finale.

53rd Aradhana Observances

The fifty-third anniversary of the *Brahma Nirvana* of Sri Bhagavan was grandly observed at the Ashram on April 28, in the presence of a large gathering of devotees. A highlight of this year's programme was the deeply inspiring *Veda Ghana parayanam* of *Rudram* and *Chamakam* by a group of *ghanapatis* on the previous day. The proceedings on *Aradhana* day commenced in the early hours with *nagaswaram* music — by Sri T.R. Pichandi and party of Tiruvannamalai. This was followed by group singing of *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* and *Ulladu Narpadu* of Sri Bhagavan as well as *Ramana Sadguru* of Sri

Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer. Then came the chanting of *Ramana Chatvarimsat* as per the daily routine. After breakfast special *Mahanyasa Ekadasa Rudrabhishekam* to Ramaneswara Lingam was performed while simultaneously *Maha Narayana Upanishad* was chanted. *Arati*, the finale of the special *puja*, occurred around eleven. Devotees were treated to a special lunch. The poor were also fed on a large scale at the special pandal put up at the Kurangu Thottam. The evening concert of *nagaswaram* music by Sri S.G.N. Pichayappa and Sri S.G.N. Ganesan, brothers of Kattimedu was impressive. The after-dinner classical music concert by

Smt. Ambika Kameshwar and party marked the end of the proceedings.

According to Western Calendar

The main *Aradhana* function at the Ashram is usually held according to the Hindu Calendar, on *Chaitra Masa Krishna Paksha Trayodashi* day (April-May). For the last few years it is also observed according to the Western (Gregorian) calendar, that is, on 14 April, the day Bhagavan left his body.

Sri Bhagavan's immortal hymn *Aksharamanamalai* was recited by a large group of devotees before the *Nirvana* room on 14 April between 8-15 and 9 p.m. This chanting movingly re-enacted the scene of the very same

day in 1950, when devotees present chanted the hymn in the minutes before Bhagavan's *Brahma Nirvana*.

At Ramana Kendra, Chennai

Chennai Ramana Kendra celebrated the Aradhana with a National Seminar on Sri Bhagavan's teachings at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore on Sunday 20th April. Talks in the morning were given by Sri S. Ramaswamy, Smt Sarala Panchapakesan, Smt Manjula Ramesh, Sri S. Ram Mohan, Kum. Aishwarya Shankar, Baby Lasya, Sri P. S. Ramamoorthy and Sri T. A. Venkateswaran. Sri V. S. Ramanan, President, Sri Ramanasramam, delivered the presidential address in the evening. Talks in this session were delivered by Sri A. V. Subramanyam and Swami Mitrananda. The keynote address was by Dr Karan Singh, M. P. This was followed by a concert of Carnatic music by Sri T. M. Krishna.

The Aradhana celebrations were held at the Kendra premises on Monday 28th April with *Ekadasa Rudra japam*, *abhishekam*, *laksharchana*, *Tamil parayana*, *deeparadhana* and *annadhanam*. Bhajans were performed in the evening by Andavan Pichai Bhajana Mandali followed by a *harikatha* on Sri Bhagavan by Smt. Shyamala Ramachandran and *ratha yatra* of Sri Bhagavan's portrait around the *mada veedhis* of Mylapore.

At Mumbai

Aradhana was observed with Vedic prayers, chanting of Sri Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai* and *Upadesa Saram* and *puja* to Sri Bhagavan on Sunday 11th May at Sri Ramakrishna Mission Cultural Centre, Worli Hill, Mumbai.

In the USA and Canada

A number of gatherings were held to observe Sri Bhagavan's Mahanirvana Day across North America.

In Toronto, Canada, a hundred devotees attended the function at the house of Padma and Krishna Sastri; many devotees also assembled at Usha and Dr. Krishnan's home in Ottawa and at the Arunachala Ashrama, Nova Scotia. Devotees met in other homes throughout the USA — in Michigan, California, Florida and Georgia.

In New York and Washington D.C. devotees observed the occasion in the Ganesha and Siva-Vishnu temples, respectively. At the Siva-Vishnu temple in Maryland, Dr. Shanta Ramachandran, daughter of the late Prof. K. Swaminathan, recounted her visits to Sri Bhagavan in the late 1940s while she was a schoolgirl, and later as a medical student when she observed the doctors changing Bhagavan's bandages during his last illness. By her graphic description of those incidents, she moved the hearts of all those present. At the Ganesha Temple in New York City, Sri S. Mohan related an interesting encounter his father-in-law had with Bhagavan. Chris Kelly thrilled the devotees by recounting the experience of his first pilgrimage to Arunachala in December 2002. At all programmes Sri Bhagavan's works were recited and *prasad* (meals) was served to the devotees. The continued power and presence of Sri Bhagavan was intensely felt.

Songs in Praise of Sri Bhagavan

Ms. M. S. Subhashini of Coimbatore sang nine songs in praise of Bhagavan Ramana at his shrine on

1st March 2003. She has also released these songs on cassette and CD.

Mahapuja

Mahapuja commemorates the *mukti* (Liberation) of Sri Bhagavan's mother Alagamma. It was observed at the Ashram on Sunday, May 24 corresponding to *Vaishaka Bahula Navami* according to the Hindu calendar.

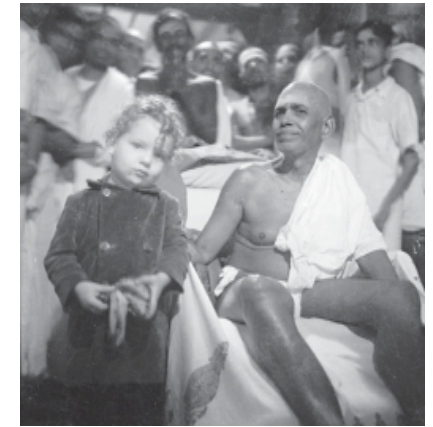
Special *abhishekam* and *puja* to Sri Matrubbhuteswara Lingam over the Mother's Samadhi was performed. A large number of devotees paid their respectful homage to the woman who gave them their Sadguru. In the evening, Smt Sulochana Natarajan and Dr. Sarada Natarajan gave a concert of Carnatic music.

Obituary

ADAM OSBORNE was born in Bangkok on 6th March 1939, but he came to India with his parents at the age of 3. He spent the next 8 years in Tiruvannamalai when he was not in school in Kodaikanal and he played and talked and ran about in and out of the hall where Bhagavan sat. He went to University in England and then took his Ph.D in America where he became a citizen. He married an American and his 3 children were born there.

He was a writer on computer technology and then he invented the first portable computer which was a breakthrough into modern procedure. The system he inaugurated is ongoing and we still don't know where it will end. He went bankrupt and lost a vast fortune through naiveté in business practices.

He developed Organic Brain Syndrome and came back to spend his



A YOUNG ADAM STANDING BESIDE BHAGAVAN

last years in India where he died peacefully in his sleep on 18th March 2003, at Kodaikanal.

Adam made a speech about Indians lacking national pride which touched the hearts of almost every Indian who read it. The full text is printed at the back of the journal.

From being a go-getting typical American and epitomising the New World success story, he was forced to retire to a compulsorily quiet life dictated by his illness. His condition deteriorated over a period of ten years to the point where he could neither speak nor move by himself, but throughout this time he behaved with incredible fortitude and dignity. He was unfailingly polite to everyone around him and he never complained. Whatever he needed to learn and however hard it might have been, he became a gentleman who endured everything that was thrown at him with courage and fortitude. His death was, one suspects, a welcome release to him from a life that had become a relentless burden. He is now with Bhagavan.

Price Reduction of Ashram Publications

Thanks to the generous contribution of devotees, we are now offering the following publications at greatly reduced prices while stocks last.

English

Moments Remembered.....	25.00
Advent Souvenir.....	75.00
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Srimad Bhagavatam.....	10.00
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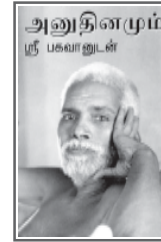
Recent Ashram Publications

Ribhu was a great rishi who obtained knowledge of the Self directly from the Lord Himself and taught several disciples. His teachings are contained in the *Ribhu Gita* which forms a section of the *Siva Rahasya* in Sanskrit. Sri Bhagavan highly commended the reading of this work. Society of Abidance in Truth published the English translation, *The Song of Ribhu*. This is now printed by Sri Ramanasramam as a special edition. This edition is for sale only in India at Sri Ramanasramam Book-Depot.



Pages : pp. 768

Price : Rs. 200

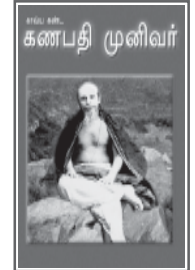


Anudinamum Sri Bhagavanudan: Day by Day with Bhagavan is one of the major publications of the ashram. The day to day happenings in Sri Bhagavan's presence lovingly narrated by one of Bhagavan's close devotees, Devaraja Mudaliar, is now available in Tamil. The translation has been done by Smt Saroja Krishnan and Prof. Niranjana.

Pages : pp. 451

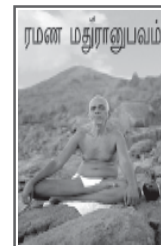
Price : Rs. 90

Kavya Kanta Ganapati Munivar: The life story of Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni, a prominent devotee of Sri Bhagavan is detailed and inspiring. This Tamil biography was written by Dr Kripanandan. This edition is an improved version and contains additional features such as the Muni's letters to Sri Bhagavan. The ashram is happy to publish the story of this great devotee in Tamil.



Pages : pp. 207

Price : Rs. 45



Ramana Madburanubhavam: The reminiscences of Smt Akilandammal are inspiring. She was a great devotee who fed Sri Bhagavan during his early days on the hill. Sri Balaram Reddy was a staunch devotee of Bhagavan whose reminiscences will interest readers. These two accounts have now been combined into one book.

Pages : pp. 163

Price : Rs. 35

Shall We Listen to Him?

S. Rajam is a distinguished South Indian musician, painter and a keen amateur photographer. Now 84, he lives in Chennai.

Sometime in the 1940s, S. Rajam visited Sri Ramanasramam. Rajam sang a song in the Old Hall and was rewarded by the gracious glance of Bhagavan.

On coming to know that Bhagavan took a walk on Arunachala after breakfast, Rajam decided to photograph him. He set up his tripod near the steps at the back of the ashram and waited. When Bhagavan returned Rajam prostrated before him and requested him if he could take a photograph. Bhagavan agreed and asked him whether the camera was a “plate” type camera. The astonished Rajam who did not expect Bhagavan to know about the latest techniques in photography, replied that it was and requested Bhagavan if he might take a photograph. Bhagavan agreed and he took a photo. Then Bhagavan asked him whether he needed another shot. Rajam replied in the negative saying that one was fine.

When he returned to Madras, Rajam discovered that the negative was spoiled and was blank. He then realised why Bhagavan had asked him whether one shot was enough.

Often, Bhagavan’s words or actions may be so subtle that it is difficult to understand them in the first instance. Whatever Bhagavan said or did, the foremost purpose was the welfare of the devotee. It is possible that we may miss the true significance of Bhagavan’s advice and pass it over, later to our regret. The suggestion may be something very simple as in Rajam’s case but the inner import could carry a deeper significance of which we are not aware at the time.

Bhagavan may not also repeat the suggestion — all the more reason why one had to be deeply attentive to him. Just because he is not in the body it is not different now.

Devotees need only to turn inwards and pay attention to the guidance that emanates from the deep within. And more important, abide by it.

— M. RAVINDRA NARAYANAN ▲