

CONTENTS

RAMANA ASHTOTTARAM	2
EDITORIAL: Lineage	3
THE MAHA NIRVANA: Christopher Quilkey	8
MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ADVAITA: David Frawley	21
ULLADU NARPADU VERSE TWO: S. Ram Mohan	31
KEYWORD: ATMA NISHTA	34
MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS ON SRI BHAGAVAN: K. V. Ramanan	37
'I' IS A DOOR PART TWO: Philip Renard	45
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	58
SRI ARUNACHALA PANCHARATNAM COMMENTARY: Sadhu Om	61
WHAT DOES ARADHANA MEAN?: M. Ravindra Narayanan	71
SRI TINNAI SWAMI: Michael James	74
FROM THE NOTEBOOKS: Robert Powell	85
ADVAITA PRIMER: T. S. Viswanatha Sharma	87
LIFE AND TIMES OF LAKSHMANA SHARMA: Meenakshi Losardi	91
BOOK EXCERPT: THE DICEY PROBLEM OF NEW AGE SCIENCE: V. Dwaraknath Reddy	99
SRI RAMANA PARAVIDYOPANISHAD: Lakshmana Sharma	108
RATHA YATRA	118
BOOK REVIEWS	121
ASHRAM BULLETIN	124
AFTERWORD	128

Ramana Ashtottaram

15. *Om Srimad dvādaśānta mahāsthālē labdha vidyōdayāya namaha.*

Prostration to he who gained enlightenment in the most holy city *dvādaśānta mahāsthala* (Madurai).

There are three places of significance in the life of Sri Bhagavan: Tiruchuli, Madurai and Tiruvannamalai. At Madurai, the venue of the *lila* of Siva (Thiru-vilayadal), in the shadow of the temple of Meenakshi-Sundara, eternity broke into time. Siva-Sakti entered human history and the single most decisive event in Bhagavan's life occurred. The illumination that came to young Venkataraman in mid-July, 1896, was so sudden and striking, so complete and permanent, that it takes its place in human history alongside the Buddha's awakening.

The phrase *Srimad dvadasanta mahasthala* explains why this world-transforming event took place in this town of Madurai where Siva as Somasundara and Sakti as Meenakshi reign. Over and above the six *chakras* (yogic centres) from *muladhara* to *sahasrara* in the human body, there are six more subtle *chakras*.¹ The highest of these, the twelfth and last (*dvadasanta*), is in the cosmic order identified with the most ancient and holy city of Madurai. Here in this *peeta* (throne) Sakti is most potent and dynamic.

¹ *Tirumantiram* by Tirumular: v.1708 "... and beyond the *adharas* (path) now proceed and ascend the *adhvas* with *prana* for support."

The yogi must not stop at *medha's* (*ajna*) centre, but should wake AUM and with *prana* as support, proceed beyond the *adharas* to ascend further the six steps, *adhavas*.

Lineage

IN the early years when Bhagavan stayed at Virupaksha cave, a Sastri from Sringeri Mutt came to him and said that he would initiate Bhagavan since it appeared he had not received *diksha* (initiation) from any recognised authority.

Bhagavan said: "He saw me, spoke to me for a long time, and before going to the town for meals, drew near me and with folded arms and great respect said, 'Swami! I have a request to make. Please hear me.' When I asked him what it was, he said, 'Swami, as you are born a Brahmin, should you not take *sanyasa* in the regular way? It is an ancient practice. You know all that. What is there for me to tell you? I am anxious to include you in the line of our Gurus. Hence, if you give me the permission, I will come here with all the requisite articles from my Mutt and give you the initiation..... You may think over this well and give me a reply. I am going down the hill to take my meals and will come back by 3 p.m. All the members of our Mutt have heard of your greatness and I have come here to see you at their request. Please do this favour.'

"A little while after he left, an old Brahmin came there with a bundle. His face appeared familiar. It could be seen from the outside

of the bundle that there were some books in it. As soon as he came, he placed the bundle opposite to me and like an old acquaintance said, 'Swami, I have just come. I have not had a bath. There is no one to look after this bundle. I am therefore leaving it with you.' So saying he left the place. As soon as he went away, why, I do not know, but I felt like opening that bundle and seeing the books. As soon as I opened it, I saw a Sanskrit book in Nagari characters with the title '*Arunachala Mahatmyam*'. I did not know before that the *Arunachala Mahatmyam* is in Sanskrit also. I was therefore surprised and as I opened the book I found the sloka describing the greatness of this place in the words of Iswara:

'Those who live within 24 miles of this place, i.e. this Arunachala Hill, will get My *Sayujyam*, i.e. absorption into Me, freed from all bonds, even if they do not take any *Diksha*. This is my order.'

'As soon as I saw that sloka, I felt I could give a fitting reply to that Sastri by quoting that sloka ...I showed this sloka to the Sastri as soon as he came in the evening. As he was a learned man, he did not say anything further but with great reverence and trepidity saluted me, went away and, it seems, reported everything to Narasimha Bharathi ... (who) felt very sorry for what his disciples had done, and told them to stop all further efforts in that direction.'¹

In the years that followed there have been many who claimed a special dispensation from Bhagavan and that they have received from him a special *diksha*, which gives them the right to claim lineage. We are on sticky ground here because Bhagavan does work in mysterious ways and he does directly instruct many of his devotees in silence and secret. In actuality each of us is privy to his knowledge and blessing without any intermediary if we are open and receptive to the teachings. Each of us legitimately can claim lineage from Bhagavan although he himself was not part of any succession but stood alone, and in that sense of linear continuity he neither received nor gave

¹ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, Suri Nagamma, No 66., *Acceptance of Diksha*, 13th January, 1949.

initiation. But that is not the point, because though we each have the right to receive his grace, it is entirely different when it comes to assuming authority to disseminate the teachings. It is here we need to be very clear and separate the claims of wannabe gurus from the genuine devotees who are grateful recipients of grace. There have been many senior devotees of Bhagavan who, in their own right, had both the ability and authority to teach in his name. Muruganar, Sadhu Natanananda and Kunju Swami are some of those who immediately spring to mind. None of them to my knowledge ever claimed pre-eminence and the prerogative to teach. They knew two things. One, there would be many who would bow to their superior knowledge and set them up as an independent source, but secondly, they also knew that to abrogate for themselves the privilege would run contrary to Bhagavan's mission or purpose. Not one of those who were genuine and close to Bhagavan took upon themselves the role of guru. They resisted the temptation, perhaps also aware of the danger of an inflation of the ego that is something to beware of when an ineligible person is treated as a guru. They did not see their own relatively higher knowledge compared to others around them, warranted any special claim. Moreover they knew Bhagavan is always with them so where was the necessity to claim a singular right? Especially if one really understood the teachings, who exactly are the others that one can teach?

It is said Bhagavan is a manifestation of Dakshinamurti, the aspect of Siva the peerless teacher who taught in silence. If we investigate the legends in the Puranas, we unearth the story of the four sons of Brahma who were dissatisfied with the breathtaking powers and onerous duties bestowed on them by their father Brahma, the Creator. They left their allotted tasks and went in search of a preceptor who could satisfy their hunger to understand. Eventually they came across Dakshinamurti, the supreme preceptor, at Arunachala. There he demonstrated the highest teachings in silence.

There is a metaphoric element of truth in myths which we can learn from. We are all sons of Brahma; we are all creating our own worlds and we are all generally dissatisfied. Whatever teachings we

imbibe there are invariably vital elements missing. Bhagavan said according to the capacity of the seeker, their vessel will be filled. What if our receptivity to understand is limitless? What if nothing apparently can satisfy us? We are bewildered and usually settle, reluctantly, for second best because there seems to be no alternative. What if we suddenly come across that which we know would satisfy us? Would we not pay whatever price necessary to fulfil the yearning?

Lineage in the ordinary sense of the word implies an organisation. It implies a giver and a receiver. Religions have lineages. Be it the Shankaracharya's of the various mutts established by Adi Sankara to sustain the *dharma*, the Pope in Rome, or the Tibetan Rimpoches. Bhagavan is not a religion; he is the spirit of the teachings. He does not represent them, he exemplifies them. In this respect Bhagavan is the lineage. He manifests the possibility of transmission of the teachings. He is the first and last. Bhagavan through his own life established the possibility that we too are eligible for enlightenment. He did not live in our physical world to maintain the formality of the *sanatana dharma*; he came to elucidate the teachings obscured by prejudice and selfishness by a unique deed of genius. He went right to the root of all thought. He showed us not only the possibility but also the certainty that we too can be free. He was then, when physically alive and now, continues to be accessible to all comers whose only qualification is the desire to understand. But really it is even more basic than that: to think of Bhagavan automatically entitles us to a relationship with him.²

The subtle penetrative influence of Bhagavan is that strong. He exists as a guru for his devotees. What attracts us to Bhagavan defines his function. He teaches exactly what we need in that moment according to our level. His function is to fulfil our needs. And then he takes us beyond. While we see ourselves separate from Bhagavan his external function is necessary.

² The traditional saying is: birth in Tiruvarur, to have *darshan* of Chidambaram, to die in Varanasi grants us liberation but to even think of Arunachala has the same efficacy.

“It is said that the guru can make his disciple realise the Self by transferring some of his power to him: is this true?

“Yes, the guru does not bring about Self-realisation, but simply removes the obstacles to it. The Self is always realised. So long as you seek Self-realisation the guru is necessary. Guru is the Self.”³

This is what lineage truly is all about. It is an *abhishekam*, an anointment into a new way of life. It is the cleansing of our propensities by the gift of discrimination so we can see that most of what we imagined or desired is worthless. It is a transmission. It is the gift of a key to unravel the maze of thought that obscures the light. We see if but for an instant, the full clarity of light independent of all our imaginings. We know for certain not by thought, which is intermediary, but by direct experience.

Bhagavan said at the end of his life when asked not to leave his body: “Where can I go?” That being the case it indicates to us in the strongest language possible that he is still very much with us. He said all along that he was not the body. Now it is up to us to verify it on the strength of his words, and if we have faith in Bhagavan, then what more do we need than the ability to listen plus our resilience and dependence upon this rock on which we build our lives? Since we each are recipients of Bhagavan's grace we are all in the lineage and *avatars* of our self. In this sense of the word there is lineage. When we qualify ourselves to be holders of the teachings, do we require a trumpet? Is not silence in the spirit of Bhagavan the obvious rejoinder?

If we are ignorant and in dire need of salvation where is Bhagavan? He is before us, he is behind us, and he is our very ‘I’. He is so close that we don't need to search for him. If we too are enlightened, who is Bhagavan and more crucially who are we? We can only be one with him. Where then is the necessity of lineage? ▲

³ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 282.



ONE OF THE LAST THREE PHOTOS TAKEN OF BHAGAVAN ON
4TH APRIL 1950, BY H. CARTIER-BRESSON.

The Maha Nirvana

CHRISTOPHER QUILKEY

MUCH was written at the time when Bhagavan left his physical body. People were devastated by a sense of bewilderment and loss. What is amazing is that now, over fifty years later, those of his devotees who are still around feel the bereavement as though it were yesterday. Time has not lessened their emotion, nor dulled the ache.

When I spoke to senior devotees and asked for their memories of that time, two salient points repeatedly emerged. Firstly, Bhagavan's unflinching courtesy to everyone on all occasions. Secondly, each person had a direct, intimate and apparently exclusive relationship with Bhagavan. Everyone describes his look of infinite tenderness and compassion that seemed to be directed personally at each individual.

Bhagavan had always stressed in his teaching that we are not the body. In the last year of his life devotees were caught in a conflict between an intellectual understanding of this principle, and the overwhelming wish that he would be cured and stay longer with them. In a way his physical death created the opportunity for people to discover anew their faith in Bhagavan; it forced them to come to terms with, and to accept his repeated statement that he is here. As he put it, "Where would I go?"

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A small growth was detected on Bhagavan's left arm in December of 1948. When the nodule increased in size, Bhagavan was advised to have it operated. At first he refused saying let things take their own course. The typically forthright Chadwick in his reminiscences was particularly incensed that Bhagavan's response was ignored and points out that we should always take heed of what the master says and follow his counsel implicitly. One of the characteristics Bhagavan constantly exhibited was that he generally gave practical advice only once. It was up to the devotee to be sensitive to what was said and act upon it. Bhagavan never pushed himself forward because he had too much respect to interfere if people did not listen and so he left them to decide for themselves what was right or wrong.

An operation was performed on 9th February 1949 to remove the growth. Though the wound healed the nodule soon reappeared and rapidly grew. Apparently the doctor had not removed all the infected tissue in the area. By the time of the Kumbabishekam of the Mathrubhuteswara Temple in mid March 1949, Bhagavan had already become quite weak due to bleeding and the accompanying anaemia.

On the 27th of March Bhagavan underwent a second operation headed by a Dr. Raghavachari and an expert team of surgeons from Madras. The entire growth was removed as well as some surrounding tissue to make sure all the affected area was sanitised. A sample was taken of the growth and subsequent tests revealed it to be a sarcoma, a type of cancer that is a malignant tumour of the connective tissue. The wound now would not heal and the doctors started radium treatment. In the meantime Bhagavan's physical health took a downward turn. There was one suggestion that a complete amputation would resolve the problem. Though he was generally compliant towards others and their proposals, for once Bhagavan refused point blank.

Bhagavan had said right at the beginning, prior to the very first operation that it would be best to leave things be and let events take their own course but the human mind always wants to meddle because we think we can control events. Many concerned devotees wanted to 'fix' the problem in any way possible.

In late April Bhagavan was subjected to radium treatment on several occasions and due to the continued loss of blood from the seeping wound, on the 30th April he received a blood transfusion of 300cc. The dressings were changed up to seven times a day. He was given frequent injections. As time went by Bhagavan became so weak from blood loss that on the 9th July he dropped down onto the floor when he tried to sit for lunch.

One of the many treatments which Bhagavan patiently submitted to was a herbal remedy that started on 18th July. The green paste actually aggravated the disease and sepsis set in. At some point during these months the failures to contain the spread of the tumour led to the spread of the cancer cells through the blood stream and lymphatic system. A third operation was then performed on 14th August after another team of doctors discussed the pros and cons in great detail. After the operation the wound healed but the malignancy re-appeared further up the arm in a more virulent form. During all this time Bhagavan gave no indication of pain or discomfort. Although when asked he admitted that "There is pain." He never said, "I have pain." Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami wrote: 'It was sad indeed to look at the suffering of his body. But the mystery was his attitude to it. He described all the pain and suffering as though the body belonged to someone else. The question arose whether he suffered or not. How could he describe the pain and suffering so accurately and locate it in the body and yet remain unaffected by it? "There is a severe intolerable headache", he said as he was going into a slow uraemia and his kidneys were failing. The Maharshi never described the symptoms in a subjective manner.'¹

The new growth spread rapidly and in desperation a fourth operation was performed on the 19th December. It was soon realised that surgery did not alleviate the sarcoma but on the contrary exacerbated it. Allopathic treatment was given up and homoeopathy tried. Bhagavan was detached from the whole

¹ T. N. Krishnaswami, *By An Eye-Witness*, p.36, *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir*, ed. A. Osborne 1967.

proceedings and even graciously let others try their medicinal skills. People remarked at the time that he allowed these diverse cures out of consideration for the various anxious practitioners. Although he knew when he would leave this world, he knew events would take their own course and yet here were all these sincere people frantic to alter the trend of destiny and keep his body alive. For all these years his devotees had heard from Bhagavan's lips that he was not the body and still they continued the hunt for a cure to what he knew was incurable.

In turn homoeopathy, ayurveda and siddha medicine were tried. None succeeded and all the while Bhagavan grew weaker because of the malignancy, and probably he was not helped by the strong treatments with their various restrictions such as diet which he endured to satisfy the longing of his devotees.

Suddenly in early April 1950 it became obvious to all that Bhagavan was dying. It happened as fast as though a ball had picked up speed on a downhill run. We cannot now imagine the grief and sense of helplessness which beset many. Those of us who were not privileged to see Bhagavan now find it difficult with the objectivity of years to put ourselves in the position of those for whom Bhagavan was the star and refuge. His physical presence was a source of never-ending joy and awe. It was a constant comfort to know he was there. That one could go to him with troubles or seek his advice whether verbally or silently. It was the warmth of his presence that people appreciated. It was imbued with love. Everyone who sat in the Hall loved him. T.N.Krishnaswamy the pragmatic doctor; Alan Chadwick the soldier; Framji the businessman; Arthur Osborne the detached intellectual; A. Bose the sophisticated and high-powered industrialist; they were no longer spending their time exploring Bhagavan's spiritual instructions, they were mostly, according to what they wrote at the time, swamped with overwhelming love for him. There was so much love in Bhagavan's face; it was a rare and special feeling which devotees had begun to take for granted but now the brutal realisation confronted them that his presence in the physical form would soon leave them.

As the end approached Bhagavan insisted on giving *darshan* even though he was almost too weak to sit up. People slowly filed past the couch where he sat, some silently adoring, moved beyond tears. Others again begged him to allow them to take the pain on themselves and ease his suffering. To all he gave the special look full of love and compassion. The Parsi devotee, Framji had joined the evening *darshan*. While he waited his turn he silently chanted prayers from the Avesta. When he finally stood before Bhagavan he was repeating the sloka: 'O rising sun I bow to Thee'. Bhagavan looked at Framji and said softly in English, "Framji, the sun is setting."

Many people have remarked how the last days of Bhagavan were exceptional because of the extraordinary radiance of grace he displayed. With the decline of the physical resources of the body it no longer acted as a screen between devotees and the powerful sun of Bhagavan's presence.

On the night of the 14th many realised the time was near at hand. Though the heat of summer was unusually high few registered the fact sufficiently to be physically discomforted. Aside from a small number who stood out for their composure, many behaved like somnambulists, so distracted were they from the everyday bounds of reality. Outside the large gathering of devotees spontaneously sang Arunachala Siva as they waited and watched the punkah swinging back and forth in the tiny room where Bhagavan lay. When he heard the hymn tears of joy came to his eyes.

'The Maharshi asked to be propped up in a sitting posture. He tried to assume a semi-Padmasan posture. His breathing was getting laboured and heavy. The attending doctor put the oxygen to his nose. Those around stood in sadness with bated breath. The Maharshi brushed aside the oxygen tube. There was a chorus of 'Arunachala Siva' from outside the room. The gathering stood dumfounded. Would death dare touch him? No, it is impossible. A miracle would happen.

'The atmosphere was tense with emotion, fear and expectation. There was some weeping. Very gently the Maharshi seemed to gasp a little and the body became still.... We could scarcely realise what had happened. He had left us once for all. No more the beatific

smile to greet us. No more the graceful form to adorn the Ashram. The Maharshi had deserted us!²

Another eye-witness, Lt. Col. Karamchandani, a medical officer, wrote, ‘The pulse disappeared and breathing became slow and easy, a very unusual feature at such a time and stage. The breathing became slower and slower till it completely stopped at thirteen to nine. The last breath was as easy and slow as any other previous breath. We were able to decide the last breath only from the fact that there were no breaths after.’³ Bhagavan had consciously left his body from one breath to the next. While his mind was alert to the end, his breathing ceased at 8.47pm. At that very moment a large light like a star or comet was seen trailing slowly across the sky above Arunachala. ‘H. Cartier-Bresson, the French photographer, who has been here for about a fortnight..., related an experience of his: “It is a most astonishing experience,” he said, ... “I saw a vividly luminous shooting star with a luminous tail, unlike any shooting star I had before seen, coming from the South, moving slowly across the sky and, reaching the top of Arunachala, disappeared behind it. Because of its singularity we all guessed its import and immediately looked at our watches — it was 8.47 — and then raced to the Ashram only to find that our premonition had been only too sadly true: the Master had passed into Mahanirvana at that very minute.’⁴ The comet was observed as far away as Madras and Bombay, and many people instantly knew what it portended.

They came by car, by bus, by train and any other way they could to attend the mahasamadhi of the *jivanmukta*. The state government arranged a special train and on the day an estimated 40,000 people attended the ceremonies. A remarkable figure for those days.

There was wailing as the fact brought home to people the realisation that Bhagavan was no more available to them in a

² T. N. Krishnaswami, *By An Eye-Witness*, p.36, *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir*, ed. A. Osborne 1967.

³ *The Silent Power*, p.145, 2002 ed.

⁴ *Guru Ramana*, p.144, 1998 ed., by S.S. Cohen.



physical form. Each was lost in their own grief. Rituals immediately commenced in preparation for the interment. One devotee who narrated the events as he saw them movingly said that whilst the body was still in the Mahanirvana room, “for the first and last time I touched the holy feet of Ramana Bhagavan.” Soon after the body was brought out of the room, taken to the Matrubhuteswara temple new hall and placed on a platform facing south. A cordon was placed around it so no-one could go near.

Arthur Osborne wrote: ‘One had expected the face to be rock-like in samadhi, but it was so pitiable, so marked by pain. Only gradually during the night the air of mysterious composure returned to it.’⁵

In the immediate after shock some people even felt a sort of resentment at Bhagavan’s physical death. How could he leave them like that? It was not a rational reaction and it faded with time, but there was anger in the beginning as there often is at the loss of a loved one who is irreplaceable. Dr. T. N. Krishnaswamy said: ‘To me it is a riddle beyond my understanding. This suffering wounded the hearts of thousands of Bhagavan’s devotees. Many of them would gladly have laid down their lives to relieve him.’⁶

The original idea of the sarvadhikari was for Bhagavan to be interred in a new temple facing south and whose entrance would be behind the large black granite couch on which Bhagavan gave *darshan* in the last year of his life. In the front portico area immediately facing the Mathrubutesawara Temple one would see both lingams from the one point. For whatever reason with the decline and demise of Bhagavan’s body, his younger brother, the sarvadhikari who was so identified with his elder brother, diminished in power and authority as the strain of events took their toll and proceedings in the ashram took their own course.

In the days leading to this dramatic moment there was a lot of confusion and some people even wanted to take Bhagavan’s body to be buried on the hill. However Bhagavan had clearly indicated to

⁵ *The Last Days & Maha-Nirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 22, 1991 ed.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.25.

K. K. Nambiar in a dream on the 2nd April exactly where the samadhi should be and on that fateful night a pit was dug in that precise spot, where it is today.⁷

It was the sarvadhikari’s son, the then T.N. Venkatraman who gradually took on the burdens of office and stood guard, so to speak, to protect Bhagavan’s body and his heritage from the wilder ideas circulating as to what would occur after Bhagavan’s mahasamadhi. He remained by the body until the final act of interment.

Work had already begun late that night on the rocky substratum adjacent to the temple. K. K. Nambiar and Vaidyanatha Stapathi who supervised the construction of the Mother’s temple, then measured the ground exactly and arrived at the suitable spot where the samadhi could be installed so that the interior width of any proposed structure would be equal to that of the adjoining temple.

As devotees sat by the body the sound of spades and crowbars thudded in the background under the glow of kerosene lamps. ‘The samadhi pit was dug 10½ x 10½ feet and seven feet deep. In its centre the masons isolated a small area of 4½ x 4½ feet and surrounded it by a wall built of granite stones, lime and cement. The remaining portion they filled with many cartloads of sand’.⁸

At the bottom a small platform in the shape of a triangle half an inch high was fashioned in cement. The point was directed north. The south wall of the pit would support the back of the body which when lowered into place would be facing north. So today when we look at Bhagavan’s samadhi from the east when the arati is performed, we actually are in line with his right profile. According to *agamia* injunction his head should be turned to the east, but devotees decided that the head should face Arunachala since Bhagavan is one with Arunachala.

In the meantime most people, awake the whole night, were numbed by the sheer inevitability of it all. The immediate turmoil had subsided and resignation and silent grief pervaded the atmosphere.

⁷ *The Guiding Presence of Sri Ramana*, p.67, 1997 ed.

⁸ *Guru Ramana* by S. S. Cohen, p.145, 1998 ed.

In the morning the rituals began in earnest. The body was brought outside in front of the southern entrance of the new hall. The body by tradition would return to the earth the same way it came, naked of all accoutrements. All cloth would be removed but for the sake of decency the lower extremities would have been covered with a fresh white piece. When the soul of a *jivanmukta* returns to the Self, the physical body is like a Shiva linga *stula* (the physical expression of a Shiva lingam) and as such is given due reverence. The body was anointed with a series of materials: oil, soap nut powder, turmeric, curd, honey, *panchamritam* (a mixture of bananas, honey, sugar-candy, ghee etc.), lemon, coconut water, sandal paste and finally *vibuti* (sacred ash). After each substance was applied to the body it was washed with copious draughts of water. Then finally the *vibuti* was smeared on and the flower decorations were placed around the neck. While all this happened there was the constant drone of sacred chants. Next was the offering of food, *naivedya*, and the burning of incense. Arati, the waving of camphor before the body and then the breaking of coconuts completed the 16 offerings (*upachara*). The sarvadhikari performed all the ceremonies.

In the meantime because of the hard, rocky ground the pit was finally completed only by the late afternoon. The bottom was lined with bilva leaves, salt and a little camphor. On top of the triangulated platform a large white cotton bag was placed with its sides slit open. Near sunset of the 15th, the body was taken in a palanquin around the Mathrubuteswara temple and brought to the pit. Two of Bhagavan's attendants, Subramania Swami and Vaikunta Vasar, were in the pit to receive the body which had already been placed in the bag. It was lowered onto the platform and the sides of cloth drawn up and filled with more camphor, bilva leaves and *vibuti*. Outside the bag, sand and broken brick were laid in equal measure up the sides. There was pandemonium at this moment as people threw camphor and *vibuti* into the pit in a final frantic act to honour Bhagavan. At a distance it looked like smoke rising from a fire. Subramania Swami eventually fainted due to the suffocating air. Order was restored, the swami revived and the pit filled with a final burst of



sand and *vibuti*. It was dark by the time the pit was closed with granite slabs. It was the last act in Bhagavan's *lila*. It closed the book on his earthly existence. It broke the hearts of many and would only be mended eventually by the remembrance and realisation that he lives on in all our hearts.

Three years later Bhagavan's younger brother, the sarvadhikari died as he struggled to maintain the ashram as a functioning place of worship and contemplation. It was left to his son to start with few resources the long journey of recovery. Against strong odds he kept the ashram alive and open for all who wanted to come and receive the blessings of our beloved Bhagavan.

Bhagavan after attaining jnana retained his human form for our benefit. He taught us with words and with silence; he taught us by his presence and by the manner of his death. Having accepted the bondage of a physical body he also accepted all its limitations. He suffered illness, excruciating pain and death. If he had avoided any of this by his powers, how could we have believed in his teaching? Could he say, 'I am not the body?' and then avoid the ailments and pain that the body is prone to? Would we not feel that he was using special powers that were not available to us, and so we need not truly respect his dictum?

It was out of love and compassion for us that Bhagavan endured the terrible ordeal of sickness and death from a particularly painful type of cancer. After his maha-nirvana many people left or rather fled because the pain of remembrance was too raw for endurance. Many staunch devotees left only to return a few years later when their initial shock had dissolved. The ashram for a time was all but deserted.

Slowly it has come back to life and now it flourishes again as a place of sanctuary for those who seek Bhagavan's help and guidance in dealing with life, either mundane or spiritual. It is also clear to almost everyone that Bhagavan is here as strongly as when he wore a body. Indeed he is everywhere when we need him. ▲

Misconceptions about Advaita

DAVID FRAWLEY

The Allure of the Direct Path

ADVAITA, which refers to the state of non-duality of the Self and God, can easily lend itself to all sorts of misconceptions. Indeed one can argue that since the Advaitic state transcends all thought and all dualities, all conceptions about it are ultimately misconceptions!

Advaitic practice is itself about the removal of misconceptions, particularly wrong ideas about our true nature, negating its false identification with the body and the external world. But misconceptions about the path can also be significant obstacles to overcome. Of course many of these same misconceptions can be found relative to any spiritual path, because all spiritual paths aim to take us to a higher state of consciousness, which can appeal to fantasy and escapism as well as to genuine aspiration. Yet as Advaita is the highest and most direct path this potential for distortion is even greater, like an ordinary climber's fantasy to scale the heights of Mount Everest.

David Frawley is well known for his numerous writings on the Vedas. He is recognised as a Vedacharya. He has been a student of Bhagavan's teachings since 1970. He lives at Santa Fe where he teaches at a Vedic Institute he founded.

Advaita is formless in nature and in practice, so there is much room for overestimating, if not exaggerating one's attainments, and little objective to keep one grounded. Going all the way back to the Upanishads there are criticisms of practitioners who can brilliantly talk the Advaitic line but lack the realisation to really back it up. Advaita, though referring to the Brahmic state beyond Maya, therefore, has its own glamour or Maya. The allure of a quick and direct path to becoming God and guru has a special appeal not only to the awakened soul but also to the unawakened ego that wants the glory of spiritual realisation without any real toil or tapas in order to get there.

However, these usual misconceptions are getting magnified as Advaita becomes popular in the West, which as a media dominated culture easily falls into stereotype, image production and fantasy-fulfillment. Just as Yoga has undergone many distortions in the West, which has reduced it largely to a physical asana practice, so too Advaita is often getting reduced to an instant enlightenment fad, to another system of personal empowerment or to another type of pop psychology.

An entire 'neo-Advaitic' movement has arisen reflecting not only traditional teachings but the demands of western culture. While this movement is arguably a good trend for the future and contains much that is positive in it, it is also a fertile ground for many distortions, which are likely to become more pronounced as the popular base of the movement expands.

The Advaitic path is also rooted in a powerful and simple logic, which is not difficult to learn. "You are That", "The Self is Everything", "All is One", and so on. We can easily confuse adapting this logic, which is not difficult, with the actual realisation of the state of awareness behind them, which is something else altogether. We can answer all questions with "Who is asking the question?", when it may be no more than a verbal exercise.

Faced with both old and new misconceptions, the Advaitic student today is in a difficult position to separate a genuine approach and real guidance from the bulk of superficial or misleading

teachings, however well-worded, popular or pleasant in appearance these may be.

Advaita and Vedanta

Advaita is primarily a term of Advaita Vedanta, the non-dualistic tradition of Vedanta. Though rooted in the Vedas, Upanishads and Gita, its most characteristic form occurs in the teachings of Shankaracharya, who put these Vedic teachings in a clear rational language that remains easily understandable to the present day. The basic language and logic of Shankara can be found behind most Advaitic teachings even today.

There are many specifically Advaitic texts from Shankara's Upanishadic commentaries to more general works like *Yoga Vasishtha*, *Avadhuta Gita*, *Ashtavakra Sambhita* and *Tripura Rahasya* as part of an enormous literature, not only in Sanskrit but in all the dialects in India.

Similarly, there have been many great gurus in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta throughout the centuries. Most of the great gurus of modern India have been Advaitins including Vivekananda, Rama Tirtha, Shivananda, Chandrashekharendra Saraswati of Kanchi, Ramana Maharshi and Anandamayi Ma. Most of the great gurus from India who brought Yoga to the West like Vivekananda, Yogananda, Satchitananda and Swami Rama, also taught Advaita Vedanta, if we really look at their teachings.

However, a recent trend has been to remove Advaita from Vedanta, as if it were a different or independent path, and not bring in the greater tradition of Vedanta. Though neo-Advaita usually bases itself on modern Advaita Vedantins like Ramana Maharshi or Nisargadatta, it usually leaves the Vedanta out of the term and neglects the teachings of other great modern Vedantins from Vivekananda to Dayananda, though their works are easily available in English and quite relevant to their practice.

This 'Advaita without Vedanta' is particularly strange because many important ideas found in the neo-Advaita movement, like that of a universal path of Self-knowledge, reflect the neo-Vedanta movement

that was popular in the early twentieth century following the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and have been echoed throughout the modern Vedanta movement.

Neo-Advaita and Ramana

The teachings of Ramana Maharshi are often the starting point for neo-Advaitic teachers, though other influences also exist in the movement. However, instead of looking into the background and full scope of Ramana's teachings, there is often a focus only on those of his teachings that seem to promise quick realisation for all.

Some neo-Advaitins even refer to Ramana's teachings as if Ramana was a rebel or outside of any tradition, as if he invented Advaita himself. While Ramana based his teaching on his own direct realisation, he frequently quoted from and recommended the reading of Advaitic texts, which he found represented the same teachings as those that arose from his own experience. This included not only the works of Shankara, the main traditional Advaitic teacher, but many other texts like *Yoga Vasishtha*, *Tripura Rahasya* and *Advaita Bodha Dipika*.

Ramana did broaden out the traditional Advaitic path from its medieval monastic Hindu forms. Yet even in this regard he was continuing a reformation since Vivekananda who created a practical Vedanta or practical Advaita and taught it to all sincere seekers, not just to monastics.

Many students come to neo-Advaitic teachers because of Ramana's influence, looking for another Ramana or for instruction into Ramana's teaching, but apart from Ramana's image used by the teacher, what they get may be something different. That someone may use the image of Ramana or quote from him, therefore, is no guarantee that their teaching is really the same.

Are There Prerequisites for Advaita?

One of the main areas of difference of opinion is relative to who can practise Advaita and to what degree? What are the prerequisites for Self-inquiry? Some people believe that Advaita has no prerequisites, but can be taken up by anyone, under any

circumstances, regardless of their background or life-style. After all, Advaita is just teaching us to rest in our true nature, which is always there for everyone. Why should that rest on any outer aids or requirements? This is a particularly appealing idea in the age of democracy, when all people are supposed to be equal.

In much of neo-Advaita, the idea of prerequisites on the part of the student or the teacher is not discussed. Speaking to general audiences in the West, some neo-Advaitic teachers give the impression that one can practice Advaita along with an affluent life-style and little modification of one's personal behavior. This is part of the trend of modern yogic teachings in the West that avoid any reference to asceticism or tapas as part of practice, which are not popular ideas in this materialistic age.

However, if we read traditional Advaitic texts, we get quite a different impression. The question of the aptitude or *adhikara* of the student is an important topic dealt with at the beginning of the teaching. The requirements can be quite stringent and daunting, if not downright discouraging. One should first renounce the world, practice *brahmacharya*, and gain proficiency in other yogas like Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Raja Yoga and so on (the *sadhana-chatushtya*). One can examine texts like the *Vedanta Sara* for a detailed prescription. While probably no one ever had all of these requirements before starting the practice of Self-inquiry, these at least do encourage humility, not only on the part of the student, but also on the part of the teacher who himself may not have all these requirements!

Ramana keeps the requirement for Advaita simple yet clear – a ripe mind, which is the essence of the whole thing, and encourages practice of the teaching without overestimating one's readiness for it. Yet a ripe mind is not as easy as it sounds either.

Ramana defines this ripe mind as profound detachment and deep discrimination, above all a powerful aspiration for liberation from the body and the cycle of rebirth – not a mere mental interest but an

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unshakeable conviction going to the very root of our thoughts and feelings.

A ripe, pure or sattvic mind implies that rajas and tamas, the qualities of passion and ignorance, have been cleared not only from the mind but also from the body, to which the mind is connected in Vedic thought. Such a pure or ripe mind was rare even in classical India. In the modern world, in which our life-style and culture is dominated by rajas and tamas, it is indeed quite rare and certainly not to be expected.

To arrive at it, a dharmic life-style is necessary. This is similar to the Yoga Sutra prescription of the yamas and niyamas as prerequisites for Yoga practice. In this regard, Ramana particularly emphasized a sattvic vegetarian diet as a great aid to practice.

The problem is that many people take Ramana's idea of a ripe mind superficially. It is not a prescription that anyone can approach or practice Advaita in any manner they like. Advaita does require considerable inner purity and self-discipline, developing which is an important aim of practice which should not be lightly set aside.

Is Advaita Against Other Yoga Practices?

A related misconception is that Advaita is against other spiritual and yogic practices like mantra, pranayama, puja and bhakti, which from its point of view are regarded as of little value and only serve to condition the mind further. Even a number of traditional Advaitic texts speak of setting all such other yogic practices aside as useless. Many neo-Advaitins emphasize such advanced teachings. They may tell even beginning students to give up all other practices and

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discourage them from doing mantras, pranayama or other yoga techniques. We could call this 'Advaita without Yoga'.

Traditional Advaita, which Ramana echoed, states that advanced aspirants who are truly ready for a dedicated path of Self-inquiry can discard other yogic practices if they are so inclined. But it also states that for gaining a ripe mind, developing proficiency in these preliminary practices is a good idea. Most people can benefit from at least some support practices, even if their main focus is Self-inquiry. Note the Ramana Gita in this regard.

If we study traditional Advaita, we find that Yoga practices were regarded as the main tools for developing the ripe mind necessary for Advaita to really work. Many great Advaitins taught Yoga as well. Even Shankara taught Tantric Yoga in his teachings like *Saundarya Lahiri* and composed great devotional hymns to all the main Hindu Gods and Goddesses. This tradition of Yoga-Vedanta – using Yoga to create a ripe or sattvic mind, and using Advaita for the higher realisation through it – has been the dominant approach in Vedanta found not only in the works of older gurus like Shankaracharya and Vidyaranya, but in modern gurus like Vivekananda, Shivananda and Yogananda.

Ramana, though he emphasized Self-inquiry, never rejected the value of other yogic practices. He commonly extolled such practices as chanting the name of God, chanting Om and doing pranayama. During his lifetime regular Vedic chanting and pujas were done at the ashram which continue today.

This traditional Advaitic view of different levels practice should not be confused with an approach that rejects all practices as useless. In this regard we can contrast traditional Advaita, which Ramana followed, and the teachings of J. Krishnamurti, which is often the source of neo-Advaita's rejection of support practices.

Advaitic aspirants may not be attracted to all such Yoga practices, but they should not therefore regard them as of no value or discourage others from doing them. Until the mind is fully ripe or sattvic, such practices have their value, though we should use them as a means to

Self-inquiry, not in exclusion of it. Advaita without Yoga, like Advaita without Vedanta often leaves the student without the proper tools to aid them along their sometimes long and difficult path.

The Advaitic Guru

Of course, the greatest possible distortions are relative to the Advaitic Guru. Since Advaita relies less on outer marks than other traditions, almost anyone can claim to be an Advaitic Guru, particularly once we have removed Advaita from any tradition of Vedanta or Yoga. In much of neo-Advaita, there is a rush to become gurus and give satsangs, even without much real study or practice. While certainly even a beginning student can teach the basics of Advaita for the benefit of others, to quickly set oneself up as a Self-realised guru raises a lot of questions. One can have an experience of the Self, while the full realisation may yet be far away. Full Self-realisation is neither easy nor common, under any circumstances.

Advaita does emphasize the advantage of instruction from a living Self-realised guru. Many people therefore think that they must have a living Self-realised guru or they can't practice Self-inquiry. This is not the case either. If one has access to genuine teachings, like those of Ramana, and follows them with humility and self-discipline, one can progress far on the path, which will lead them to further teachers and teachings as needed. On the other hand, in the rush to get a living Self-realised guru, students may get misled by those who claim Self-realisation but may not really have it.

A related misconception is that Advaitic realisation can only be gained as a direct transmission from a living teacher, as if Self-realisation depended upon a physical proximity to one who has it. Practice may get reduced to hanging out around the so-called guru and waiting for his glance! The presence of a real sadhak does indeed aid one's practice, but physical proximity to gurus is no substitute for one's own inner practice. And physical proximity to those who don't have true realisation may not bring much of benefit at all.

If Self-realisation were as easy as coming into physical proximity with the teacher, most of the thousands who visited Ramana would

have already become Self-realised. If the teaching had to come from a living guru only, then no teachings would be preserved after the guru died as these would no longer be relevant. So the realisation behind the guru and the depth of his teaching is more important than whether he is in a physical body or not. A great guru leaves teachings for many generations and his influence is not limited by the lifetime of his physical body. A lesser guru, on the other hand, does not have much real transformative influence even if we spend a lifetime around him.

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In addition, true Advaitic gurus are not always easy to find, nor do they always make themselves prominent in the external world. Like Ramana, many great gurus are quiet, silent and withdrawn. We find them by karmic affinity from our own practice, not by external searching or running after personalities.

Which Self is Being Examined?

Self-inquiry is an examination into our true nature, which is pure consciousness beyond body and mind. This is a very different process from psychological analysis, which is an inquiry into our personal, historical, ego-based individuality. Our true Self is our universal being, a consciousness present not only in humans but in animals, plants, the very Earth on which we live, the atmosphere, stars and planes of existence beyond the physical.

Another misconception in modern Advaita is turning Self-inquiry into an examination of the personal self, our fears and desires, and trying to make us feel better about it. Neo-Advaita in particular gets mixed up with western psychology and can get caught in examining the mind rather than going beyond the mind. Advaita is not about psychological happiness but about negating our psychology.

Finding One's Own Path

The spiritual path is different for every individual. A true teacher teaches each student differently according to their unique nature. They will not necessarily teach Advaita to everyone, at all times or in the same manner. If we look at great gurus, their disciples are not simply imitations of them, but retain their own individuality. Note Ramana's main disciples Muruganar and Ganapati Muni in this regard.

The West has a tendency to standardise, stereotype, mass-produce and even franchise teachings. The neo-Advaita movement, like the western Yoga movement, is affected by this cultural compulsion as well, and often gives the same teachings en masse. True Advaita is not a teaching that can be given uniformly to people of all temperaments. It is often best pursued in solitude, silence and retreat and can never become a thing of the marketplace.

Certainly Advaita Vedanta is bound to continue as an important influence in not only individual sadhana but also in world thought. But it has many depths and subtleties that require great concentration and dedication in order to understand. ▲

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma's
Commentary

verse two

S. RAM MOHAN

“ALL the creeds begin with the three entities (namely the world, the Creator and the individual soul). The two opposing doctrines (which those creeds expound), namely that One Original Cause appears as (these) three, and that these three are ever three, are held only so long as the ego survives. But the Highest is the Egoless State, which is the Natural State (of the Self).”

Commentary

All the diverse religions at the outset mention these three, namely the world, the Creator and the individual soul. The religions differ from one another in their answers to the question: are these three distinct entities, or are they in reality all one? There are in practice only two dogmas that are prevalent: one is that all three are only appearances of one reality; the other is that each of the three is an eternally distinct entity. Now the fact revealed here is that, whichever of these two dogmas one may entertain, one does so only so

long as one has the ego-sense, whereby one identifies oneself with one's body; the fact that one asserts one of these doctrines is itself a proof that his ego has not been extinguished. One can become a dogmatist only if one is subject to the ego. It is plain that one who is a slave to the ego-sense has *not* experienced the true state of himself as the real Self. Moreover, so long as one has not gained that experience, one is incapable of knowing the origin and truth of these three. Only in the egoless state, says Sri Bhagavan, will the actual truth of all things become known. So long as the ego-sense survives, all knowledge is only ignorance. The egoless state is the state of true consciousness, or clarity, which is beyond *maya*. Therefore, irrespective of whatever religious sect one may belong, that is, whether one is a non-dualist (*advaiti*) or a dualist (*dvaiti*), the belief one has as a religious person or a philosopher is not true knowledge – that is, knowledge based on experience of the truth. Such knowledge as one has attained, whether from books or teachers is only theoretical, intellectual knowledge, not the mature wisdom born of experience. This intellectual knowledge is technically called indirect knowledge (*paroksha jnana*) as opposed to *aparoksha*¹ experiential knowledge of *atman* (Self) which being 'eternal existence' is a direct supra-sensual knowledge not revealed through the senses but straight from the source.

But in the context of the subject-matter of this revelation, which is the real Self, who is the *brahman* (the ultimate reality), the expression 'indirect knowledge' is totally inappropriate; these two words contradict each other, and joined together they give no meaningful sense. The reason for this is as follows: indirect or inferential knowledge has for its object some absent thing which cannot be directly perceived. For instance everyone knows that he exists (he is) and this

¹ *Paroksha*: That which is not directly cognised through senses (i.e., through books etc., which is called verbal authority as opposed to sensory perception). *Aparoksha*: Negative of the above, i.e., neither through senses nor through books. It is instinctive direct knowledge which comes from the highest source of all Knowledge.

knowledge has not come through any conditioning of the mind or through senses. This is a case of direct knowledge or immediate (without a medium) knowledge. With the contrary, the knowledge of a pot existing before us is through the senses. It is perceived through the eyes and linked in the brain with the image of a pot impressed on the memory by previous experience. This is indirect knowledge. Now while objects of the world can be either absent or present, the real Self is never absent; He is always *present*, and hence, in respect of Him, only direct knowledge is possible. Hence inferential knowledge, or book-knowledge, of the real Self – and of the *brahman*, because it is that Self – is not real knowledge at all, but ignorance, and it has none of the blessed effects of the right awareness.

The essence of Sri Bhagavan's teaching as given here is this: right knowledge of the duality-free (*advaita*) Self is nothing other than the genuine experience of the truth of the Self in the supreme state, the natural state (also called the egoless state). The word *matam* (religion) means belief or creed and is literally a state or thought of the mind (*mati*) in respect of a subject. Knowledge of the substance of other religions can be mental or intellectual. The duality-free (*advaita*) state cannot be so; it is not within the scope of the mind or intellect, because that state is the mindless state; it is in that state of 'no-mind' that the truth of the *brahman* is revealed. Since the ego and the mind die together as one, there is no right awareness while there is the ego; it dawns only on the death of the ego; and this is the fundamental teaching of Sri Bhagavan.

Someone once brought to Sri Bhagavan a weighty book which expounded the creed of a religious sect. Sri Bhagavan just turned the pages, reading a little here and there, and then told this commentator: "In this book there is condemnation of all religions (beliefs) except the author's own. And every one of these creeds is first described in a style of apparent appreciation, and then it is criticized and condemned. But while thus seemingly expressing 'approval', the author does not set forth each religion faithfully and accurately, but an error has been deliberately introduced into it, so as to facilitate the condemnation that is to follow. But all this controversy is

vain. All religions are unanimous in stating that the supreme state will dawn by itself if the aspirant gets rid of his 'I'-ness and 'mine'-ness, which are the main mental impurities. There is no disagreement on this point. Therefore the followers of all religions should endeavour to become free of these, an endeavour which is agreed upon by all as proper and necessary. Why then should any controversy arise about the nature of the state to be won by such endeavour, while the religious adherents still remain in the state of imperfection? Is it necessary to decide any question about that state now, when one has no first-hand knowledge of it? Such questions may wait till that state is won."¹

Here it has been declared by Sri Bhagavan that to remain in one's nature, having lost the individuality is the highest state and there is no other state equal to it, nor any that excels it. ▲

¹ We are unable to locate the reference in Ramana literature and presume the quote is taken directly from Lakshmana Sharma's personal notebooks — *Editor*.

KEYWORD

ATMA-NISHTA

Sanskrit:

Atma : Self. *Nishta* : abidance. *Atma-nishta* : Self abidance. *Atma-nishta* is to abide in the Self, the unconditioned awareness.

When our consciousness rises from sleep we identify with our body which is conditioned by the feeling 'I am this body-mind'. This rising consciousness, ego or self, is a conditioned consciousness. There is a sense of duality, that is, the subject - object relationship. We perceive things, beings and events in the world of time and

space. In the dream state the consciousness or ego operates in the same way except there is no memory to connect the experiences together into an entity we call 'I'. Everything happens in the moment. There is no past or future. In deep sleep the so-called self subsides. There is no body, mind, world or time and space. Yet we exist and therefore we know that there is nothing to be known. This is our unconditioned awareness, being-consciousness, the Self.

In the waking state thoughts obliterate the sense of 'I' while the sleeping self does not subside with full awareness and therefore Self-radiance is shrouded as it were.

Bhagavan gives us the instructions and clues as to how to make our self subside with awareness by Self-enquiry or self-surrender. When this happens it is called Self-abidance, *atma-nishta*. Since there is full awareness, this Self-abidance cannot be called sleep. It cannot be called waking either since thoughts are absent in this state of Self-abidance. Therefore it is called waking-sleep or *jagrat-sushupti*.

In the waking state the periods when the waves of thoughts subside if only for a moment is a clue, an opening to that thought free-state of pure awareness towards which we aspire. Bhagavan says we should keep the attention of the mind fixed on the sense of 'I' and by remaining in this state of Self-abidance, it is surrender. Both jnana and bhakti merge in this one process of being. Attending to Self is nothing but abiding as Self. It is not doing but being. That is, it is not a mental activity but our natural state of existence.

Bhagavan's words are descriptions, *lakshana*, through which He is trying to indicate to us something which is beyond description. We should keep in mind that description is not the described, *lakshya*. Intellectual analysis of Bhagavan's words do not give us the necessary understanding. But if we understand His instructions we should take note of the clues, and with experiment and experience, the true understanding dawns when we abide in a state of Self-abidance, *atma-nishta*. ▲



Memories and Reflections on Sri Bhagavan

K. V. RAMANAN

Realise from wherever you are

MY father, who was a lecturer in the University at Madurai, would travel the long distance frequently to Sri Ramanasramam while Bhagavan was still in the body. On some such occasion he became acquainted with Sri Yogi Ramiah who resided at the ashram and was a steadfast devotee of Sri Bhagavan and a *brambhachari*. My father would visit various holy places with him while leaving our family in Madurai. On one such occasion we received the news that preparations were under way for giving him *upadesam* into *sannyasam*, and that he would leave the family life. Soon afterwards all of us, including father went to Sri Ramanasramam. Somebody broached the topic and my mother

K.V. Ramanan is a qualified accountant who has settled in Tiruvannamalai. He is the son of Sri N. R. Krishnamurti Iyer who was a close devotee of Bhagavan. Ramanan is a third generation member of his family to be a Ramana devotee.

immediately drew Sri Bhagavan's attention to the crisis and explained the situation. Father was called and advised that he can achieve his goal even while remaining in the family and in the midst of it all. Sri Bhagavan said, "It is not necessary to leave the world to attain jnana. You can do it here, as a householder." Sri Bhagavan was firm and clear in his response. Though categorical, he did not scold father but was neutral in his advice.

Sri Bhagavan usually did not comment on people or situations. When asked he would give a statement or an opinion but he would neither argue nor give advice unless specifically requested. In general he would simply state the facts. When he did make statements about affairs in the ashram he would say it once and leave it at that. It was up to others to be sensitive, pick up on what he said and act accordingly.

In Sri Bhagavan's presence there was only love. I never felt any fear in his presence. A devotee could always approach him. Everything was out in the open. No such thing as privacy existed for Bhagavan. His life was an open book from which all who cared to could read.

My father explained to me how Bhagavan responded to questions asked by devotees and visitors. He spoke about a *kannadi*, a glass, a mirror or veil that surrounded or separated Sri Bhagavan from the devotee. The thoughts of the devotees do not reach Sri Bhagavan. The 'replies' from Sri Bhagavan came from this *kannadi*. Sri Bhagavan was thought free and all the responses were automatic. The thought came and the answer was appropriate to the person, the level of understanding and the situation.

My father never told me who told him about this *kannadi*. He thought it was an important concept and often referred to it. He said there was a world screen before the jnani and that a fully realised soul, a *jivanmukta*, was always without thought. The replies came from the divine. There was no person as such who was an intermediary.

No difference between Mother and Sri Bhagavan

There were arguments going on whether a temple could be constructed on the shrine of the Mother. Sri Chinna Swamy was

adamant about constructing the temple but did not receive sufficient support. One night he was almost on the verge of dropping the idea but prayed to Sri Bhagavan for guidance. Next morning he received a money order from father with a letter which said, Sri Bhagavan had come in his dreams and asked him 'who is Mother?' My father said 'Sri Bhagavan is Mother and Mother is Sri Bhagavan'. Sri Bhagavan said that is correct. Later Sri Chinna Swamy told father that his was the first contribution for construction of the temple and on receipt of this and the letter he stood firm like a rock and started the construction with the strong conviction that the temple would be completed.

While the construction was going on Sri Bhagavan would go often to the site. He would visit as and when he found the time.

My father would say, "Anything you want, go and ask Mother." One day after a Sri Chakra puja, I felt myself talking to Sri Nandikeswar and asking him: "Why don't you give me enough money so I can keep quiet?" From inside the shrine itself, the old respected Sastri, who was an expert on the *Panchangam*, came out and without any preamble straight away asked me, "Why don't you read the *Kanakadhara Stotra* dedicated to Lakshmi?" I was not interested because "if money comes, jnana goes." Sastri replied that it need not be for me but for my family. I then started regularly to chant this sutra and from that time the funds have come to me for the well-being of my family and I have been free of that worry.

My father always felt that Alagammal was the Supreme Mother. It was this episode which convinced me that Mother fulfils the wishes of the individual who prays to her.

All should enjoy

There were hectic activities going on for the purchase of Sri Ramana Mandiram at Madurai and Sri Sundara Mandiram at Tiruchuli. Before embarking on the project Sri Chinna Swamy was a bit hesitant, as he would have to contact higher officials and needed support for this. Sri Bhagavan told Sri Chinna Swamy to take Thatha Renganatha Aiyar, a leading advocate of those days

and my grandfather who was also present in the ashram when he spoke to the officials. A group of people had come to Madurai specifically for this purpose and eventually stayed in our house for a few days. Then the whole hall in our house appeared like a *samsthanam*. Sri Chinna Swamy and my grandfather were very fond of *milagu* (pepper) rasam. Lots of salt would be put in the preparation and it should be very watery. This common liking drew them closer together. Sri Chinna Swamy would call it Panneer Rasam. Except Sri Chinna Swamy and my grandfather, nobody would take it because of excessive salt and water. Sri Chinna Swamy insisted that it should be served to all so that all can eat and enjoy it. To solve the problem my mother used to prepare separate rasams for the two groups and serve it without Sri Chinna Swamy knowing.

Though I mention this idiosyncrasy about the rasam of Sri Chinna Swamy, it was rare for him to express a will of his own. Whenever he stood before Bhagavan his arms were invariably folded in a posture of respect just as a servant stands before his master. He was like Nandikeswar who had the same respect for Lord Shiva and Subramania. Whenever Bhagavan chided him he would immediately do whatever was required. There are many stories about Sri Chinna Swamy's relationship to Sri Bhagavan both good and otherwise. Though he was in an enviable position by being Sri Bhagavan's right hand man it was also an uncomfortable job both because of the daily scrutiny by the inescapable eye of Sri Bhagavan and also because Sri Chinna Swamy had to take many unpleasant decisions for the good of the ashram. He did so in the firm conviction that Sri Bhagavan's grace was there to support him.

One of the most telling aspects about his relationship to Sri Bhagavan was the incident when he told newly-arrived people who came for Sri Bhagavan's *darshan* that they should be careful because Sri Bhagavan was no ordinary person; that he was fire. Sri Chinna Swamy lived and moved close to the great fire of Sri Bhagavan's jnana and knew what he was talking about. It was no joke constantly being close to that fire. It required great maturity.

Concentration is the main work

Concentration is the main work and other works are auxiliary and both can be performed simultaneously. Rather when one concentrates other works will go on automatically.

Sri Bhagavan once told father, when asked, that repetition of *nama* (Ram Ram) should be like *Thaila Dhara* (oil poured in a steady and un-intermittent way) and should continue nonstop. When father asked how he could take classes in the college if he went on repeating *nama* nonstop. Sri Bhagavan told him to go on concentrating and that would take care of the lectures. Father followed it and became a successful professor of high calibre.

Father spoke to me about the mind being like a Rodger's knife (surgeon's knife). This sort of knife by its nature and use, is extremely sharp and is treated with great care. In those days surgeon's knife would be kept in a special sheath. It was only taken out at the time of an operation. The mind should be applied only when the necessity arises.

My father instructed me to do what was told in the ashram and leave the rest to Bhagavan. He told me to go to the temple like a blinkered horse that sees straight ahead and nothing else. In any spiritual institution it is the same. The ashram is a place where people learn about themselves and it is not up to us to interfere.

Love for young children

When I was about 2-3 years old we had come to Sri Bhagavan's hall. Sri Bhagavan was sitting on his usual cot with tiger skin spread out, the tiger's head protruding in front. Mother wanted me to go near Sri Bhagavan and prostrate. I was unwilling and said there is a tiger. Sri Bhagavan laughed and said, "Touch and see; it is only a tiger's skin." I went near and touched the skin and head and chanced to touch the skin of Sri Bhagavan's hand. I prostrated before Sri Bhagavan and came back.

When I was 6 or 7 years old I had come to Tiruvannamalai and my aunt Smt. Alemelu insisted that we should stay in her house at Thalagiriar Street. Father used to go daily to the ashram in the morning and come back at night. One day my aunt's husband started to go to

the ashram. I wanted to accompany him, but he rejected the request telling that the ashram is far away and no transport is available and besides I could not walk that far. When I insisted, he asked why did I want to go to the ashram? I told him that I wanted to recite the slokas on Sri Bhagavan before him. He then acquiesced, carried me on his shoulders and dropped me in the Bhagavan's hall and told Sri Bhagavan immediately that I wanted to recite slokas on Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan said, "*Sollu, sollu*" (recite, recite). I recited two slokas "*ateeta guna jaalaaya*" from Ganapati Muni's *Chatvarimshat* and "*apaara sachit sukha vaariraashe*", the *dhyana* sloka (invocation) to the *ashtottaram* on Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan listened telling "*um, um*" (hum, hum).

Once my parents had come with my elder brother and elder sister (possibly at the time when I was a little child in the lap of my mother). My parents wanted to do giri pradakshina. The lady who was to look after my brother and sister dropped out at the last minute and my parents were in a fix and told the group with whom they were to go that they could not go and the group left. Sri Bhagavan asked my parents why they did not go and they expressed the problem. Sri Bhagavan said, "you walk fast and join the group. I WILL LOOK AFTER YOUR CHILDREN." He took my brother and sister to the kitchen and taught them how to cut vegetables.

On one occasion my elder brother asked Sri Bhagavan to give him a walking stick similar to one used by Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan asked him what would he do with it. He said, "I will place it in the pooja room and worship it". Sri Bhagavan immediately asked one of the attendants to bring one of the broken walking sticks. He took it and cut it to size, polished it and gave it to my brother.

Once we two brothers had seen somebody who was called Das and had a beautiful personality. Then my elder brother started telling everybody he saw that he was Sethurama Das. I kept him company and would say I was Venkataramana Das. Then we went to the ashram and my brother told Sri Bhagavan, "I am Sethurama Das". I then said "I am Venkataramana Das". Sri Bhagavan remarked "*athenna Dasu?*" (what is Dasu?). Next moment we two stopped adding Das after our name.

The lasting impression of Bhagavan was one of him smiling as people came into the old hall and greeted him. He smiled but otherwise kept quiet unless there was a specific question. I was too young at the time and I did not know what I felt. Now only I can say what I felt was PEACE. At that time I never felt anything. I did not notice nor question the atmosphere around Bhagavan. I took it all for granted. Only now do I realise the importance of all that I experienced in Sri Bhagavan's presence. I can now visualise and feel the atmosphere of peace that was present when Sri Bhagavan was in his body.

Purpose of Life

I used to wonder quite often what is the purpose of my life and why I came to Tiruvannamalai to set up my practice, even though my father kept a house for us to stay at Tirunagar, Madurai.

In my fourteenth year myself and two of my cousins had come to Sri Ramanasramam and happened to ask Sri Bhagavan for boons. One cousin said, "Sri Bhagavan, I want to see all the temples in Tamil Nadu". He later became HR & CE civil engineer visiting temples on duty with pomp and show. The other cousin said, "Sri Bhagavan I want to become an automobile engineer". He became a automobile engineer in Neyveli. I said, "Sri Bhagavan I want to be with you". In the year 1977 I was in the family pooja room of my official house in Disergarh. I sat in the presence of the Lord Arunachala Hill photo and the thought came: 'What is this Arunachala, can you not give this Rs.2,500 monthly in Tiruvannamalai and keep me in Tiruvannamalai?' Like a flash many things happened. I resigned my job, and came and settled permanently in Tiruvannamalai with my family. At first it was difficult but I never lost faith in the rightness of the decision.

OK. It is all right for this part of my coming to Tiruvannamalai. But what is the purpose of my life? Then it dawned on me. My grandfather assisted Sri Chinna Swamy in the purchase of Sundaram Mandiram at Tiurchuli and Ramana Mandiram at Madurai. Father came to Tiruvannamalai and stayed in our house. He then went to

Sri Ramanasramam and translated essential parts of the important *Ribhu Gita* into English. I became the auditor of the ashram. My son is also qualifying as a chartered accountant and will serve in the future as an auditor of the ashram. Our family's purpose for four generations has been to serve Sri Bhagavan and the ashram.

I have learnt what is my purpose and to do that and not interfere with anyone else in their life or affairs. We should practise kindness towards others.

My father would often try to teach me aspects of Sri Bhagavan's philosophy but my mind refused to take interest in it. I believed and still do, the one teaching father gave me which stuck and that is prostration. In my twentieth year this practice came into my life. *Saranagati* (surrender) is my sole practice. If I am happy I prostrate and surrender the happiness to Bhagavan. Similarly if I am miserable it is offered to Bhagavan. Both happiness and sorrow are thoughts to be surrendered if we are to be in peace, *ananda*.

Surrender to the feet of Sri Bhagavan is the key to salvation. For God will act for and through us. Like a pen there is ink in us and it is God who writes the script. Sri Bhagavan would say in Tamil "*Angaangirundu Aattuivippan.*" (The Ordanier controls the fate of souls in accordance with their destiny).

By practising *saranagati* I am free. Though due to certain circumstances in my life I have repeated certain mantras to help alleviate the situation but once the condition was past the mantra was forgotten. Only with surrender do I remain fixed on Sri Bhagavan.

My father would say that life is like a big fire with different tongues of flames coming out. Red, green — all kinds of colours arise according to circumstances. How can one say the fire would erupt only in one way? Likewise all come from the root fire and human beings are the tongues of fire. The base of the fire is *atman*. It is always there in everyone. All comes because of that fire. As long as you are that fire you need not bother what happens. ▲

'I' is a door

On the entrance presented in 20th-century Advaita

Part Two: Nisargadatta Maharaj

PHILIP RENARD

IN the first part of "I is a door" I described the striking phenomenon that in Advaita Vedanta the term 'I' is maintained to indicate even the higher levels of reality, the levels 'beyond the person'. By maintaining this consistency it assists the seeker to understand that the notion 'I', so obvious for experiencing the person per se, is in fact, *deeper* than the person temporarily presenting itself. This notion 'I' is already here now and always continuous. To be able to get in contact with That which you really are, nothing needs to be first eliminated or excluded. In the first part I examined the approach of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and this time I should like to pay attention to the way Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981) articulated this matter.

In my opinion Nisargadatta Maharaj was one of the greatest teachers of the twentieth century. What in particular makes him so great is his remarkable ability to show that everything that was asked of him is made up of concepts, and to annihilate these concepts by exposing their uselessness. Whatever question or response the visitor

or disciple came up with, Nisargadatta pointed out that it boiled down to clinging to patterns of thought or concepts and he referred to its origin, its seed. Everything, everything really was undermined as being a concept and consequently not true, and that included also something he had himself just said. As he emphasized, the only true thing is the conceptless.

Since he is not alive anymore, the only way to learn from him is by reading his books (apart from a few moments of *darshan* through some video fragments). And whilst reading, it becomes evident and in fact it can be called humorous, that he himself, the great underminer of concepts, is continuously offering concepts. He jumped from level to level, used numerous Sanskrit terms for a certain level, used the same or closely related terms for another level, and then had the whole matter dissolved in what he called 'the deep dark blue state of non-experience'.

Unfortunately this resulted in many seekers who have caught a glimpse already of who they really are, to continue their search, because of the message 'you are only the Absolute'. They assiduously claim that they 'know consciousness already' but they also express frustration that they have failed to take 'the next step'.

I dare to say here: there *is* no next step.

It is all about going to the limit of what can be experienced, and to remain still there. One should not be led astray by any comment on the Absolute and be lured to go in search of it.

But, as can be argued, Nisargadatta is making comments exactly on the Absolute all the time, and shows again and again that everything else is unreal! This surely is the impasse: to hear that we are That, and not be able to experience it, let alone search for it. That is the paradox Maharaj is presenting us with all the time. How are we supposed to deal with this paradox?

Maharaj himself answered this question – and that by offering a concept. One specific concept, which he indicated by using the term '*the knowledge I Am*', or '*I Am-ness*'. Earlier in this article Nisargadatta Maharaj was called 'great' especially because he fearlessly undermined each and every concept. But really he can be called so because in

turn he presented this one concept. He considered this concept, 'I Am-ness', as something to be *digested*, swallowed, dissolved. And so he described it as 'the ultimate medicine'. It's true he called it 'the disease itself' at least as often, or even 'itself a misery', but in the same respect he indicates in many places the *very* same concept is exactly the *medicine*, and is the indicator to freedom. So again we are facing here with a paradox: something being a disease yet in its essential nature it is the medicine itself.

There is a quote that holds the key to the entrance of this paradox. In my opinion it is the most beautiful quote there is, because the whole mystery of existence is described in a few sentences, including the handle to enter the mystery. Everything is in it, and all further texts of Maharaj can be interpreted from this perspective.

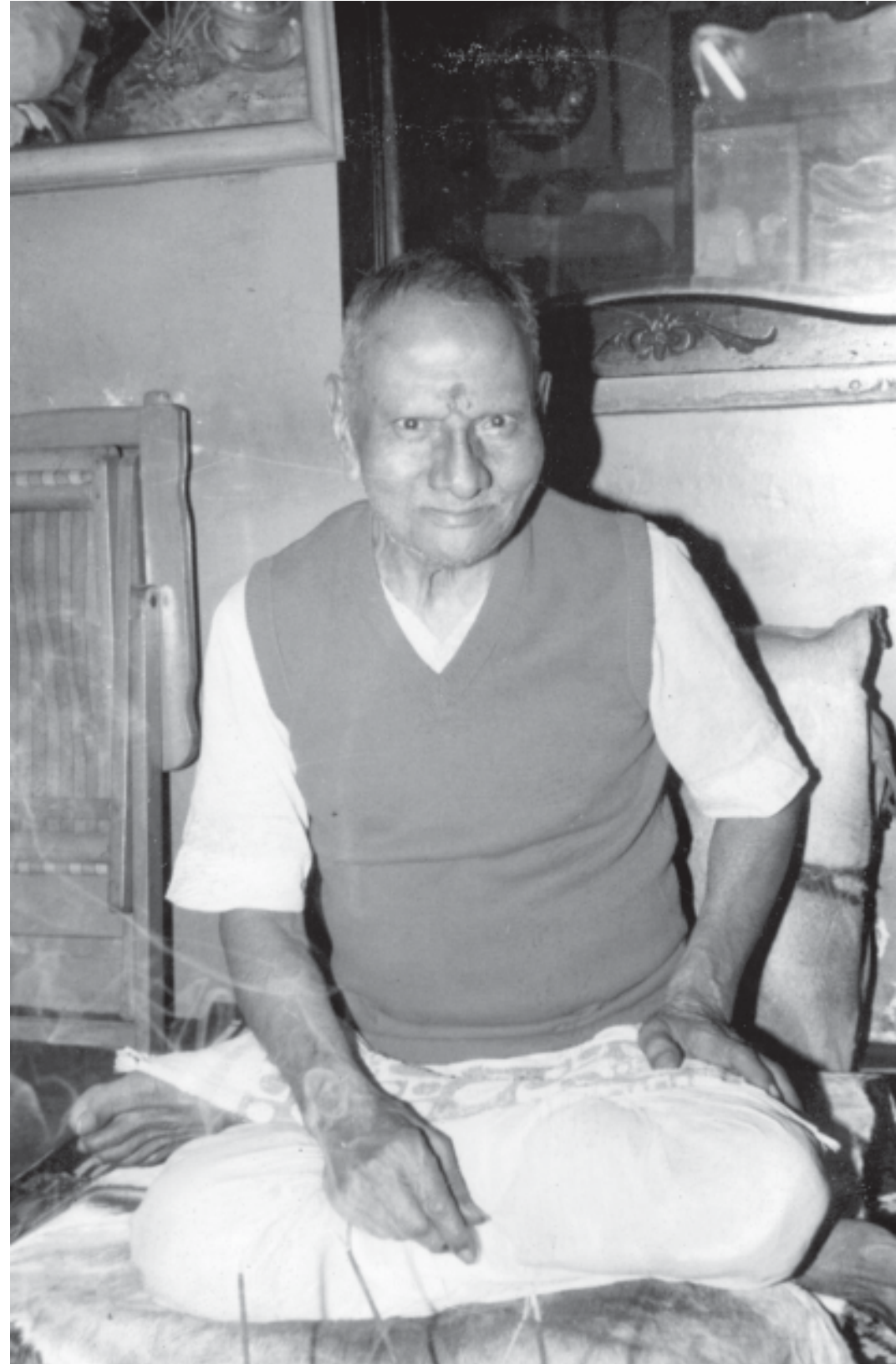
This touch of 'I Amness'
is in each being;
this beingness has
that touch of love
for the Absolute

"This touch of 'I Amness' is in each being; this beingness has that touch of love for the Absolute, and it is a representation of the Absolute. (...) Only the Absolute prevails. The truth is total Brahman (*Para Brahman*) only, nothing else but Brahman. In a total Brahman state the touch of beingness, 'I Am' started, and with that, separation started, otherness has come. But this 'I Amness' is not just a small principle; that itself is the *Mula-Maya*, the primary illusion. (...) The great *Maya* principle is making you do all her tricks, and you are also abiding in what she says, and finally, that light of yours, that beingness, gets extinguished. (...) That *Maya* is so powerful that it gets you completely wrapped up in it. *Maya* means 'I Am', 'I love to be'. It has no identity except love. That knowledge of 'I Am' is the greatest foe and the greatest friend. Although it might be your greatest enemy, if you propitiate it properly, it will turn around and lead you to the highest state."¹

¹ *Prior to Consciousness* (edited by Jean Dunn). Durham, NC: Acorn, 1985; p. 12-13. Capitals are added in *Maya* conform to the usage in other quotes.

The sense of 'I Am' is a universal principle, in exactly the same way present in each being, prior to the interpretation 'I am John' or 'I am Ann'; in other words, 'I am this person'. Nisargadatta (that is, his translators) used to indicate this sense of 'I Am' with the term 'consciousness' (*chetana*). It makes sense to linger over the meaning Nisargadatta ascribed to this term, just because he often called this consciousness illusory and because the term 'consciousness' has been used by other teachers to indicate exactly the Ultimate (indeed as the translation of the term *chit* instead of *chetana*; see for instance "I is a door, Part 1"). He supplied numerous synonyms for it like 'knowingness', 'Krishna state', 'child consciousness', 'seed', 'witness', 'God', 'being', 'beingness', '*sattva*', 'the chemical', '*Saguna Brahman*', 'the manifest', 'the supreme principle': they all come down to the same. It is about a *touch*. Without any reason, something arises spontaneously, within something that is no experience, no knowledge, no form, not 'a thing' whatsoever. Only when you notice it, you can say 'something arises', not before. So manifestation and the noticing of it are one and the same. This is called the 'touch'. It is this very first vibration, this most subtle form of touch which Nisargadatta called 'consciousness', the principle 'I Am'.

The crucial element of this quote is to be found in the last paragraph: "The knowledge of 'I Am' is the greatest foe and the greatest friend." It includes everything – and consequently you can be left here with an overwhelming feeling of disorientation. Very often this disorientation is only reinforced in other passages, by the emphasis on the illusory element ('the greatest enemy'), because that which indeed is real, the Absolute, is described as 'something that can not be experienced'. However here it is most strongly said that indeed you would do well to fully worship it, *although it might be your greatest enemy*. So whether illusion or not, at this moment it does not matter at all, because ultimately it is only God, the ever creating principle that brings about *everything*. It is true this means that you can be seduced to cling to a form, but also by the same token you can be *liberated* from this clinging by the same principle.



In one of the Purana's, the 'old books' of Hinduism, we find a passage that bears resemblance to the quote. "She, when pleased, becomes propitious and the cause of the freedom of man."² It is all about worshipping this principle as totally as possible, to pay attention to it, to please it. The sense of 'you are' is so common, so ordinary, that you overlook it easily and hence Nisargadatta strongly emphasises not to do so, but on the contrary to fully honour precisely this: to *worship* it as the highest God. He keeps hammering at it

The sense of 'you are'
is so common,
so ordinary,
that you overlook it

uninterruptedly to keep quiet here and to devote yourself fully to this consciousness, to this touch.

"Worship *atman* ('you are') as the God; there is nothing else. You worship that principle only; nothing else needs to be done. This very

knowledge 'you are' will lead to the highest, to the Ultimate. This 'you are' is there so long as the vital breath is present. And when you worship that 'you are' as the manifest Brahman (*Saguna Brahman*) only, you reach immortality. (...) You must continually remember, 'chew the cud'. (...) You must continually think about it."³

We wonder what exactly may be 'worship', because the rise of a verbal prayer is associated with this word. In fact worship is 'paying attention continuously to something with your whole heart'. The best example of this in the world is being in love. If you are in love, your attention is totally going towards your beloved, whether you 'want' to do so or not. You are full of it and everything that is going in the direction of the beloved occurs effortlessly. This you may call worship. So now we are invited to practice this worship, this being in love in regard to our ordinary consciousness itself, to formless

² *Chandi* (= *Devi-mahatmya*; this is part of the *Markandeya Purana*), I.57; also IV.9. Quoted by Vivekananda: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986 (10th ed.); p. 216.

³ *The Experience of Nothingness* (edited by Robert Powell). San Diego, CA: Blue Dove, 1996; p. 51-52. (A Dutch translation of this book had been published in 1981).

experience as such, 'the touch of beingness', 'the feeling of beingness'. How are we supposed to put this worship into practice?

It means that you totally *merge* with this beingness, with this primal vibration. Take all of your passion to this unlocatable 'place', encourage this vibration, and do not be worried about the fact that this is still a form of duality, a form of energy or 'corporality'. Worship Her, cheer Her, do not hold back anything, give yourself totally to Her, so that you may melt with Her. Then She shows you, within the merging, that 'two' ceases to exist. She being an enemy can only be the case if you let yourself be carried along by Her temptation. "The very source of all happiness is your beingness; be there. If you get involved with the flow of *Maya* there will be misery. (...) Be still in your beingness."⁴

It is here Nisargadatta points out how in the 'supreme principle', the 'I am' principle, the liberating element can be distinguished from the seducing, binding element. Sometimes I compare this with a fountain in a pond. The 'I Am' principle is the mouth of the fountain. At that point the water is powerfully spouting up high, causing thousands of drops being shaped to form together what is called a 'fountain'. The fountain's mouth has hardly taken form yet; there is only the experience of the propelling-force to *be*, the drive towards form. Then the advice is: stay at the fountain's mouth, abide there, and surrender to its formless vibration. Do not try in any way to manipulate the force itself. "What natural processes can you stop? Everything is spontaneous. Presently you are in the consciousness, which is stirring, vibrant. Don't think you are something separate from this stirring, vibrant consciousness."⁵ By staying at the fountain's mouth, worshipping That which is giving all this unfoldment, you are set free.

"The devotee with his firm determination and God by his fascination for devotion are attracted towards each other, and the

⁴ *Prior to Consciousness*; p. 21.

⁵ *Consciousness and the Absolute* (edited by Jean Dunn). Durham, NC: Acorn, 1994; p. 78.

moment they come face to face they merge, the one into the other. The devotee loses his phenomenal consciousness automatically, and when it returns, he finds that he has lost his identity – lost into that of God which cannot be separated again;⁶ and “I am the God, I am the devotee, and I am worshipping; all the same, one common principle.”⁷

God’s character of *Maya*, Seducer, fades away as soon as you understand that you need not let yourself be carried away by Her to Her forms of creation. You just have to notice *What* is seeing Her. “Meditate on that which *knows* you are sitting here. Your feeling that your body is here is identification with the body, but that which knows that this body is sitting here is the expression of the Absolute.”⁸

The liberating character of the ‘I Am’ principle is present as much in the knowing aspect as in the aspect of surrender. At this point the approaches of *jñāna* (knowingness, understanding) and *bhakti* (devotion) are blending totally into one another. Sometimes this means that surrender shows discrimination is no longer necessary, and sometimes this means that understanding prevents you from making the error that your surrender is submission to manifestation itself, to the transient forms themselves. Surrender is right only when it is surrender to *That* which is permanent. “First, I have seduced *Maya*, and once the *Maya* surrendered to me, I had no other use for *Maya* so I threw her out.”⁹

Noticing, for instance, the body sitting here could be called ‘knowingness’. This knowingness is in fact Knowing *as such*, and

⁶ *Self-knowledge and Self-realisation* (Adaptation of the book *Atmajnana Ani Paramatma Yoga*). Translated by V.M. Kulkarni. Bombay: Ram Narayan Chauhan, 1963; p. 35.

⁷ *Prior to Consciousness*; p. 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁹ *The Experience of Nothingness*; p. 86.

this is the liberating element, because knowingness is literally the *expression* of the Absolute, as said before in a quote (see note 8). Absolute Consciousness or Knowing¹⁰ expresses itself as ‘knowing *something*’. So ‘consciousness’ and ‘the Absolute’ are not two different things, as is often imagined on the basis of many of Nisargadatta’s statements. There is only one Consciousness (or Awareness; it depends on the language-framework of the speaker or translator which term is considered ‘right’). It has an Absolute aspect and a dynamic, living, experiencing aspect, the ‘touch’. The only thing needed to see is that a certain vibration is always the *knowing* of that vibration, and that the knowing *itself* is Absolute Knowing; that there is not any separation in there. Within the Absolute there is just nothing to Know, hence Nisargadatta calls this the ‘state of no-knowingness’, or ‘no-mind’, the state in which attention is dissolved in itself.

Surrender is right
only when it is
surrender to *That*
which is permanent

“There is only one state, not two. When the ‘I Amness’ is there, in that consciousness you will have many experiences, but the ‘I Am’ and the Absolute are not two. In the Absolute the ‘I Amness’ comes, and then the experience takes place.”¹¹

One could say that ‘letting you be carried away by the Seducer’ comes down to giving credence to the power of your past, to the

¹⁰ In the English language it is very hard to find a word for this Knowing-as-such, this Knowing in which ‘no thing’ is known. The term ‘Knowledge’ seems always to remain associated with a content, so a better term for this Knowing-as-such in fact could be ‘No-knowledge’. The paradox is, this No-knowledge state or No-beingness state does ‘know’. In the language of (one of the translators of) Nisargadatta: “The no-beingness state, the no-consciousness state alone knows that there is a consciousness.” (*Seeds of Consciousness*; ed. by Jean Dunn; New York: Grove Press, 1982; p.27). See also the discussion on terminology in *The Experience of Nothingness*, p.18-21. Nisargadatta argues there that the point is the word ‘Knowledge’ does bring in the qualities (*gunas*).

¹¹ *Prior to Consciousness*; p. 42.

power of the tendencies, the *vasana*'s, instead of remaining in the here and now so you don't go beyond the 'present touch', the 'present form'. The binding aspect of the 'I Am' principle consists in the creation of a personal history, the creation of a 'subtle body', an 'I' figure, a form that has to persist. The binding force itself could be called the 'causal body' which is the storehouse of the latent tendencies and the primordial beginning of individuality, of a *jiva*.¹² The 'causal body' is a definition for the principle in us which causes *now* the creation of a form, and which seduces us to maintain and consolidate this form. It seduces us into not recognizing this form as 'mere present form of Consciousness', as something which dies immediately afterwards and is replaced again by another form. So this is what is meant by the term 'causal'. The causal body brings about your losing sight of the fact that you are always new, unborn, now, now, now. And this 'bringing about' occurs through the latent tendencies, which make you cling to the manifestations as soon as they are there, so that the form can continue to exist. Owing to its veiling and binding character, the causal body has in the Advaita tradition been equated with 'ignorance' (*ajnana*; also *avidya*).

Being strongly influenced in his linguistic usage by the Samkhya tradition, an ancient Indian school of Dualism, Nisargadatta sometimes explained this process of becoming bound using the terms *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, borrowed from Samkhya. These are the three *gunas*, the qualities determining and colouring all our actions (*rajas* is the exciting, the restless, that which incites to activity; *tamas* the inert, the solidifying, obscuring; and *sattva* the quality keeping the balance, the quality of beingness, knowingness, and lucidity).

¹² The term 'causal body' that has been used in texts of the Advaita tradition (and also by Sri Ramana Maharshi, for instance in *Vichara Sangraham* and *Maharshi's Gospel*), points to the source of all forms, even in its most latent form. In the words of Sri Ramana: "The source is a point without dimensions. It expands as the cosmos on the one hand and as Infinite Bliss on the other. That point is the pivot. From it a single *vasana* starts, multiplies as the experiencer 'I', the experience, and the world." *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 616.

Nisargadatta described the transition proceeding from *sattva* as follows: "During the waking state, to know that you are (*sattva*) is itself a misery; but since you are preoccupied with so many other things, you are able to sustain that waking state. This quality of beingness (*sattva*), the knowledge 'I Am', cannot tolerate itself. It cannot stand itself, alone, just knowing itself. Therefore, that *rajas-guna* is there. It takes the beingness for a ride in various activities, so that it does not dwell only in itself; it is very difficult to sustain that state. And *tamas-guna* is the basest quality. What it is doing is that it provides one with the facility to claim authorship for all the activities – the feeling 'I am the doer'. *Rajas-guna* takes one into all the activities, and *tamas-guna* claims authorship or doership for those activities."¹³

One could say, that in fact the power of *rajas* originally is a rather free power, which in itself does not necessarily need to hook on to something. It is only the effect of *tamas* that makes things glue together. This quality causes us to be fixated, that we are attached to something, that we isolate ourselves, that we worry, etcetera. Because of *tamas* we come to stick a personal story, a history onto a spontaneous activity.

One could interpret Nisargadatta's advice as follows: you can not but allow *rajas* to arise, because it is inherent to the spontaneous creative power; but welcome her and keep on recognizing the starting point, the very first 'touch'. Nisargadatta called this touch also the 'pinprick'. That is *sattva*. That is also the term 'consciousness' as is used by Nisargadatta, the pinprick, 'the experiencing the touch'. That is what I called 'the mouth of the fountain': here you are witnessing as it were the marriage of *sattva* and *rajas*. Remain in stillness (*sattva*) in the splashing power (*rajas*).

By dedicating yourself to this, by honouring this pinprick, this 'consciousness', your search ceases to exist. Here you can let go of

¹³ *The Ultimate Medicine* (edited by Robert Powell). San Diego, CA: Blue Dove, 1994; p. 22.

the 'doing', of the attempt to let yourself pass beyond this consciousness because really that won't help. "You can never isolate yourself from the consciousness unless consciousness is pleased with you and gets rid of you. Consciousness opens the gate for you to transcend consciousness. There are two aspects: one is conceptual, dynamic consciousness which is full of concepts, and the other is transcendent consciousness. Even the concept 'I Am' is not there. Conceptual, qualitative Brahman (*Saguna Brahman*), the one that is full of concepts and is qualitative, is the outcome of the [reflection of Awareness (*Nirguna Brahman*) in the] functioning body."¹⁴

So although it originally is important and correct to distinguish between consciousness (*chetana*) and Consciousness (or Awareness; *Chit*), it makes sense at a certain moment just to embrace consciousness in its being 'the touch', so that all resistance melts away, and with it all duality. The touch is the Helper which anoints you in your and Her surrender; it shows you that you have always been unaffected and unimpaired, free and unseparated, without the need to strive for it. So on the one hand Maharaj emphasizes: "I, the Absolute, am not this 'I Amness',"¹⁵ but on the other hand: "Understand that this 'I' is not different at different levels. As the Absolute, it is the 'I' which in manifesting needs a form. The same Absolute 'I' becomes the manifested 'I', and in the manifested 'I' it is the consciousness, which is the source of everything. In the manifested state it is the Absolute-with-consciousness."¹⁶

It is striking that here, as in many other places, Maharaj keeps on using the word 'I' as a word for the Ultimate. Apart from calling

himself very often "I, the Absolute", he says for instance: "Nothing exists except me. Only I exist,"¹⁷ and "When the state of beingness is totally swallowed, whatever remains is that eternal 'I'."¹⁸

So 'I' appears to be the term for us on *all three* levels: the person thinks and feels 'I', the touch of beingness is the experience of 'I' without thinking (without 'mine'), and the Ultimate *is* 'I', without experiencing it. This means that the Real which we are, is always so already, and now already. Also, in the midst of identification with a certain form, there is the invitation to recognize the most nearby, namely 'I', in its essential nature.

Is 'I' a door? The Teacher answers: "There are no doors to Parabrahman, dear son."¹⁹

(Translated from Dutch by Johan Veldman) ▲

¹⁷ *The Ultimate Medicine*; p. 29.

¹⁸ *The Nectar of the Lord's Feet* (edited by Robert Powell). Longmead, Shaftesbury (Dorset): Element, 1987; p. 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁴ *Consciousness and the Absolute*; p. 97. The addition between brackets is made in order to accentuate the connection between consciousness and Awareness (or Consciousness). This is made on the basis of numerous comments in the old Advaita tradition, and on the basis of *I am That*, p. 65: "consciousness (*chetana*) appears by reflection of Awareness in matter". See also *I am That*; p. 274; and *Seeds of Consciousness*; p. 170.

¹⁵ *Prior to Consciousness*; p. 27, and many other places.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Dear Editor,

In the recent *The Mountain Path*, the article, 'Learning from Ramana', at first glance would seem a nicely presented reminder of the value of surrender and devotion in sadhana. There is indeed a great deal to be learned from Ramana; however, this article pursues a misleading perspective regarding the paths of Surrender and Self Inquiry and how they were taught by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

In Ms. Williams view, which she attributes not to Ramana but her own *satguru*, it seems what we are to learn from Ramana is based on the observation of how he lived, his remarkable life, and the examples he set rather than the whole body of his teachings. Has Ramana now become something to be observed rather than the beloved object of our devotion? Praising Ramana's love for Arunachala and holding this up to his devotees as an example of Surrender is a beautiful reminder of the perfection of Ramana but it does little to help us know how to find and cultivate this in ourselves.

Bhagavan's teachings were expressed to the many different people that came to him according to their needs and he spoke to them from that individual perspective. Many of Ms. Williams references from these talks seem to be taken out of context in an attempt to demonstrate that Bhagavan's real teaching was the path of surrender and that self-inquiry was suited as a method for only 'mature souls', surrender being for those less mature, or according to an unreferenced

quote, 'the best type'. The maturity of our souls and the judgment of who is the 'best type' is not a relevant part of what we should learn from Ramana. In *Upadesa Saram* we find several methods, given according to the ease or difficulty of inquiry and the recommendation of surrender as a means to purify the mind so that inquiry can begin. Ms. Williams suggests that surrender is enough, that only at a much later stage might we be able to use self-inquiry, and only then would it be effective, if at all, considering the fact that by that time, according to her we should be soundly sleeping!

We can agree that Ramana's life, with all its openness and transparency, is indeed a lesson to all of us. His love for Arunachala and for those around him serves as a wonderful example of a life lived perfectly. It is however a fact that this love as expressed by Bhagavan came after the inquiry that resulted in his realization of the Self. Ramana's experience through inquiry was the source of his ability to fully surrender, to love, to long for a final merging with the beloved, Arunachala. In Ramana's case, a boy with no spiritual inclinations used inquiry and surrender together to realize his true identity. This later manifested in the love and devotion we observe in his life.

Surrender is more than just picking a guru, saying 'I surrender' and going to sleep. There is no use being a 1st class passenger if the train we board has neither engine nor destination. To really surrender we must at least have some idea who is surrendering, why and to what. Without that, those that feel they can surrender and simply wait and sleep have missed the point of Ramana's teaching. Inquiry and Surrender go hand in hand. Each opens the door for the other. The devotee who practices inquiry cannot become self-realized or make much progress without surrendering his ego/mind. The devotee who follows the path of surrender and sleeps, does not inquire into his own nature, that of his guru or what surrender means, is like a child who does not become self-realized or even develop a pure mind though he loves and surrenders to his mother.

Although Grace is the ultimate bestower of all things, still, until we can fully realize That, we all bear the responsibility for our own lives. In today's world many gurus would like to be the objects of

our love but who can match our 'Master without rival', Sri Ramana. We need to use discrimination, inquiry and surrender, together, to find our way. Without these, what love truly means and what we really are will never be realized. At the end of the article we are asked to find our own Arunachala. Those who have been chosen by Ramana, those who have learned from him, already have, he is our Satguru, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

We are indebted to Him, the example he has set, his presence at Arunachala, the many satsangs with his devotees and the published works that have guided so many around the world. Let us truly 'learn from Ramana'.

- A. Samuel on e-mail

Dear Editor,

I would like to thank you for the article 'Sunk in the Ocean of Bliss - Learning from Ramana' by Alison Williams.

- Venkataprasad on e-mail

Dear Editor,

The article 'Learning from Ramana' left us wondering in amazement how such a distortion of Bhagavan's teaching would find its way to being published in *The Mountain Path*. One wonders about the source of Ms. Williams's ideas about Bhagavan's teachings, as they do not coincide with what we know and have read of our Sadguru, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

- C. Sando on e-mail

Dear Editor,

I wish to convey my appreciation for the simple and aesthetically designed new format of *The Mountain Path*. It would be informative if the details of subscription find a place in the magazine.

- K. S. Ramaswamy on e-mail

Due to technical problems with the postal authorities, we are not at present able to publish these essential details. We hope to rectify the problem shortly — Editor. ▲

Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam

verse four

SADHU OM

English Paraphrase

O shining Arunesa, having given up [attending to] external objects [second and third persons] and having meditated upon You [the real Self] in the heart with a mind which has become still by restraining the breath, the yogi will see the light [of Self-knowledge] and will attain greatness in You [by thus uniting with You, the embodiment of all greatness]. Know this.

Commentary

In order to understand this verse clearly and in the correct perspective, we should carefully examine all the points of similarity and difference between this and the previous verse.

Firstly, the principal thing which Sri Bhagavan prescribed in the previous verse was what was described by him as knowing clearly the form of 'I' by scrutinizing "where does this 'I' rise?" whereas the principal thing which he prescribes in this verse is what is described by him as "seeing the light by meditating up on you, O Arunesa". These two things are in fact one and the same. How? Let us first see how "seeing the light" is the same as "knowing clearly the form

of 'I'. What is the light which is to be seen? It is the light which Sri Bhagavan has been talking about in each of the previous three verses, namely the light of Self-consciousness, which shines as 'I, I'. Thus seeing this light which shines as 'I' is the same as clearly knowing the form of 'I'. The means he prescribed in the previous verse to see this light was scrutinizing the rising 'I' in order to know the source from which it had risen, whereas the means he prescribes in this verse is meditating upon Arunesa. What is that Arunesa which is thus to be meditated upon?

Some devotees, who have not pondered deeply over all the words in this verse, wrongly assume that Sri Bhagavan is referring here to meditation upon the name and form of Arunachala. However, though it is true that (as revealed by Sri Bhagavan in verse 9 of *Sri Arunachala Patikam*) the name and form of Arunachala has a wonderful power to suppress the mischievous mental activities of any soul who has thought of it even once, to draw that soul inwards to face the one Self, which is its reality, to make that soul motionless like itself, and thereby to feed upon that soul, in the present verse meditation upon the external name and form of Arunachala is not what is meant by Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan begins this verse by saying "*veli vidayam vittu vilangum arunesa*", which means "O Arunesa who shine, [the mind] having given up external objects". Therefore, since the name and form of Arunachala is an external object, it is not the *dhyana-lakshya* or object of meditation meant by Sri Bhagavan in this verse. Throughout *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam*, wherever Sri Bhagavan refers to Arunachala, he is referring to that which shines when all external objects have been given up. External objects mean all second and third person objects. That which shines when all second and third person objects have been given up is only the first person. But though we call it the first person, the 'I' which then shines is truly not a person but the impersonal reality of the false first person, the ego. Therefore the real Self, which shines as 'I', is alone the Arunesa who can shine in the absence of external objects. Thus meditating upon Arunesa, who ever shines self-luminously as 'I', is the same as scrutinizing "where does this 'I' rise?" Hence the

principal thing prescribed in this verse is no different from that which was prescribed in the previous verse.

Secondly, the instrument mentioned by Sri Bhagavan in the previous verse was "that pure mind which is facing Selfward", whereas the instrument mentioned by him in this verse is a "mind which has become still by restraining the breath". Here alone lies a significant difference between these two verses. Though the pure mind which is facing Selfward is a 'mind which has become still' (*nirkum manam*), a mind which has become still by restraining the breath is not necessarily a pure mind. For a pure mind, that is, for a mind which is free of worldly desires and attachments, likes and dislikes,

The pure mind
which is facing Selfward
is a 'mind
which has become still'

restraining the breath is unnecessary. By its clear power of discrimination the pure mind has already gained *vairagya* towards attending to external objects and *bhakti* to attend to Self. Hence for such a pure mind it is easy to give up external objects and turn Selfwards. Restraining the breath is prescribed as an aid only for those whose minds are impure. Since the impure mind is clouded and agitated by the density and strength of its worldly desires and attachments, likes and dislikes, it lacks the clear power of discrimination in the absence of which it has no *vairagya* towards attending to external objects and no *bhakti* to attend to Self. Hence, since such a mind has no strength of its own to give up external objects and to turn Selfwards, the *yoga-sastras* have prescribed *pranayama* as an artificial aid to help the mind give up attending to external objects. By restraining the breath, the mind is forcibly made to subside and become still, thereby giving up attending to external objects. "But so long as the *prana* remains subsided, the mind will also remain subsided, and when the *prana* comes out, the mind will also come out and wander under the sway of *vasanas*", says Sri Bhagavan in *Nan Yar?* That is, though the mind is forced to give up attending to external objects so long as the breath is re-

strained, the *vishaya vasanas* or seeds of desires to attend to external objects are not destroyed or weakened by the practice of *pranayama*, and hence as soon as the restraint on the breath is released, the mind again comes under the sway of its *vasanas* and resumes its habit of attending to external objects.

In order to purify the mind, that is, to weaken the strength of its *vishaya vasanas*, the only two means are Self-enquiry and *nishkamya bhakti*. For those whose minds were so impure that they lacked the strength to practise even a little Self-enquiry, Sri Bhagavan used to recommend only *nishkamya bhakti* as a means of purifying the mind. But there are some aspirants whose minds are so clouded with various impure *vasanas* that they feel no attraction to the path of *bhakti*. Only for such aspirants is the method of *pranayama* prescribed. But having practised a little *pranayama*, when they are able to still the mind to the extent of withdrawing it from attending to any external object, they should begin to make use of that calm, unagitated and one-pointed mind to attend to Self. If they do not thus try to attend to Self but continue to pursue still further their efforts of stilling the mind by *pranayama*, they will achieve only the dull state of *manolaya*, which will not in any way help them to weaken their *vasanas* and purify their mind. To illustrate the futility of such *manolaya* achieved by *pranayama* or other yogic practices, Sri Bhagavan used to tell the story of the yogi who was immersed in *manolaya* for hundreds of years on the banks of the Ganga and who asked for water as soon as he returned to body consciousness.

Though the aspirant who practises *pranayama* may be able to still his mind to the extent of withdrawing it entirely from attending to external objects, when he makes effort to turn his attention towards Self, he may at first experience difficulty due to the strength of his impure *vasanas*.

“Some *jivas* suffer, being often thrown back into the whirling stream of *samsara* by their *vasanas*, which are like mischievous boys, not allowing them to remain in the state of Self, which is the bank of the stream [of *samsara*].” – *Guruvachaka Kovai*, verse 115.



Impurity of the mind in the form of the strong *vasanas* of worldly desire and attachment is alone the cause which makes it appear difficult to cling firmly to Self-attention. But though the aspirant repeatedly fails in his attempts to attend to Self, his attempts are not in vain. Self-attention is the best of all means to purify the mind, and even a little effort made to turn the mind Selfwards will begin to enkindle in it a clarity of discrimination, by which it will gain increasing *vairagya* towards attending to external objects and *bhakti* to attend to Self. The more the mind gains such *vairagya* and *bhakti*, the more the dirt in the form of its impure *vasanas* will be washed away. As the mind thus becomes more and more purified, Self-attention will become easy, and the artificial aid of *pranayama* will become unnecessary. Thus only by the effort to attend to Self will the “mind which has become still by restraining the breath” be transformed into “that pure mind which is facing Selfward”. Only such a pure mind will be able to see the light of Self-knowledge by meditating upon Arunesa, who shines in the heart as ‘I’.

“Having meditated upon You, O Arunesa, the *yogi* will see the light”, says Sri Bhagavan. Here the *yogi* is one who, by giving up attending to external objects and by fixing his mind in Self, has united and become one with Self, the light of true knowledge. The real *yogi* is only he who has thus become one with Self, and not merely he who practises *pranayama* and other such gross yogic exercises.

Such a *yogi* alone “attains greatness in You”. What is meant here by attaining greatness in You? It means attaining greatness by merging in Self like a river merging in the ocean. Having thus merged in Self, the *yogi* has ceased to exist as a separate individual. “Your glory lies where you cease to exist”,¹ says Sri Bhagavan. How?

¹ *Maharshi's Gospel*, p.27, 13th ed., 2002.

Having ceased to exist as an individual, one remains as Self, which alone is truly worthy of being called great.

In this context there is another important meaning for the Tamil word *unnil* (in You) which is used here by Sri Bhagavan. Besides meaning ‘in You’, *unnil* can also mean ‘like You’ or ‘equal to You’. Using *unnil* in this sense is rare, but Sri Bhagavan is a master at handling such rare usages in Tamil. Thus the words “*unnil uyarvu urum*” mean not only ‘will attain greatness in You’ but also ‘will attain greatness like You’ or ‘will attain greatness equal to You’. In other words, that *yogi* will become You.

Now if we compare this verse with verse 14 of *Upadesa Undiyar*, it will be clear that the central idea of both these verses is the same. In verse 14 of *Upadesa Undiyar* Sri Bhagavan sings:

“If one makes the mind, which has subsided by restraining the breath, go on the *or vazhi*, its form will die.”

The words ‘*or vazhi*’ mean ‘the one path’, ‘the path of knowing’ and ‘the path of becoming one’, and hence they refer to the path of Self-enquiry, which is the one path of knowing and uniting with Self. Thus the “sending the mind on the *or vazhi*” prescribed in that verse is the same as the “meditating upon You” prescribed in this verse. When the mind is thus sent on the path of attending to Self, its form will die, and the pure light of Self-consciousness alone will remain shining. Thus from these two verses it is clear that Sri Bhagavan’s verdict regarding the practice of breath-restraint is that it is only an aid for restraining the impure mind from its unceasing habit of wandering, and that when the mind has thus been restrained, its attention should be turned towards Self in order to know its own true form, which is the light of Self-consciousness.

Here some people doubt, “When the mind is restrained from its wandering by means of breath-restraint, it is forced to give up attending to external objects. When it thus gives up attending to external objects, which are second and third persons, will not the first person alone remain shining there? Therefore by merely giving up attention to second and third persons, will not Self-attention automatically result?” This is an important doubt to clarify.

Withdrawing the attention from second and third persons is called *antarmukham* or introversion, whereas focusing the attention on 'I' is called *ahamukham* or facing Selfward. Though *ahamukham* includes in itself *antarmukham*, *antarmukham* does not necessarily include *ahamukham*. That is, though the attention is withdrawn from external objects, it is not necessarily focused keenly on the consciousness 'I'. The state in which the attention is thus withdrawn from external objects but not fixed keenly on Self is called *manolaya*, and this state is experienced by everyone daily when they go to sleep. If a person practising *raja-yoga* withdraws his attention from external objects by means of breath-restraint and if he does not make effort to fix his attention firmly upon the consciousness 'I', his mind will slip into the state of *manolaya*. Though the *manolaya* which is thus achieved by the practice of *raja-yoga* is glorified by the name *nirvikalpa samadhi*, it is in fact no more helpful to spiritual progress than is the daily sleep experienced by all people.

Why is it that Self-knowledge does not arise in the state of *manolaya*? The reason is that the power of *maya* functions in two forms, namely *avarana sakti* (the power of covering or concealing) and *vikshepa sakti* (the power of projection, diversification, tossing or confusion). *Avarana sakti* is the dullness of forgetfulness of one's true nature whereas *vikshepa sakti* is the perception of multiplicity which arises when the body is taken to be 'I'. In the various states of *manolaya* such as sleep and *kashtha nirvikalpa samadhi*, though the mind is temporarily freed from the hold of *vikshepa sakti*, it still remains enveloped by the veil of *avarana sakti*. Due to this veil of *avarana sakti*, the clear knowledge of one's true nature is not experienced in *manolaya*, and hence in due course the mind will rise again and come under the tossing sway of *vikshepa sakti*.

By withdrawing one's attention from external objects, one frees oneself temporarily from the sway of *vikshepa sakti*. But in order to pierce though the dark veil of *avarana sakti*, it is necessary for one to attend keenly to the consciousness 'I' and thereby know its true nature. That is, since Self-forgetfulness is the root-cause for the rising of the veil of *avarana sakti*, Self-attention alone is the

medicine which will remove it. This is why Sri Bhagavan says in verse 16 of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

“Having given up external objects, the mind knowing its own form of light is alone true knowledge.”

Here Sri Bhagavan does not talk merely of giving up external objects, but also of knowing the form of light. Indeed, He puts stress only upon this aspect of 'knowing' (*ordale*), which is the subject of the sentence and which is emphasized by the letter 'e' meaning 'alone' or 'itself', whereas he places 'giving up external objects' as only a subsidiary clause. Why? Because

Having given up
external objects
the mind knowing
its own form of light
is alone true knowledge

giving up the attachment or desire to attend to external objects is a necessary prerequisite without which the mind will be unable to turn Selfwards and know its own 'form of light', its real nature of self-luminous consciousness. But once the

mind has great love to turn Selfwards and know its own form of light, the giving up of attention to external objects will happen effortlessly and naturally. Therefore the main aim to achieve is the mind knowing its form of light, while giving up external objects is only subsidiary to this and is not by itself a complete or worthy aim.

Thus the principal truth emphasized by Sri Bhagavan in verse 16 of *Upadesa Undiyar* is that the mind knowing its own real nature, which is the light of consciousness, is alone true knowledge. What is described in that verse as "knowing its own form of light" (*tan oli uru ordale*) is what is referred to in this verse as "will see the light" (*oli kanum*). Since in both these verses Sri Bhagavan mentions both giving up external objects and knowing the light, it is important here that we should not forget the context in which Sri Bhagavan gave that verse in *Upadesa Undiyar*. While describing which path in *Upadesa Undiyar* did Sri Bhagavan say, "Having given up external objects, the mind knowing its own form of light"? Was it while describing the *yoga-marga*? No. He had already completed his description of

the *yoga-marga* in verses 11 to 15. In verse 16 he begins to describe the path of Self-enquiry, which is the true *jnana-marga*, by defining what is the state of true knowledge. Is it not clear, therefore, that the inner intention of Sri Bhagavan in this fourth verse of *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam* is only to describe the same path of Self-enquiry?

But while thus describing the path of Self-enquiry in this fourth verse, Sri Bhagavan has used the words ‘meditating’ and ‘*yogi*’, and he has made a passing reference to restraining the breath. Catching hold of these peripheral words and ignoring the central subject of the verse, many people have been trumpeting, “See, here Bhagavan has praised the path of *raja-yoga*; in this verse he proclaims that even by *raja-yoga* one can attain Self-realisation.” In order to avoid being misled by the hasty and superficial conclusions arrived at and propagated by such people, it is necessary for true devotees to analyse carefully the meaning of each word and phrase in this verse and to understand the whole verse in the light of other verses and sayings of Sri Bhagavan.

Truly speaking, only two paths are approved by Sri Bhagavan, namely the paths of *jnana* and *bhakti*. Having given pre-eminence to *jnana* in the first four verses, in the fifth verse he takes up the subject of *bhakti*. ▲

What Does Aradhana Mean?

M. RAVINDRA NARAYANAN

LITERALLY, Aradhana means worship. In Hindu religious parlance, Aradhana denotes the yearly worship offered to a sage or saint on the day of passing away. Of relevance to us, devotees and aspirants on the path of Self-enquiry, is the Aradhana of Bhagavan.

Sri Ramana Maharshi’s Aradhana falls two days before the new moon in the Tamil month of Chitra (April-May). On this day his devotees gather at his Samadhi in Tiruvannamalai and pay homage. Their thoughts are naturally on him. A pertinent question that we should ask ourselves is, ‘What does Aradhana truly mean?’ Several related questions then follow. Is it enough to pay our respects to our guru, worship him on that day and crave for his blessings? Is this the only significance of the Aradhana? And is the Aradhana limited to only one single day in a year? These might seem strange questions,

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especially the last one. Nevertheless, some introspection will reveal that these questions are indeed relevant to a serious spiritual aspirant.

First of all, what does birth or death mean to a jnani? Sri Bhagavan says, "Who is born? It is only he who asks 'Whence am I born?' that is truly born in Brahman, the Prime Source. He indeed is born eternally; He is the Lord of Saints; He is the ever new."¹

It therefore follows that true birth is spiritual birth and therefore the birth of the body is not true birth. Extending the logic, we come to the conclusion that the death of the body cannot be construed as true death. The death experience of Sri Bhagavan resulted in the death of the 'I am the body' idea. The limited self died and therein was born the true Self, the Supreme Sage.

Acharya Vinobha Bhave, the staunch Gandhian, Sarvodaya leader and a great spiritual person, paid one of the most fitting tributes to Sri Bhagavan on the occasion of his *Maha Niravana*. He said, "Sri Ramana Maharshi did not give up his body now. He gave up his body when he was sixteen years old." Whilst others mourned the physical death of Sri Bhagavan, it was Vinobha Bhave who put the incident in proper perspective, thus in one stroke emphasising the fact, rather the truth, that Sri Bhagavan's presence transcended his physical frame. Bhagavan's physical death was just the disappearance of his body. The Supreme Self remains untouched, as powerful as ever. This was the reason Bhagavan consoled his grieving devotees who thought that he was going to die, testifying to his timeless presence when he said, "Where can I go? I am here".

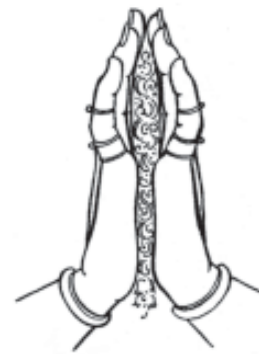
So, why are we observing his Aradhana with *pujas* and feasting? Is it just a yearly ritual to be forgotten the next day only to be remembered the same time next year? If it were limited to just performing *pujas* and singing his hymns on that particular day, then very little purpose is served. It will then remain a mere ritual. But if we understand the true significance of Bhagavan's *Maha Nirvana*,

¹ *Supplement to Reality in Forty Verses*, v. 11.

then the yearly observance of Aradhana certainly will be of great significance to us.

As we have seen, true birth is the birth of Knowledge, the establishing of the True Being in the Heart which is born only upon the death of the 'I am the body' idea. Therefore, birth and death are not really different but two sides of the same coin. The real question is, whether we are prepared to give up our ego, let it die so that our true 'I' will take birth. It is not that the true 'I' did not exist before. It always exists, rather it IS. But, we who are preoccupied with our little selves are hardly aware of its presence. It is only upon the death of the ego, the giving up of the 'I am the body' idea, that we become fully aware of it.

The Aradhana of the Sadguru who guides us through this 'death' and 'birth' is therefore important and can be an instrument of inner transformation if on that day we renew our pledge to pursue the truth with passion and dedication. On Aradhana day let us resolve to rededicate ourselves to die to our ego and to be born anew in the Self. Our observance of Sri Bhagavan's Aradhana then will be truly relevant and most useful. ▲



ANJALI HASTA

Anjali Hasta

When both hands are held close together, palms joined at the level of the chest, it is known as *anjali hasta*. This is a common gesture used to convey respect and reverence. Devotees pray to their favourite deities in temples in this manner. Elders are also welcomed and shown reverence with this gesture. Sometimes flowers, a garland or a chain of *rudraksha* beads are held in the hands.



Sri Tinnai Swami

MICHAEL JAMES

EARLY in the morning on Deepam Day, 7th December 2003, a little-known devotee left his physical body in Tiruvannamalai, where he had lived for more than 54 years in the supreme state of *atma-jnana* bestowed upon him by the Grace of Sri Bhagavan.

The reason that he was so little-known, even among fellow devotees, can only be attributed to the divine Will of Sri Bhagavan, which can never be fathomed or explained by our limited human intellects. If at all any semblance of individual will could be attributed to this self-effacing devotee, he appeared to have chosen to live in such circumstances as would shield him from all but the barest minimum of public attention. Those who knew him respected that

Michael James has been actively involved for many years with translation work from Tamil to English, particularly the compositions of Sri Bhagavan himself, and those of Muruganar and Sadhu Om. He had been associated with Tinnai Swami since 1976.

seeming choice and avoided publicising him in any way. But now that the human form has been cast off, I believe it is not inappropriate that I share with fellow devotees a little of what I know about him¹.

The devotee I am writing about was in his former life named Ramaswami, but for more than forty years past he has been known as Sri Tinnai Swami, because he lived on and seldom moved away from the *tinnai* (masonry bench) in the verandah of the house of the family of the late Sri C.P. Nathan, who gave him food and shelter and attended to his few physical needs.

Sri Tinnai Swami was born in Coimbatore on the 12th December 1912, in a family of lawyers and doctors belonging to the small Telugu Brahmin community of that town. As a young man he was employed for many years as a biochemist in Madras Medical College, during which time he married and had four sons. Until his mid-thirties there was no indication in his outward life of the great inner and outer transformation that was to happen later.

In the mid-1940s he came to Tiruvannamalai on three occasions to have *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan, each time staying for just a brief while, but these first three visits appear to have caused no immediate change in his outward life. The first hint of an outward change in his life occurred later, possibly sometime around the end of 1948. At that time an opportunity had arisen in his department for a biochemist to be selected to go to America for higher studies or research, and at first he was the candidate selected. Soon, however, his selection was reversed, and a junior colleague was selected in his place. Knowing that this change had happened unjustly through some political influence, he resigned his job in Madras Medical College as a matter of principle². Before seeking another job, he

told his wife that he would take this opportunity to spend some more time in Sri Bhagavan's Presence.

Thus he came to Tiruvannamalai for the fourth time, and soon he wrote to his wife saying that he planned to stay longer, and would bring her and their children there after the forthcoming *kumbhabishekam* of Matrubhuteswara temple, at which time he hoped to find suitable accommodation for them. Accordingly his family soon joined him and stayed with him in Tiruvannamalai until about July of that year. By that time his wife was about to give birth to their fourth son, so he sent her and their children to stay with his father-in-law in Kolar. Before she left, he told her that he intended to go soon to Pondicherry, where a suitable job vacancy was available.

“What is the use of
merely seeing Swami?”
he replied,
“We must become Swami”

During those months that he lived with his family in Tiruvannamalai, he spent most of his time either in Sri Bhagavan's Presence or doing *giri-pradakshina*, and he also appears to have formed a close friendship with Sri Muruganar. One incident that occurred at that time gives a clue to the inner change that was taking place within him. One day he came home unusually late for lunch, so his mother asked him, “Have you been to see Swami?” (referring to Sri Bhagavan as Swami). “What is the use of merely seeing Swami?” he replied, “We must become Swami”.

After his family had left, he one day approached Sri Bhagavan and asked permission to leave for Pondicherry to apply for a job, to which Sri Bhagavan replied, “*Iru*”. *Iru* is a Tamil word that literally means ‘Be’, but in such a context it would normally be taken to mean ‘Stay’ or ‘Wait’. Though it was unusual for Sri Bhagavan to tell someone to stay when they asked permission to leave, most devotees who were present at that time probably took little notice of it. However, one of those present was Sri Muruganar, and he was able to understand the great power of that single word

¹ I am writing this article from memory only, so I cannot vouch that all the minor details are 100% accurate, but as far as possible I have tried to avoid including any details that I am unsure about.

² By chance, many years later, Sri Tinnai Swami's eldest son, who was also a biochemist, was selected for a similar opportunity in America, where he went on to become a professor or lecturer in Duke University.

uttered by Sri Bhagavan and the profound impact it had upon Sri Tinnai Swami³.

Sri Tinnai Swami obeyed both the colloquial and the literal meaning of the word ‘*iru*’ uttered by Sri Bhagavan. From that moment, he never left Tiruvannamalai, and he also remained fixed firmly in the eternal state of Self-abidance. As Sri Sadhu Om once commented, “Lord Murugan bestowed *jnana* upon Arunagiriyar by uttering two words, ‘*Summa iru*’ [meaning ‘Just be’], whereas Sri Bhagavan bestowed *jnana* upon Tinnai Swami by uttering just one word, ‘*Iru*’”.

Sri Tinnai Swami’s inward transformation was reflected in a complete transformation in his outward life. From that day on his outward behaviour was changed radically. He seldom spoke, and when he did his words were usually enigmatic, often allegorical, and

Sri Tinnai Swami’s
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at times even appeared quite meaningless. He neglected his appearance, allowing his hair to grow long and matted, and he lived by begging his food, usually just one meal a day, and sometimes not even that. He was known sometimes to remain so absorbed in his inward state that for several days he did not

stir outwardly even to eat or fulfil any other bodily function.

Since they had heard nothing from him for some time, his family became worried, so his brother-in-law came to Tiruvannamalai to find out what had happened to him. When he finally found him and discovered that he had changed so completely, and when he showed no sign of response when requested to come home, his brother-in-law concluded that he had become mad.

³ This incident was related by Sri Muruganar to Sri Sadhu Om, from whom I heard it.

His wife, however, refused to believe this, and asked her father to take her to see him. Finally they came, shortly after Sri Bhagavan’s *mahanirvana*, but their pleas to him to come home were of no avail. Seeing this, his wife said to her father, “If he wishes to live like this, I do not wish to stand in his way. But as his wife I have the right and duty to serve him. So please allow me to remain here to take care of him.”

Her father therefore rented a cottage in the compound of Kittu Aiyar, the Ashram priest, for her to stay in with her two younger sons, while the elder sons would remain with him in Kolar, where they were going to school. When his wife and father-in-law requested Sri Tinnai Swami to accept her service, he consented and lived for a while in an adjacent hut. During that time he would spend most of his time in deep Self-absorption, from which he would rise only to accept food or to do *giri-pradakshina*.

After some time, however, his father-in-law asked Tinnai Swami’s wife to return to Kolar to be with her elder sons, and though at first she declined, she agreed after Sri Tinnai Swami told her to go, saying her duty was to look after her sons. Over the course of the next fifty years or so, she visited Tiruvannamalai on many occasions, sometimes for just a few days, and sometimes for several weeks. Whenever she came, she did whatever she could to serve Sri Tinnai Swami, though generally there was little anyone could do for him except to offer him food. Sometimes he would accept her service, and at other times he would not, and when he did not she usually understood it to mean that he did not want her to remain there, so she would return home.

After she returned with her father to Kolar, Sri Tinnai Swami returned to live in Virupaksha cave. As had become usual, he spent most of his time there in Self-absorption, and would on most days get up only once to go for *giri-pradakshina* and to beg his meal on the way.

At first he would beg from houses anywhere in the town, but gradually he restricted himself to begging from just a few houses in Sri Ramana Nagar. As time went on, he slowly stopped begging from other houses, and came on most days to the house of

Sri C.P. Nathan to eat his only meal. Finally one day in the late 1950s, when he came to their house as usual, he said to Mrs C.P. Nathan, “Amma, it is raining outside. May I take shelter here?” She replied, “Swami, this is your house. You are welcome to stay here.” He therefore sat on the *tinnai* in their verandah, and remained there.

That day was actually a very hot sunny day in the Tamil month *Purattasi* (September-October), and there was no sign of any rain. After a short while, however, a small black cloud appeared, and a few drops of rain fell. Nevertheless, it appears that what he really meant when he said, “It is raining outside”, was that living in a public place like Virupaksha cave, he was exposed to all sorts of unwanted attention. That is, because from his outward appearance and behaviour it was clear even to worldly-minded people that he was no ordinary *sadhu*, he naturally attracted public attention and adulation, which he wished to avoid.

At that time C.P. Nathan was living with his family in a rented house, but because he had recently been disabled by a paralytic stroke, he knew that he would be unable to continue paying the rent, and was therefore in need of some other accommodation. When Mrs C.P. Nathan informed this difficulty to Sri Tinnai Swami, he pointed to a nearby piece of vacant land and said, “Why should you worry? Your house is built there”. Soon after that, it became known that that plot of vacant land belonged to David McIver, and that he was ready to sell it for the nominal price he had paid for it some 15 or 20 years earlier. But though they could afford to buy the plot, C.P. Nathan and his wife had no idea how they could afford to build a house on it. When they told this to Sri Tinnai Swami, he said, “Three *sadhus* will build your house for you”. Later, with money lent by some friends, and with the help of three *sadhus*, Sri Sadhu Om, Swami Sankarananda of Desur Ramananda Mathalayam, and Swami Krishnananda, a small house was built for them, with a coconut leaf verandah and *tinnai* for Sri Tinnai Swami to live on.

For more than forty years Sri Tinnai Swami lived on that *tinnai*, and only on a very few occasions did he ever leave that compound.

In the twenty years I lived in Tiruvannamalai, from 1976 to 1996, he left the compound on only one occasion, in the late 70’s, when for some unknown reason he went and crouched for three or four days in the open ground between the compound and Arunachala.

During my early years in Tiruvannamalai, he left his *tinnai* only to crouch on the floor to eat food, or to visit the outdoor latrine, or occasionally to sit on the outdoor *tinnai* facing Arunachala, or very rarely to walk to the front gate. Other than this, he remained reclining quietly on his *tinnai*. Before I came to Tiruvannamalai, on a few occasions he walked to Pali Tirtham (the tank beside Sri Ramanasramam) to dip himself briefly, and returned in his wet clothes, which he allowed to dry on his body. And while I was there, he once went to the well behind the house and poured a few buckets of water over himself. Except on these few occasions, he never took bath, but his body did not give off any unpleasant odour.

From the day that Sri Bhagavan told him, “*Iru*”, Sri Tinnai Swami remained completely indifferent to all forms of physical discomfort and inconvenience. Apart from shelter, a small amount of food each day, and occasionally fresh clothing to replace what he had been wearing continuously for a considerable period of time, often till it was threadbare or quite ragged, he generally did not accept any form of service. His hair always grew long and matted, and his finger and toenails also grew long, thickened and curled, and it was only in the later years of his life, when his nails had become so distorted and curled that they were growing back into his flesh, causing bleeding and obviously very painful wounds (which were sometimes invaded by the small red variety of ants, whose bite stings sharply), that he finally acceded to our repeated requests to allow us to cut his nails.

There are many remarkable incidents in his life that I have witnessed or heard that I could relate, including some minor miracles that devotees attribute to him, but the most remarkable thing about his outward life was the fact that he lived silently in one place for so many years, unmoved by and unconcerned with whatever was or was not happening around him. It was not that he did know what

was happening – from occasional words he uttered it was clear that he knew many things, including things which he had no means of knowing through the usual channel of the five senses –, but he was simply unaffected and untouched by anything.

During the many years that he lived on their *tinnai*, C.P. Nathan and his family were blessed with the good fortune of providing him with the little food, clothing and shelter that his body required, and in the early years in spite of their then state of poverty they performed such service not only to him but also to Sri Sadhu Om and other *sadhus* and devotees of Sri Bhagavan. Sometimes they even had to

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sell their cooking vessels in order to purchase provisions to feed visiting devotees. All of us who had the good fortune to know Sri Tinnai Swami will be ever grateful in particular to Mrs C.P. Nathan, who in spite of many hardships served him with great devotion

in every way she could, especially providing him food, as she did till the end in spite of her advanced age and physical weakness.

Towards the end of 1985 Sri Tinnai Swami lost his eyesight, apparently due to cataract, but he never allowed any doctor to check his eyes. After this his few physical activities became even less. He ate food from a plate placed on a table beside his *tinnai*, continuing to recline even as he ate, and he got off his *tinnai* only to answer the calls of nature in a bowl placed beside it. Other than that, he remained unaffected by and totally unconcerned with the failing strength and health of his body. His state remained unshakable as ever.

Finally, a few days before his 91st birthday, he left his body as quietly as he had lived in it, in the early hours of the morning when everyone in the compound was asleep. His holy remains were found reclining peacefully as ever, and were interred with due respect and

devotion in the manner traditional for a *sadhu* that afternoon, a few hours before the holy *deepam* was lit on Arunachala, beside the *samadhi* shrine of Sri Sadhu Om, close to the *tinnai* where he had lived for so many years.

His ever-devoted wife, Smt Jayalakshmi, and his four sons all survive him.

In the eyes of the world, which attaches importance only to doing, overlooking the true importance of mere being, there may appear to be little greatness in the extraordinary life of Sri Tinnai Swami. He did not speak, write or teach anything, nor did he perform any other “useful” function. But whether we are able to recognise it or not, his mere being was a great blessing bestowed upon the whole world by Sri Bhagavan, the effect of which cannot be known or measured by our finite intellects. As Sri Bhagavan says in verse 303 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*:

“They [the wise] say that the *ucchistha* [the leftover of food] consumed by God is the supreme purifier that removes all sin. Take to heart that the life of *sat-achara* [abidance in the state of being] lived by a *jnani* in this material world is itself that *ucchistha*.”

That is, the mere existence of a *jivanmukta*, whose physical form continues to live in this world after God has consumed his ego, is itself the sacred *ucchistha* that purifies the world of all evil. When this supreme good is done by his mere being, what need is there for the *jnani* to do anything – whether to speak, write, teach or perform any other kind of “good deed”? ▲

Important Request

ON May 30, 1949, Life Magazine ran a long article on Sri Bhagavan titled "Holy Man". Winthrop Seargent wrote the article and Eliot Elisofon (1911-1973) took the photographs.

The full store of Eliot Elisofon's work was donated to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin.

Eliot Elisofon spent at least two weeks at Sri Ramanasramam shooting many reels of film of Bhagavan, the Ashram and the surrounding area. We wish to approach this Research Center and investigate what photo-



graphs or negatives they are storing and discuss with them the possibility of acquiring digital copies of the negatives, etc. Displayed above is one of the photographs of Bhagavan that Eliot Elisofon took.

We are trying to locate any individual on the faculty or staff of the **University of Texas** that would be willing to help us fulfil our intention. There are certain research privileges allowed to faculty members at the Research Center. If anyone can help us in this manner, we ask they contact us first before contacting the Research Center.

Please call or write to either Ravi Ramanan or Dennis Hartel.

Ravi Ramanan in California:

E-mail: RaviRamanan@ca.slr.com

Tel: (925) 828-5934

Dennis Hartel of Arunachala Ashrama, NY:

E-mail: dennis@arunachala.org

Tel: (718) 575-3215

From the Notebooks

Two

ROBERT POWELL

BODY perception gives rise to a framework in space and time that drives us, motivates all our thoughts and actions. In its totality it is nothing but what we call 'mind' basically a concept, kept alive artificially through repeated false vision and self-misunderstanding.

To pierce our suffocating illusion, we should see 'body' as nothing but an easy way of speaking, a thought construct. We perceive 'body' as such on account of our assigning limits or boundaries to it in space and time. These boundaries have been assigned by the sense organs, but these organs are themselves part of the body whose real existence has yet to be proved. So the whole thing is an exercise in begging the question a circular argument!

* * *

All that we really are is an 'idea', everything that we think to have 'existence' i.e., independent existence is only an idea, a creation of the mind.

Most of us like to have some 'temporary immortality' to stretch out that which we cling to the idea that temporarily negates our ideation or 'ideological' reality that is, we constantly negate our being as mere idea. Because once I accept or confirm my existence as mere

idea, where am I? I am nowhere at all, nothingness only a 'nothingness,' however, that rests on the only solid basis of consciousness.

When you use that word 'I,' what's the first thing you think of or are associating with? It is the 'body'. Do not refer to 'your' body because that is the fundamental first mistake from which all others follow.

Fundamentally, all our thinking revolves around that 'I' imagination or projection. Where is thought, without the latter?

Without the 'body' which 'I' have (better: 'that has been') projected, where is the world, and where is the mind? Truly, there is only Consciousness!

* * *

The truth about the meaning of life is that there is none, just as the mind that would postulate it, as well as space and time, are all nonexistent.

* * *

Death can exist only in the world of form. And form itself is nonexistent; it is a kind of waste product of the brain/nervous system, which is itself part of the exudent.

* * *

Tragically, we have built the whole of Existence upon our perception of the entity designated as 'I' or 'self'.

The idea of 'body' comes about through integrated sense data, which in turn are physical reactions to stimuli. The latter only register because of the underlying substratum called 'mind'. In its absence, they would not be able to manifest, just like in the sleep state, there is no registration of anything happening around us.

* * *

People are concerned with what happens 'when bad things happen to good people', but what about 'when good things happen to bad people'? It seems to me that the former affirms our usual dualistic mode of functioning (good always gets rewarded or should be rewarded), whereas questioning this world outlook could be the starting point of a nondualistic or *advaitic* realization. ▲

ADVAITA PRIMER

Self-Knowledge and Happiness

T. S. VISWANATHA SHARMA

AMONG the prose works of Sri Bhagavan, *Nan Yar?* (*Who Am I?*) is outstanding for its conciseness and lucidity.

The very first paragraph of *Nan Yar*, states: "Since all living beings desire to be happy always, without any misery, since in everyone supreme love exists only for oneself, and since happiness alone is the cause of love, in order to obtain that happiness, which is one's very nature and which is experienced daily in deep sleep, where there is no mind, it is necessary for one to know oneself. For that enquiry in the form 'Who am I?' alone is the principal means."

We all query the validity and worth of our lives and instigate questions when our drive for the acquisition of money, power, status and sensuous enjoyments are met with impediments or outright failure. Every question we sincerely ask in doubt, desperation or anger demands a reply. More often than not, empty silence is the response. We have not listened with either enough sensitivity or the question is wrongly phrased because we are not really interested in finding out the truth of the matter but simply want to escape an intolerable situation. Bhagavan goes right to the heart of our perplexity and declares emphatically that happiness is our birthright, "one's very

nature”. This statement is fundamental to understanding the teachings of Bhagavan. We cannot cure ourselves of a malady unless we know what it means to be healthy. In the same respect we perceive directly when we are unhappy because intuitively we understand what is happiness. “The desire for happiness is a proof of the ever-existent happiness of the Self. Otherwise how can desire for it arise? If headache were natural to human beings, no one would try to get rid of it. One desires only that which is natural to him: happiness, being natural, it is not acquired.”¹

If one cares to read the original scriptures, the *Vedas*, one will immediately be struck by the vigour and exuberant joy expressed by the rshis. There was a joyful acceptance and astonishment at the marvellous gift of being alive. For the most part we have lost that gift. We have forgotten or are out of touch with our real nature which in Sanskrit is called *svabhava* (*sva*: own’s own; *bhava*: real nature). In the thrust of modern day life we are driven by schedules and demands which have little to do with our inner needs. We are sucked into a pattern of desire for objects we never knew were necessary until we were deluded by advertising and foolish comparisons with others.

The essential task of Vedanta is to awaken and guide us to rediscover our birthright. Vedanta says that our true self, *atman*, is God. ‘I am God’ (*aham brahmasmi*) is the supreme truth. The same consciousness that resides at the core of our being pervades all existence. To know ourselves is to know God and to become one with all.

Vedanta has two meanings. First, it can mean the ‘end of the Veda’; the second meaning is that it sums up the final conclusive teachings of the Vedas. The Vedantic texts teach as much as can be taught in words the lessons transmitted by the ancients, until such time as one finds an authentic contemporary teacher who exemplifies those teachings. The supreme goal of all traditional wisdom is the

knowledge (jnana) of one’s true identity. Bhagavan’s teaching of ‘Who am I?’ is the pinnacle of Vedanta.

There are three basic canonical texts called *Prasthanas Traya*, on which all Vedantic philosophy is based. They are the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras by Badarayana. They call the ultimate reality Brahman which is identical with Self (*atman*). The teachings are meant to destroy ignorance, the root of the illusion which keeps one chained to the bonds of conditioned existence.

The traditional method adopted in the Vedanta is cumbersome, tortuous, and complex. It requires prodigious effort and perseverance. Even for starting this method, a number of essential qualifications are prescribed as pre-requisites: complete dispassion towards all worldly

objects and the pleasures of heaven (*vairagya*); discrimination between the real and unreal (*viveka*); control of mind (*sama*); control over senses (*dama*); extreme forbearance (*titiksha*) and so on. One birth may not be sufficient even to acquire these qualifications.

After that there is the threefold process of *sravana* or guided study of the scriptures; *manana* or rational reflection and *nididhyasana* or consistent contemplation. The very idea of the disciplines one has to undergo deters most modern people from adopting this labourious procedure.

In Bhagavan’s method, the first encouraging point is that there is no specific qualification required for adopting Self-enquiry. All are unconditionally eligible for this method.

Secondly, the method is direct and extremely simple to understand and put into practice. No rituals are involved nor any faith in or knowledge of God (*Isvara*) is required as a precondition. The method takes us directly to the source of our ‘I’.

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¹Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 619.

In time, by the practice of Self-enquiry, one develops such essential qualities of *vairagya* and *viveka* as mentioned above, which are indispensable to purify the mind.

It is the path where all other paths of yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and the path of Vedanta converge. Bhagavan compared all the paths to the various roads leading to a temple and the path of Self-enquiry to the only common inner path leading to the sanctum sanctorum.

Bhagavan has categorically stated that the short-lived happiness which we get in intervals free from worldly desires shall better be termed as pleasure while bliss is directly connected only to Self-realisation.² “One must realize the Self in order to open the store of unalloyed happiness”³

One has to ask oneself the question as to who is it that wants happiness. It will finally resolve into the question ‘Who Am I?’ Ultimately one has to transcend both happiness and unhappiness as we know them. The happiness which comes with identification with external forms is inconstant and is inseparable from unhappiness.

The entire key rests with the discovery of Self. For the Self alone exists unchanged and indivisible. It is unaffected by cause and effect. We experience the greatest love for it. Why? Because we know it is the one ‘thing’ that is true and untouched by any limitation. It needs nothing to exist. Its very nature is happiness.

Permanent peace or happiness can be discovered only when desire and fear or aversion are understood to apply only to the ego and not the Self. The *ahamkara* is the result of erroneous identification of the Self with the body. We can never be happy until we see the ego or I-thought as a construct and an object of consciousness. When we truly understand with all our being, happiness and self-knowledge are realised to be one and the same. ▲

² *Ibid.*, Talk 28.

³ *Ibid.*, Talk 3.

Life and Times of Lakshmana Sharma, ‘Who’

MEENAKSHI LOSARDI

SRI LAKSHMANA SHARMA¹ believed that for man to attain the highest level of perfection and happiness of which he is capable, culture and civilization are necessary and in so far as they serve this end, they are good and praiseworthy. It is when a culture degenerates that the right life values are lost and man loses integrity as well as the happiness which comes from doing what is appropriate.

He believed that Culture has its foundations in the Supreme Spirit and though beyond the world, is the source of man himself. When there is an intimate connection with the Source, then culture is truly culture, not some hollow pretence that seemingly feeds man’s spirit. The axiom that Being is the Original Source is the theme of all the

¹ The S as in Shiva or Sharma, according to the accepted international convention for Sanskrit, has a diacritical mark over the S. However the policy of *The Mountain Path* since its inception has been to simplify the text as much as possible; thus Śiva is Shiva and Śarma is Sharma.

Meenakshi Losardi says: “I did not realise when working among the American Indians at the foot of their sacred Hill, Blue Lake Mountain in the American Southwest, that I would end up living at the foot of the blessed Red Hill, Arunachala. To me, a woman of English antecedent, my only wish is to remain ever within the orbit of this blessedness.”

Upanishads and of the teachings of all the sages, the Perfect Ones, who have lived and maintained the ancient tradition of culture.²

He thought that the essence of culture was character, which is best cultivated through religion, and that it was for us to learn how to pursue religion successfully by the guidance of great world teachers and sages, who have attained egolessness. The constructive culture necessary for the attainment of the right ends of life could be facilitated by the encouragement of proper conduct, unselfish devotion and a genuine quest for what is real.

It was Bhagavan himself who said that the best service anyone could do was to strive to become perfect, by becoming free of the ego.

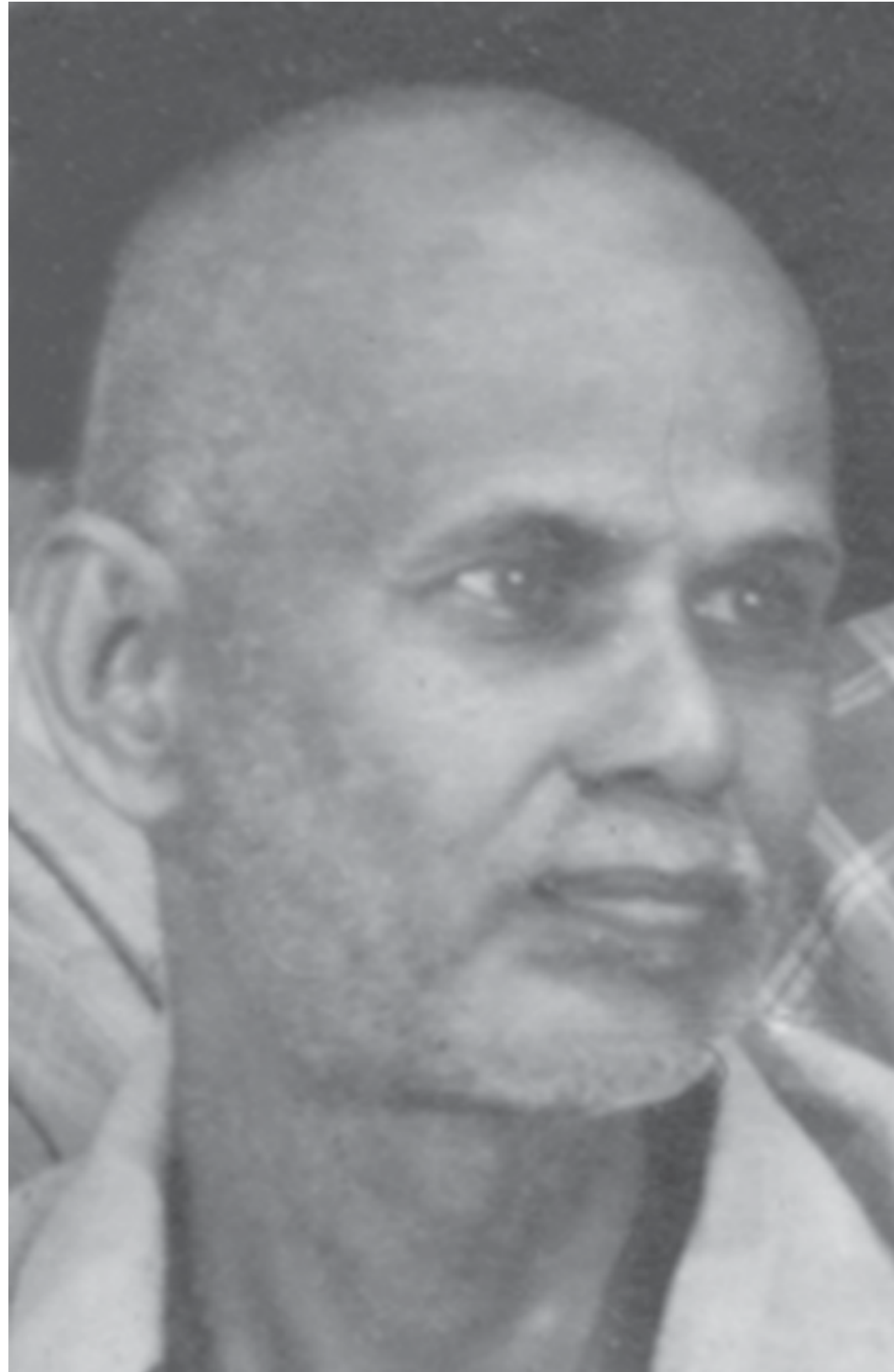
Lakshmana Sharma dedicated his long and varied life to this quest for culture and civilisation by harmonising the teachings of his *Sadguru*, Sri Ramana Maharshi, to those of *The Life Natural*, which was the dynamic vision and application of his philosophy and the teachings of the *Upanishads* and *Gita*.

He was born in 1879, at Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu in the same year as Bhagavan. Throughout his childhood he was the weakest and sickliest of four brothers in the family. It was coincidental his bad health as a child helped to develop his interest in Nature Cure which allowed him to eventually reach the ripe and vigorous age of 86.

As a boy he studied at the local Intermediate College at Pudukkottai, where he showed an early interest and aptitude for Sanskrit. Later on, his studies sent him first to Tiruchchirappalli, where he gained a Bachelor of Arts, and thereafter to Madras where he completed a Law Degree.

Lakshmana Sharma worked as a civil lawyer for the Government and eventually served in Pudukkottai, the official Receiver State. At the same time he was also an active and courageous social reformer. He was committed to the Freedom Movement and discarded wearing all foreign cloth and took up the wearing of khadi in 1918. Even

² See *The Call Divine*, January 1960, p.291.



though he knew it would cost him his job as a Government employee, in 1920 he presided over a public meeting against the autocracy of the ruler of Pudukkottai.

In response to Mahatma Gandhi's call, Sharma gave up his lucrative legal practice, withdrew his children from Government schools and admitted them into a national gurukulam. Had it not been for the sudden death of Subrahmanya Aiyar, who as well as being a great revolutionary and a close associate of Sri V.D. Savarkar was also the head of the Bharadwaja Gurukulam, Lakshmana Sharma would probably have ended up with a career as an educationalist.

It was after Aiyar's death that his concern to propagate the ideas of Nature Cure led Sharma to move, with his wife Nagamma and children, to Pondicherry where he had immediate access to a printing press for getting his books on Nature Cure printed. He lived at Pondicherry from 1920-1925. It was from there that he continued to develop and promote his involvement in Nature Cure and in 1927 he first came to his Guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi and from then on began regular visits.

He viewed the Maharshi as the formless, timeless and spaceless Arunachala, who dances as the 'I' in the Heart and who graciously took form so that we could be removed of the bondage of form. It is with Ramana, the true Guru, that we can repose our faith and loyalty, because: ". . . Ramana is the same as Bhagavatpada Sri Sankaracharya and Sri Dakshinamurti, . . . his words are the primary *Upanishad*, from which the ancient *Upanishads* themselves derive their authority."³

Sharma believed that the teachings of Bhagavan were centred on the Direct Path, the Quest (*Maha Yoga*) of the Self, and that Ramana did not teach the metaphysical truths of the *Vedantas* simply for their own sake, but they had an intrinsic value as aids for the understanding and practice of the Quest. It was the Quest itself that was the means of solving problems, because it was the direct path to the natural state, wherein problems would be resolved through harmony with one Self.

³*The Mountain Path*, January 1966, p.11.

Sharma spent more than twenty years in close association with Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and during that time made a deep study of his teachings.

"Once, some time after this writer came into the Holy presence, the Bhagavan asked him: "Have you not read the *Ulladu Narpadu*?" The writer replied: 'No, I am unable to understand the Tamil.' The fact was that he was altogether unfamiliar with classical Tamil. But then it occurred to him that here was a golden opportunity. So he said: 'If the Bhagavan teaches me, I shall learn it'. So the Bhagavan began to teach him. The pupil needed to proceed slowly, one verse at a time, and to make sure of not forgetting the meanings learnt, he composed verses in Sanskrit embodying the meaning of each verse, before going on to the next. And to make sure that the meanings have been faithfully rendered by the Sanskrit verses, he submitted each verse to the Bhagavan for scrutiny and approval. If the approval was not forthcoming, he recast the verse as often as was necessary until the approval was obtained. In this way all the verses were gone through and rendered into Sanskrit."⁴

Sharma went on revising his Sanskrit numerous times until he was satisfied that it conformed exactly to the Tamil original. Sri Bhagavan appreciated his sincere efforts and once remarked that it was like a great *tapas* for him to go on revising his translation so many times. Sharma eventually published the final version of his Sanskrit verse rendering (which included a rendering of the supplement, *Ulladu Narpadu – Anubandham*) under the title *Sri Ramana Hridayam*, together with a translation of the same in English prose.

Maha Yoga, which is one of Sharma's most lucid works, is an insightful exposition of Bhagavan's teachings and an eloquent, original summary of *Vedantic* philosophy and the *Upanishads*. Besides this, Sharma also rendered selected verses from Muruganar's *Guru Vachaka Kovai* into both Sanskrit and English under the title *Guru Ramana Vachanamala*.

⁴*The Call Divine*, 1st August 1954 p.572-573.

During the years Muruganar and Lakshmana developed a close friendship in which they helped each other augment their philosophical understanding of Bhagavan's teachings. Muruganar visited Pudukkottai on many occasions and from the mid 30's whenever Sharma visited Arunachala, while his family members stayed at the Ashram or lodgings, he himself would live at Palakottu with his close friend, Muruganar. It was during those years that Muruganar instructed Lakshmana Sharma in classical Tamil so that he was better equipped to understand and translate the teachings of Sri Bhagavan.

He was a regular contributor to *The Call Divine*, a Bombay monthly magazine published in the 1950's, dedicated to the works and teachings of Sri Bhagavan. It was in this magazine that Sharma's last published work, the *Paravidya Upanishad* appeared in monthly instalments in the mid 1950's.

Sharma took meticulous care with his writings and repeatedly revised his translations as he was working on a manuscript. The care that he exhibited also continued after writing and when he completed one of his works, he would, with his own hands, bind the manuscript into a neat volume. Until the manuscript went to press he would read and re-read it many times making corrections and alterations wherever needed. Some of his Sanskrit works were composed as many as thirteen times, each time in a different meter.

As well as writing expositions of Bhagavan's teachings, being a loyal freedom fighter, engaged in *sadhana*, and fulfilling his role as householder, Sharma also devoted his life to Nature Cure. This science, which has its origin in the scriptures of India, fell into general neglect and obscurity until its rebirth in Germany during the 19th Century. It was Lakshmana Sharma who discovered its Indian origin and reintroduced Nature Cure to India. He believed that the science of Nature Cure to be liberating as it sought to restore to people the independence and blessings lost due to ignorance. ". . . this science – which is to replace the empirical, blundering, pseudoscience called Medicine – the chief enemy of mankind – is by itself a Liberal Education which gives a moral and intellectual satisfaction that is not to be had

elsewhere, except in the ethico-religious philosophy of our ancient sacred lore, called the *Upanishads* or *Vedantas*."⁵

His belief was that the practice of medicine was based on a policy of violence to Life and the living body and thus tended towards the ruin of health. Whereas Nature Cure proceeded on the principle of non-violence and thus was harmonious with the laws of health.

He founded The Indian Institute of Natural Therapeutics, was founder of Sharma's Nature-Cure Sanatorium, founder-editor of *The Life Natural*,⁶ the only English Nature Cure monthly journal published in India, and also was the author of *Practical Nature Cure*. As well as his writings on Nature Cure, Sharma, who was renowned as a foremost authority, also conducted training camps and travelled the country giving consultations.

In 1942, Vallabhai Patel, one of the principal leaders of the Freedom Struggle, became seriously ill while staying at Gandhi's Ashram at Wardha. For some months Gandhi himself tried unsuccessfully to treat Patel with Nature Cure methods, but Patel's health continued to fail. Maurice Frydman who was closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi, recommended his friend Lakshmana Sharma as an authority on Nature Cure. Sharma subsequently took the case on, and Patel's health quickly improved.

Lakshmana Sharma's life was always conducted with courage, enthusiasm and a tireless energy. At the advanced age of eighty he started and completed a monumental treatise in Sanskrit verse on Vedanta, entitled *Vedanta Saram*. Even at the age of eighty-five he spent some twelve to sixteen hours reading and writing and rarely missed his two-mile morning and evening walks.

Some two years before his death speaking to his friend Brij Mohan Lal, Sharma admitted: ". . . I have finished my work in this life. Then why should I drag on? It is better for me to have a new start and this cannot come in the present life."⁷

⁵*Practical Nature Cure* by Lakshmana Sharma, p. 20.

⁶ Founded in 1940, but publication stopped in 1995.

⁷*Practical Nature Cure*, by Lakshmana Sharma, Ch.XXIII, App.1.

Step by step, he completed his work. He re-wrote the whole of his magnum opus, *Practical Nature Cure*, which comprised 720 pages and also completed two monumental works in Sanskrit verse, the above-mentioned *Vedanta Saram* and *Svadhena-Svasthya-Mahavidya*.⁸ After completing those works he neatly bound the manuscripts by hand and submitted them for publication. He then said that he definitely had nothing further to do and would like to shed his mortal body. There was no remorse only a sense of spiritual consummation and he calmly started preparing himself for the inevitable.

His work was over and the will to live disappeared. From then on his decline started and he no longer took any interest in the world around him and old age finally began to make its appearance.

Sometime towards the end of February 1965, he stopped eating cereal food. A month later he stopped all solid food and was subsisting on juices alone. Steadily he reduced the quantity of juice and thirteen days before the end he stopped all juice, taking only water. The day before his death he only had a few spoonfuls of Ganga water. The end came at 6.50 a.m. on May 3, 1965.

“Those who believe in the influence of the positions of the stars and planets of human destiny say that it is difficult to find a more auspicious combination of circumstances. The sun was moving towards the northern hemisphere (*Uttarayana*), the Moon waxing, the time was just after daybreak and the preceding star was *Krittika*. Each of these circumstances, they say, has an auspicious significance.”⁹

Thus the long and blessed life of a dedicated man ended. He was a person who died in much the same way as he lived, fearlessly and graciously. He learnt to do whatever was appropriate in the moment till eventually whatever he did was auspicious. ▲

⁸ The philosophy and practice of Nature Cure explained in 1,500 Sanskrit *slokas*.

⁹ Excerpt from a speech delivered by Sri L. Ramachandra Sharma on May 15th, 1965 at Pudukkottai.

BOOK EXCERPT

The Dicey Problem of New Age Science

V. DWARAKNATH REDDY

Physics is a study of the energies that act on matter. Einstein's theory of relativity amended, but did not abolish, Newtonian determinism. Denying an over-riding authority to CHANCE, Einstein said, "God does not play dice". But quantum theory superseded relativity and gave prominence to PROBABILITY. Therefore Stephen Hawking declared, "God is a gambler". (God was merely their word for the workings of cosmic energy.)

Dwaraknath Reddy ("I know a little physics and a little more philosophy, and so had to mouth my bit") responded, "God has no problem. He is the ABSOLUTE OWNER of the casino. You and I, in the RELATIVE frame, are the error-prone egos." That resolves the 'dicey' problem!

Dwaraknath Reddy is an unusual amalgam of industrialist, philanthropist and spiritual seeker. An energetic 80, he has been for the past 20 years a resident devotee near Ramanasramam. His deeper contemplations, have been on the science/philosophy border. He has many books to his credit and they are available in the ashram Book-Depot.

Reddy pin-points that the conflict of reason between science and philosophy is centered in this: Science asserts that mind is an outcome of brain-cell activity, whereas philosophy declares that consciousness is prior, and brain is only the equipment through which the energy manifests.

Is the Observer of Physics Conscious?

The response of science to that could be: ‘Why are you even asking that question? Who is denying that the scientist who is enquiring into the phenomenon, and then describing it, is human and conscious?’

But that response would be sadly missing the point. The question asked is: ‘Is it not consciousness as an independent and separate agency, that affirms the existence of matter?’ Science which insists irrevocably that consciousness is a neural output, or an oozing from the brain (perhaps akin to sweat oozing from the skin?), is stating that in the final analysis what is referred to as ‘mind’ is also matter, for whatever is an output of matter must be modified matter, but not other than matter. Then the probe of consciousness into the reality of matter would be a farcical situation, much like the policeman who is investigating a theft, who is seen on scrutiny to be the thief himself camouflaged as a cop! To change the metaphor, we have the painting on a canvas of a landscape with grasslands, a stream, ducks and trees, and the picture of the painter himself sitting to one side with his easel on which he is painting the scene. It is all one picture, one frame. It is a painting with the painter also pictured as painting the picture. What we are asking is: ‘Who is the painter of this picture?’ Would it be a sufficient reply to point out that portion of the canvas which contains the picture of the painter?

The realisation must dawn that the canvas cannot contain the real painter. He cannot, just cannot, be in that frame. A reflection cannot contain the subject that is reflected however perfect the likeness may seem. In fact, on contemplation, any reflection is not only unreal but also incorrect because of lateral inversion (if right is left, then whatever is left cannot be right!).

The physicists’ ‘observer’ is not a reference to the human. It (not ‘he’) is only another temporal-spatial configuration in a larger scene that is the field of observation, yet it is assigned a special initiative. Is it a first amongst equals? The scientific surmise of the riddle seems to be that mind is comparable to a pre-programmed computer with creative capacities. But the question returns: ‘Who, if anyone, programmed the computer?’ Capra, the renowned physicist of intellect and intuition, and author of *The Tao of Physics*, seems to be guardedly hedging his insights when he writes:

“The contrast between the two kinds of description -- classical terms for the experimental arrangement and probability functions for the observed objects — leads to deep metaphysical problems *which have not yet been resolved.*

There has to be
existence of knowledge
irretrievably coupled
with the knowledge
of existence

In practice, however, these problems are circumvented by describing the observing system in operational terms, that is, in terms of instructions which permit scientists to set up and carry out their experiments. In this way, the measuring devices and the scientists are effectively joined into one complex system which has no distinct, well defined parts, and the experimental apparatus does not have to be described as an isolated physical entity.”¹

I respectfully submit that the problems were resolved elsewhere, long before science saw them as problems. Metaphysics is the theoretical philosophy of ‘existence’ and ‘knowledge.’ These are two simple words of common usage in daily life, but in the metaphysical frame, they are words of deep, fundamental and primordial significance. Anything exists and is known to exist. *There has to be existence of knowledge irretrievably coupled with the knowledge of*

¹ *The Tao of Physics*, by F. Capra, 1977 Fontana ed, page 138.

existence. These parameters define consciousness. Consciousness cannot be mixed up with any devices or apparatus, which are material contraptions with mechanical functions. They are insentient whereas consciousness is synonymous with sentiency.

How then can consciousness be a product of braincells which are molecules of matter, of a certain configuration, even as bone, blood, and muscle are variations of matter with other configurations? How can insentient matter give rise to sentiency? Or, is the distinction irrelevant? We, all of us, always, talk of consciousness, not as an objective perception, but as a subjective experience. Consciousness is experienced as knowing, feeling, loving, hating, remembering.

What is Consciousness?

It is here that new physics may be seen as treading on the toes of bio-chemistry, but in truth there is no such discord within the scientific fraternity. Consciousness is not a word in the vocabulary of the physicist. We have had to labour for clarification only because we observed an 'observer' in their description of reality. He turned out to be unreal!

It may seem now that we meandered needlessly across the meadows of physics searching for consciousness. Finding it a misguided venture, we have crossed over to the adjacent territory which flies the flag of chemistry. We said consciousness is not in the lexicon of physics, only time-space is. We must add now that time-space is not in the lexicon of chemistry; consciousness is, and very much so in bio-chemistry. But there is a rider. If consciousness was only about feeling, about pain, emotion, or muscular response, physics could disclaim any involvement with it, but as TIME (unlike matter) is a concept and as concepts are the exclusive domain of consciousness, and physics has a vital involvement with time, we have to suspect that physics cannot distance itself from this enquiry too long. Time will catch up! Physics and chemistry may then turn out to be one seamless science. Time is an interval between two events. An event is what is cognized. Cognition occurs in consciousness. Therein lies the overlap, if not the unification, of physics and chemistry. However, that shall

wait a little. Now the scrutiny is of brain and consciousness.

The great divide between science and spirituality is not whether the emphasis is on fact or faith, not the difference between experimental verification and emotional acceptance, not the provable reality of a lifespan versus the scorned and the seemingly unsubstantiated projections of life-after-death. These questions and their answers will fall into one rationale of sequential thought, if the basic frame is on solid foundations. Otherwise, as is the case now and has been for too long, the grandest abodes of human intelligence will be spacious multistorey dwellings in mansions built without a ground floor!

The foundation has to be the answer to the question: IS CONSCIOUSNESS A PRODUCT OF THE BRAIN, OR IS CONSCIOUSNESS AN ENERGY WHICH MANIFESTS THROUGH A MATCHED EQUIPMENT WE CALL THE BRAIN?

What are we referring to when, talking together, discussing together, we use the word 'consciousness'? If in conversation we use words such as iron, water, heat, world, or hunger, there is no ambiguity or vagueness in communication. Similarly, there ought to be no ambiguity about a reference to consciousness. When the other words were heard, there arose in us knowledge of the things for which those words were the assigned names. The sound of the name brought up the knowledge of the thing. This knowledge-capability is consciousness, is it not? All other learning about the world deals with acquiring the knowledge of things of the world, but this learning about consciousness centres on acquiring the knowledge of knowledge. It is a departure from the habituated occupation of our lives, but it cannot be remote or nebulous. On the contrary, it may be too close, too intimate, for the mental gaze to focus on it all of a sudden. In a day of normal activity our eye-sight rests on a thousand things and serves our purposes. It is the eye that makes it possible, but in a lifetime I may not have given direct attention to the eye as the first principle and facilitator of my perpetual need to see and act and fulfil myself. Similarly, knowing and utilizing the

known has been the method and definition of our living, and our preoccupation with it was self-sufficient, but now, in a spirit of deeper discovery and higher purpose, we are turning our attention from the seen to the seer, from the known to the knower. And that is why this question has framed itself: WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS?

Dropping the labels of scientist or philosopher, let us relate the word 'consciousness' to the familiar undeniable FEEL of it in ourselves. Let us not make it an impersonal word in an encyclopaedia or get stalled in vain dialectic. It is, is it not, that inwardly revealing faculty or facility by which we, in ourselves, recognize our livingness, our perceptions and responses, our feelings and memory-recall and desire-projection? To be alive, and alive to being alive, is the insignia of 'consciousness.'

Energy is for Ever

Consciousness manifests the energy that propels thoughts into constant flow. Memory, intelligence, will, desire and emotion — are all facets of the mind, and mind is a movement, a process of thought. The energy comes from consciousness.

Gravity or electricity or radiation are energies that we are familiar with. They are objectively deduced, defined and measured by observing their manifested effects. Cause is never seen as cause, it is always seen in the effect it produces. These energies — we can agree on this without argument — do not 'know' themselves. We call them inert or insentient. They do not know us (no loss on either side), but we know them (good for us).

We also know the energy of consciousness. But wait a minute. Say that again. Who knows it, who is the 'we' here? By our own definition, the knower is consciousness. So consciousness knows consciousness? Here, words of habitual usage are breaking down. Why? Because the words are the vehicles of relativity, born of duality and serving to demarcate opposites. Their validity is confined to a subject-object relationship. The scientist studies matter and energy

which are the objects of his exploration, in relation to which he is the subject. But now he is focussing on subjectivity and there is no object, unless we say that the one is both subject and object, which makes a travesty of normal speech. There arises thus a need to make meanings more flexible, more fluid and more versatile. It cannot be otherwise on the horizon where land touches the sky, and the temporal bows to the eternal, and the relative whispers to the Absolute. To him who would investigate the ultimate reality, the unified field, or the Theory of Everything, the role of consciousness must stand out, distinct, paramount, and pristine, being a category apart. It is not the felt thing, it is the feeler; it is not the known thing, it is the knower; it is not the observed, it is the observer. If the talk turns to an amalgam of the subject and the object, the word that survives cannot be objectivity. The Subject must be king. But can there be a king without a kingdom?

It is in this context, now hopefully stated in clear and complete terms, that we return to the question: IS CONSCIOUSNESS A PRODUCT OF THE BRAIN? All forms of life, insects to angels if you wish, possess the *feel* of consciousness, though the expression of it will vary depending upon the way the equipment, which is the body of the creature, is structured. The equipment can be broadly said to be the nervous system and the brain, or the equivalents thereof, serving to transmit the energy.

When any energy manifests through equipments, the effects in quality and quantity depend on the structuring of the equipments in related terms. Electricity becomes light in a bulb, sound in a radio, motion in a fan, and heat in a resistance-coil. All these aspects are always the combined potential of electrical energy, and it has been thus eternally. When television was invented, electricity did not evolve with new TV potential. Second, electricity produces varying results of light in bulbs themselves, depending on whether the bulb is zero-watt or 100 watts, whether the glass is clear or coloured, whether the lamp is incandescent or fluorescent. That explanation can suffice now for an overview of the biological landscape, from plants to insects to birds to animals to humans as foetuses or as adults. Someone

may still say that is speculation, but where is speculation when we observe the *felt* impact in ourselves and ask if this subjective feeling can be produced by braincells? Each one of us is his own self-contained and self-sufficient laboratory, and the question should be processed and answered within these confines.

Science tends towards an argument that the refinement of instrumentation will lead to the widening of the horizons of understanding, but as the word horizon implies, it can only be embellishment upon the periphery, not enrichment at the core. If it is matter that is being investigated, objective studies are admittedly enhanced through progressive mechanical devices such as telescopes for cosmic observation and microscopes for atomic scrutiny. The data can measure the energy that works on matter, but cannot touch the question about the origin of the energy, which must be said to be eternal and indestructible. When a bulb is broken, the light in it dies, but not electricity. Bulbs need electricity to come alive with light, but before bulbs were invented or TVs or computers or dynamos, was the energy of electricity a precedent reality, or was it not? If it was, will it not remain the same reality even if all equipments cease to be?

The energies that science studies and specifies are insentient. They do not and cannot reveal their existence in the unmanifest mode. But the energy of consciousness is of a different dimension, sentiency. Its existence is synonymous with the awareness of I-AM. It is self-revealing. We may say consciousness knows itself and then it follows that it knows all else in creation. There is no other knower. And if we ignore the knowing, what remains?

So it is not the eye peering through the telescope at galaxies, or through the microscope at sub-atomic particles that can lead to ultimate answers about reality, but the 'I' turned inward upon itself. Meditation, perhaps a maligned word in science, is only the scientific investigation of consciousness as the thing in itself, apart from its play and activity manifested as mind. When the eye sees its reflection in a mirror and studies it to good purpose, that is still science. When the eye is turned upon itself to see what can be seen, that is meditation.

(Please do not take this literally, you will end up with a squint. And meditation will then be labelled as a squint in the otherwise healthy sight of science!) The study of the mind is psychology. The circuitry, the wiring, conductivity, resistance, protective fuses — all this is the organism science calls the brain with its nervous system. This is physiology. Consciousness being included in physiology, making it a product of the brain through neural discharge and chemical interaction, is the fatal blunder of 'pure' science. Study of consciousness as LIFE in the abstract, and as LIVING in the flow of energy, has therefore acquired a classification outside the disciplines of normal science. It has become 'Philosophy', the science of the origin, manifestation, and withdrawal of the energy of consciousness. Chemistry seems to say: All is molecular. There is nothing called mind apart from matter. Structuring of molecules (proteins, amino acids, etc.) holds in its complex web the secret of life. We have the key. We call it DNA. The mystery of living organisms, of replication and mutation, from the simplest to the most complex, from microbe to man, will be unravelled upon this new frontier. Nature will be overtaken and exceeded by science. Your god has lost the race.

Physics seems to say: All is energy. There is nothing called matter (or mind) apart from energy. Quantum-field, a concept of energy, pervades the whole of space which thereby ceases to be dead and disinterested, and becomes instead vibrant and participatory. It is energy everywhere. What is seen and felt as matter is indeed the demarcation of regions of space in which the energy field is extremely intense ($E=MC^2$). Philosophy is saying: All is consciousness. Its energy appears as mind. *Mind creates and perceives matter. As Total Mind it creates and as individual mind it perceives.* Brain is the equipment in association with which the energy becomes particularized as the individual person. It is not different from electricity becoming the light in my room through the bulb in my room, while the energy of electricity is totally one cosmic pervasiveness. In association with an equipment, the infinite is seen as the finite. This is limitation. With reference to consciousness, particularization becomes personalization. ▲

Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad

LAKSHMANA SHARMA

IN the late 1920s Lakshmana Sharma had the rare privilege of having private lessons from Bhagavan. Their subject was the philosophy and practical teachings expounded by Bhagavan in *Ulladu Narpadu*. Sharma subsequently summarised the essence of these lessons in two works: his Tamil commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu* and *Revelation*, his expanded Sanskrit rendering of the original *Ulladu Narpadu* verses. In the 1930s Bhagavan remarked that Lakshmana Sharma's commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu* was the best available on that work. In the late 1930s Sharma put many of these ideas and explanations into *Maha Yoga*, his English presentation of Bhagavan's teachings.

In the 1950s Lakshmana Sharma made a further attempt to explain and summarise Bhagavan's teachings. He composed a Sanskrit work of over 700 verses, entitling it *Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad*. In his subtitle Sharma translates *Paravidyopanishad* as 'The science of the Supreme Self'.

These verses, along with an English translation and commentary by the author himself, were serialised in *The Call Divine*, a Bombay

magazine that regularly featured articles by Bhagavan's devotees. In the extract that follows Lakshmana Sharma explains Bhagavan's teachings on the unreality of the world. The italicised remarks between the verses are his own comments. The material in square brackets was added by Sharma himself to the English version to make the original Sanskrit meaning more clear.

The text has been edited for *The Mountain Path* by David Godman. The whole work will be posted on his site (www.davidgodman.org) later this year.

The Para Vidya Upanishad will soon be published in book form in its entirety. Thanks for this must go to the family of Lakshmana Sarma for their kind permission, and also to the efforts of Meenakshi Losardi and Sunder Hattangadi.

84. The Guru, who is a sage, teaches the unreality of the world in accordance with his own experience, also giving reasons supporting it. The disciple who aspires to become free should accept this teaching with perfect faith and [with its help] strive for this goal.

85. The universe, comprising these three – the soul, God and the world of visible objects – is superimposed by the mind on the real Self, which is the sole reality of the supreme state. Hence all this [universe] is just an outcome of ignorance.

The mind is the creator of the universe. Ignorance is the primal cause of the mind. Hence it is said here that this ignorance is the cause of the universe.

86. That being so, when this ignorance is annihilated by the light of awareness of that Self, then, along with it, the consequence of it [the world] will, like the darkness that disappears before sunlight at dawn, cease to appear.

This will become more and more intelligible as we proceed. What is stated above are the actual facts of the Guru's own experience. The conclusion that follows for the disciple is given next.

87. This universe [we see] shines in the dense darkness of ignorance, but does not shine in the great splendour of the light of Self-awareness. If this universe were real, why does it not shine in the supreme state, lit as it is by the conscious, effulgent light of the real Self?

An axiomatic distinction between the real and unreal, which is implicit in vedantic metaphysics, is next enunciated.

88. That which survives in the experience of the real Self is the supreme state. [That] alone is real. All else is only unreal. This is the distinction between the real and the unreal, revealed to us by the teachings of all the sages.

By this test the world is shown to be unreal. The next verse elaborates on this.

89. Since multiplicity is experienced only in the state of ignorance, it is declared to be unreal. On the other hand, because the unity of the Self is experienced on the liquidation of ignorance, that unity is real.

It may be questioned: 'If ignorance is total darkness, how can anything be experienced in this state?' The explanation is that this ignorance is not like perfect darkness, but like a greatly diminished light. In dim light a rope is not invisible; it is merely perceived wrongly as a snake. In the same way, in ignorance, what is real, the Self, is not invisible; it is mistakenly taken to be the world.

The reality is only that which survives in the supreme state.

90. 'The sole reality is that peaceful Self which shines by the light of its own nature as pure consciousness in the supreme state wherein the world is lost.' Such is the teaching of our holy Guru.

Here it is shown that the state is one of peace because there is no duality there. This is what we learn from all the Upanishads.

This teaching is further confirmed by the analogy of the dream world.

91. As the dream world is known to be unreal for the reason that it vanishes upon waking, so this waking world is also proved to be unreal by its vanishing in the light of the real Self.

It is next pointed out that those who seek to discredit this teaching are those who do not ardently aspire to the supreme state.

92. But ignorant men, who are averse to winning the supreme state, put forth an endless series of arguments, [trying to refute this teaching]. The sages clear the doubts generated by these arguments so that earnest aspirants may not be deluded by them.

The teaching is addressed not to all men, but only to those who aspire to win the supreme state, because they alone are qualified to receive it.

93. This teaching of the unreality of the world is not addressed to those who look upon the body itself as the Self, or consider the Self to be the owner of the body. For these people the world is real, not unreal.

The teaching has to be adapted to the person being taught. The same teaching is not good for all. Here it is shown that he who believes that the Self is not the body, but the owner of it, or the dweller therein, is for this purpose in the same category as the one who believes the body itself to be the Self.

Why is it that the world is real to these people?

94. The teaching – that the trinity of the soul, God and the world is unreal – is indivisible. If one is convinced that one of these is real, the other two also will appear to be real.

That is, the teaching must either be accepted as a whole or rejected wholly. There is no option to split it up and accept it partially, rejecting some of it.

95. To those who seek deliverance, the teaching is that all these three are equally unreal. This teaching must [therefore] be accepted, exactly as it is taught, by those who are earnestly seeking to win deliverance by the extinction of ignorance.

For different aspirants there are different paths prescribed. This particular teaching is addressed only to those who believe that for them deliverance must come by right awareness.

An analogy is next given to explain the indivisibility of the teaching.

96. One that is wise will either accept the teaching as a whole, or reject the whole of it. Who can make use of half of a hen for cooking, reserving the other half for laying eggs?

A hen must be killed and cooked for food, or the whole hen must be allowed to live for laying eggs. The same indivisibility is characteristic of this teaching.

Now we come to a discussion of the objections of those who assert the perfect reality of the world.

On what evidence do they base their belief?

97. To begin with, it needs to be considered why the world is taken to be real. For the burden of proving the reality of the world lies on him that asserts it, [not on those who simply deny it].

98. Everyone who is ignorant [of the real Self] thinks the world is real because it is seen. This is no proof because it proves too much. The same reason would prove the reality of the mirage, the rope in the snake, etc.

Usually, the knowledge that arises from seeing is mixed up with imagination, or a false impression of what is seen. This reason is therefore inconclusive.

The question then arises: 'What does the seeing of the world prove?'

99. The fact of being seen is not conclusive proof that the world exists exactly as imagined [by the seer]. From the seeing it is proper to infer only that there is a substratum in which the world appears.

In the first verse of Ulladu Narpadu Bhagavan says: 'Because we see the world, it is indisputable that there exists a first cause [substratum or basic reality] which has the power to appear as many.' In the same verse

he proceeds to reveal, in the light of his own experience, that that substratum is only the real Self, on which is superimposed the four elements of the world appearance, the pictures of names and forms, the seeing individual soul, the screen and the light. The seeing subject and the spectacle seen form the appearance imposed on the substratum. The lighted screen is the substratum. Here the analogy of the cinema show is suggested. The pictures, in which the seer is included, come and go, but the lighted screen exists unaffected throughout. The power by which the appearance is superimposed on the substratum is known as maya. All that is meant by calling the world 'an effect of maya' is that things are not what they seem to those who have not known the real Self as it really is.

100. Even scientists have proved that things are not exactly as they appear [to the seer], for they say that the solid-seeming objects are really little more than empty space.

Atomic physics now tells us that the atom is not a solid particle, but a closed space in which electrons are rotating around a nucleus, composed of protons and neutrons, etc. The electrons rotate at different distances from the nucleus. The whole atom thus resembles a solar system. That things are not what they seem is thus indisputable. On the other hand there is no proof that things are what they seem to be. There is, in fact, an antithesis between appearance and reality. It is this that is called maya, which is the illusion by which reality appears as the world, that spectacle which resembles a cinema-show. Due to this illusion there is ignorance (avidya) which works through the mind that wrongly identifies the body as the Self. For this reason the truth about the world is a profound mystery, one that transcends the human intellect, but it is no mystery to the sage, who alone is competent to tell us the truth as it really is. The next verse points this out.

101. Only the sage who knows the substratum of the world appearance, the reality, by being firmly established in the supreme state, is competent to reveal the truth of the world.

By his unawareness of that truth the common man, being a victim of his ignorance, cannot know the truth about the world.

102. When vision is focussed on the outside, who can know the truth, whether of the real Self or of the world? But, with the mind turned inwards, the sage knows the truth of both by the eye of right awareness.

It is with the knowledge of this uniqueness of the sage that the disciple has to approach him and listen to his teaching.

103. Bhagavan, our Guru, has said: “The world laughs at the ignorant man, saying, “How can you know me properly unless you know yourself correctly?””

By this it is meant that the disciple must be humble, knowing the limitations of his own intelligence. Without this humility he cannot be a true disciple.

The next verse is an introduction to the detailed exposition by Bhagavan of the truth concerning the world.

104. Bhagavan, our Guru, being a sage, expounds the unreality of the world by showing that the perception of the world takes place in ignorance. Therefore, the objector’s argument – that the world is real because he sees it – does not avail to prove his contention.

The ignorant man’s vision of the world is vitiated by the fact of his ignorance of his own real Self. This point has been repeatedly pointed out by Bhagavan. To know the world aright, one must first know oneself aright.

The verses that follow show how the seeing of the world is affected and falsified by the primary ignorance.

105. Every creature first identifies his own Self with the body, and thereby concludes that the body is real. Then it comes to believe that all forms that are seen are also real.

Whatever is seen is a form. The initial question therefore is whether forms are real. Everyone who sees comes to the conclusion that all forms are real. But the first step in the process of coming to this conclusion is the mistaken impression that the body is the Self.

Philosophy begins with the knowledge that the body is not the Self. In truth, the Self is formless, so whatever is seen is for that very reason

not the Self. Though the Self is indubitably real, that reality is instead ascribed to the body. So, a part of the world is mistakenly concluded to be real. This and the succeeding verses are a commentary on the fourth verse of Ulladu Narpadu.

106. Therefore all forms are unreal. To the sage they are not real. What really exists is formless. In right awareness nothing has form.

This is further explained as follows:

107. By a single act of vision the ignorant man sees both himself and the world as forms. Since this seeing is illusory, there is no evidence to prove that the world is real.

108. One’s own body and the world are one [indivisible] spectacle; either they are both seen together, or they are both not seen. Does anyone see this world without at the same time seeing the body, which is the form ascribed to the Self?

This fact, that neither the body, nor the world, is seen apart from the other, is something we have never noticed before. We come to know of it for the first time only when the fact is pointed out by Bhagavan. Since the Self is really formless, the whole spectacle is suspect, since it is indivisible.

It may be objected that we see the dream world without a body. The answer to this follows.

109. If it is said that we see the dream world without bodies, [the response is] that there is a body [for the soul] in all the three states. The soul is never bodiless.

Here it is the soul that is spoken of, not the Self. The two are not the same in Bhagavan’s teachings, as will be seen in due course. This and the succeeding verses give the meaning of the fifth verse of Ulladu Narpadu.

110. Every creature has three bodies, a gross one, a subtle one and a causal one: the mind is the subtle body, and ignorance itself is called the causal body.

111. The three bodies mentioned here are also enumerated as the five sheaths. The middle three sheaths are the [same as the] subtle body, and the last sheath is stated to be the causal body.

The gross physical body is identical with the first of the five sheaths, called the food-sheath (annamaya kosa) because it is the product of food. This, being obvious, is not stated in the verse.

112. As long as the three bodies remain undissolved by the light of right awareness, the soul will be embodied. [Only] in the supreme state, wherein all the three are together lost, will there be bodilessness.

113. The mind, by its own force of ignorance, itself creates another body, and also another [dream] world. The sleeper who sees this dream world along with this dream body is not disembodied.

Thus the objection is overcome.

114. Everyone sees both his own body and the world by the eye, which is a part of that very body. How can this seeing be admissible as evidence in this enquiry about the reality of the world?

Since the body is a part of the world, its reality also is in question. It cannot be assumed without proof. But is so assumed when the eye is appealed to as a witness to the truth of the world. The question of the reality of forms is now further pursued.

115. As is the eye, so is the spectacle, since the nature of the spectacle depends on that of the seeing eye. If that eye is a form, so will be the spectacle. But if the eye is the formless [Self], there will be no seeing of forms at all.

This is a law of nature that Bhagavan reveals for the first time. Seeing with the eye of flesh, which is a form, one sees forms. Seeing with the eye of right awareness as the Self, forms are not seen. So says Bhagavan. This proves that forms are unreal, at least for the purpose of this philosophy.

The subject is further elucidated.

116. In the state of ignorance both the world and the Self are seen as forms. [But] on the extinction of ignorance both are [found to be] formless, because in the supreme state the infinite Self is the eye.

In the true state, which is the supreme state, the Self alone is. It is described as infinite, and therefore formless. There are no objects to be seen, nor is there any real seeing. Hence, forms are unreal. If they were real, they would survive in that state.

117. By the vision of right awareness the world, along with the soul, emerges into the formless, real Self. The sages call that the vision of right awareness, wherein there is neither seer nor spectacle.

118. In that natural state [of the Self] there survives only the Self, which is consciousness, worldless, alone, and without the six modes of change, such as birth, and so on. Hence, it alone is real in its own right.

The world is not real in its own right; it has only a borrowed reality as will become clear later on.

119. That supreme being, the Self, which is perfect as the sole reality, is styled the infinite eye. However, because for that Self in its true state there are no objects to be seen, it is not [really] an eye.

120. The term 'eye' has been used in this context by the most holy one [Bhagavan] only to ward off the misconception that it is non-consciousness, [inert]. Thus, the most holy one has conveyed the meaning that the Self is consciousness and the sole reality.

121. It is only by conceiving the formless Self as a form that one sees this world as consisting of forms. All this is really an ignorant superimposition on the formless, infinite reality, the Self.

122. It is only to him that sees himself as having a form that the names and forms appear as real. They have been fabricated by ignorance and superimposed on the nameless, formless Self, which is consciousness.

123. Thus it has been made plain by the Master that the seeing of the world is an effect of the primary ignorance. Thus the claim that the world is real has been refuted by him. Also, it has been shown by him that the aloneness of the real Self in the true state is real.

124. Our Master confirms this teaching first by showing that the world is mental [inseparable from the mind], then by proving the unreality of the mind and the ego, and finally by teaching that even the primary ignorance is non-existent. ▲

Ratha Yatra

A committee has been formed for the purpose of planning, co-ordinating and conducting the Ratha Yatra in connection with the 125th Jayanti celebrations of Sri Bhagavan this year. The members constituting the committee are as follows:

CHAIRMAN: Sri V.S. Ramanan.

VICE CHAIRMEN: Dr M. S. Swaminathan, Sri P. R. Ramasubhramanya Rajah.

SECRETARY: Sri P. Lohanatha Raja.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Sri Venu Srinivasan, Dr. N. Rangabashyam, Sri Ilaya Raaja, Sri T. R. Kannan, Sri N. K. Venkatesh Raja, Dr. D. Padmanabhan.

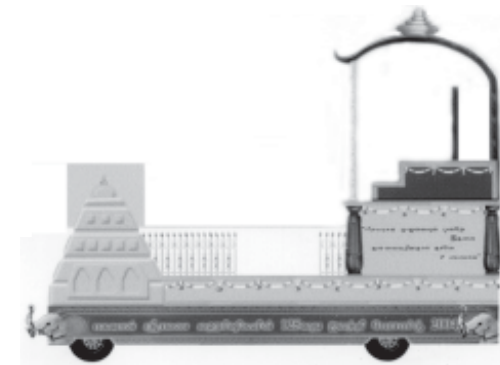
ADVISORS: Swami Ramanananda, Sri V.S. Mani, Sri S. Ram Mohan, Dr S. V. Ramanan, Sri S. Balarama Raja, Sri S. K. M. Mailanandan.

CO-ORDINATORS: Sri Sivadass Krishnan, Sri T. V. Chandramouli, Sri M. Jayendran.

Mailing Address: Ratha Yatra Committee, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai 606603.

The first meeting of the Ratha Yatra Committee was held on 18th January 2004 at Dr M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai and was attended by most of the committee members. The proposal for the Ratha Yatra was introduced by the President, Sri Ramanasramam and was presented in detail by the Secretary.

The aim of the Ratha Yatra is to propogate the chanting of *Aksharamanamalai*. In order to train people from all walks of life in the chanting, pamphlets would be distributed at all the centres where the Ratham intends to travel. Cassettes of *Aksharamanamalai* as sung at the ashram would also be sent to the centres. In addition, four lakh copies of *Aksharamanamalai* along with Sri Ilaya Raaja's article, both of which were attached as a supplement to the Tamil weekly, *Ananda Vikatan* of 24 January '04, and would be distributed to the general public. The people thus trained will chant *Aksharamanamalai* when the Ratham visits their centre.



The Ratham will start on 17th July 2004 from Tiruchuli. On 16th July, puja and homa will be performed at the Bhuminatheswara temple at Tiruchuli. There will be a cultural programme that evening. The purpose of the Ratha Yatra is to create better awareness of the simple, yet profound message of Sri Bhagavan among the larger public. The exact and detailed route of the Ratham is given on the next page.

Sri Ramana Jnana Ratham 2004

- July 17 Tiruchuzhi, Aruppukottai, Virudunagar, R.R. Nagar
 18 Sattur, Kovilpatti, Tirunelveli - 2 Nights
 20 Tuticorin, Tiruchendur
 21 Sattankulam, Tandupattu, Kanyakumari
 22 Suchindram, Nagerkoil, Valliyur, Nanguneri, Seranmadevi, Ambasamudram
 23 Senkottai, Tenkasi, Kutralam
 24 Vasudevanallur, Rajapalayam - 2 Nights
 26 Srivilliputtur, T.Kallupatti, Madurai
 27 Vadipatti, Chinnalapatti, Dindukkal
 28 Palani, Udumalaipettai, Pollachi
 29 Nallepilli (Kerala border), Palghat
 30 Malampuzha, Coimbatore - 2 Nights
 Aug 01 Avinasi, Tirumuruganpoondi, Tiruppur
 02 Chennimalai, Perundurai, Erode - 2 Nights
 04 Tiruchengode, Namakkal, Karur
 05 Kulithalai, Tiruparaithurai, Trichy
 06 Tiruverumbur, Tanjavur
 07 Kumbakonam
 08 Kuthalam, Mayiladuthurai, Sirkazhi, Chidambaram - 2 Nights
 10 Vriddachalam, Attur, Salem - 2 Nights
 12 Omalur, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri
 13 Vaniyambadi, Gudiyattam, Vellore
 14 Chittoor
 15 Tirupati - 2 Nights
 17 Tiruchanur, Kalahasti, Tirutani, Arakonam
 18 Kanchipuram
 19 Sriperumbudur, Chennai - 5 Nights
 24 Tambaram, Chengalpattu, Madurandagam, Vandavasi
 25 Desur, Madam, Thellar - 2 Nights
 27 Tindivanam, Pondicherry - 2 Nights
 29 Villianur, Villupuram
 30 Tirukoilur, Tiruvannamalai

The towns in bold are where night halts are planned. Those desirous of participating in the Yatra are requested to contact one of the following:

Sri P. Lohanatha Raja - 04563-231258

Sri Sivadas Krishnan - 94440-18070

Sri Chandramouli - 94432-37200

BOOK REVIEWS

AN AMERICAN IN KHADI: The Definitive Biography of Satyanand Stokes by Asha Sharma. 1994. Pub: Penguin Books. pp.426, Rs395.

This is the fascinating story of Satyanand Stokes whom Gandhiji described as “an American who has naturalized as a British subject and who has made India a home in a manner in which perhaps no other American or Englishman has.” Asha Sharma, the author of this comprehensive biography, is the grand daughter of Stokes and as such evidences an inwardness with the subject which helps her immensely without that help hindering the objectivity necessary for a biographer.

Stokes “came from America,” she says, “but India became his true home. He fought for India’s independence alongside Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, earning the distinction of being the only American to serve on the All-India Congress Committee and to be jailed by the British in its cause.”

This is, however, only one facet of Stokes’ versatile nature. Initially he came to work in a leper home in Sahathu, a small town of Punjab in the Simla hills. Stokes hailed from an affluent family of Philadelphia and economic ambitions never goaded him. Differing from the ethos of proselytizing, he loved India for the opportunity it gave for service. The implicit spiritual urge was reinforced by a deep visionary experience of Christ. “He spoke,” says the author, “of having seen with ‘convincing clearness’ a vision of Jesus Christ ‘toil-worn and travel-stained’ trudging on foot along an Indian high-road.”

This epiphanic vision impacted on him so intensely that not only did he give up his Western clothes going in for Khadi (indeed, in the cover photograph, he

appears as any *pahârî!*) but realized that he *had* to “give up everything beyond what was necessary for wholesome food and a garment to cover him.” In short, *tyâga* and *sêva* took deep root.

Thus began, as Asha Sharma puts it, “the story of a *sahib* becoming a *sadhu*” culminating in converting to Hinduism and, that too, as a Vedantist. Settling in Simla Hills (1904), he married a local Pahârî girl and, what is more, radically transformed the economy of the Hills by introducing the Delicious variety of apples into the region. Today, says the author, “Himachal Pradesh is called the Apple State of India and Stokes the Johnny Applesseed of India.”

Stokes contemplated far-ranging changes in the economy of the region much before any were thought of. In her chapter on “Marketing the Fruits”, Asha Sharma traces the remarkable way in which Stokes fought for better amenities and economic concessions for labour but exhorted his family (“the wealthiest in the region then”) to make every activity “a means to the common good.” “In the deepest sense,” he declared, “it is not yours; you, our family, are its custodians for the common good.”

Obviously, the Gandhian ethic of trusteeship had an impact on Satyanand. But even when the author’s portrayal of Stokes’ crucial role in the Gandhian movement comes through vividly, there is also an interesting chapter on “Debates with Gandhi.”

“. . . despite his deep regard and admiration for Gandhi, Stokes was unable to accept all his views *carte blanche*.” Stokes “believed that it was the spirit in which a particular act was carried out which determined whether it was an act of violence or non-violence.” And an act of violence could as well be “in reality the

expression of a thought free from all hatred and passion” in the world of *nāma-rūpa* [name and form]. Asha Sharma is exceptionally illuminating in this chapter in the context of the Gandhian ideology and its relevance.

Above everything else, it is Stokes’ inner quest that seems to me the most fascinating facet of this absorbing biography. The chapter on Stokes “The Vedantist” is the highlight of this aspect and Asha Sharma’s study of Stokes’ spiritual growth [and its relatively torment-free nature in comparison with Sw. Abhishiktānanda’s (Fr. Henri Le Saux) owing to his background], will be of special interest since the Swami “had close contact with Sri Ramana Maharshi.” Interfaith and its “creative incubation” are portrayed with subtlety and insight.

In short, Asha Sharma’s meticulously researched and definitive study of this remarkable person is indispensable study for all those interested in the encounters of cultures and their implications for individuals.

— M. Sivarāmkrishna

DANCING WITH THE VOID: by Sunyata. 2001. Pub: Blue Dove Press, 4204 Sorrento Valley Blvd., San Diego, CA92121. pp xliii+279, \$17.95.

Sūnyatā, ‘a rare-born mystic’ danced blissfully in the Void, the Silence in the invisible Real. The Void is the root of all forms, says the author. The wisdom of Sūnyatā is patent in the pages. Born in Denmark, Sūnyatā was named Emmanuel by his parents. From infancy he was ego-free and ‘awared’ the indwelling Christ Consciousness. In 1930 he came to India, where he met Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru. In 1938 he visited Ramana Maharshi. This book records his experiences in detail.

Ramana Maharshi was to Sūnyatā the living embodiment of all that is great in India. He remarked, “Never before I awared such a radiance in any human form”. The author speaks well about the Buddha, Milarepa, Kabir, C.G. Jung in

separate chapters. On the spiritual path, ‘nothing is me’ is the first step. ‘Everything is me’ is the next. Ego is not real. Our nature is the Self. We are I here and now, claims Sūnyatā. Spiritual life is a matter of mystic conscious innerstanding. It is body-free, dharma-free and līla-free awareness. Sūnyatā terms self-realisation as ‘zero experience without interpretation.’ Empathy, *mahākaruna*, Grace and *prajñāna* are terms pertaining to non-dual advaita-experiencing.

Looking into Ramana’s eyes he ‘awared Eternity’. ‘Awareness is all’; that is ‘*tat tvam asi*’ proclaims Sūnyatā. The Maharshi’s eyes told him without words, ‘Grace, Peace, and Spiritual Freeness’. ‘The light in His eyes convey the truth that sets us free’ is the experience of Sūnyatā. [In all humility he addresses villain Ego as ‘egoji’]. Mental duality is ego. Ego’s death is described in Chapter 27. Awareness, Silence and ego-free Stillness alone are needed in spiritualism. Then one can understand *ānanda*, which is our birthright.

Buddhism and *advaita* flower out from the wisdom of Sūnyatā.

— Dr. T.N. Pranathārthi Haran

IN SEARCH OF HINDUISM: Pub: Srī Aurobindo’s Action, Srī Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 605002. pp56, Rs30.

MAHASARASWATI: Pub: Kalai Arangam: N/5 Adyar Apartments, Kottur Gardens, Chennai 600085. pp62, Rs.? Both by Prema Nandakumar.

The first is a booklet of essays collected under the theme of a North-South cultural harmony in India through all ages. On the basis of numerous references the author views Hinduism as a tapestry formed of the cross threads of the Vēdic cults and Shramanic (Jain and Buddhist) Āgamic worship and bhakti cults, which have absorbed the cultural aspects of invasions and in turn positively inoculate the exclusivist infusions themselves.

Hindus adopted worship at their shrines to Tulukka Nātchiār (goddess as Islam), while Akbar inscribed Christ’s teachings in the central bay of the Jama Masjid. Christian paintings depict the Virgin with *tilak* on her forehead. The *Sīra Purānam* in Tamil by Umaru *pulavar* (*poet*) describes the city of Madurai while depicting Mecca, and the Sangam Tamil ecology while painting the picture of Arabia. Many Hindus, Muslims and Christians in south India profess faith in horoscope, *rāhu kalam*, wearing bangles and flowers etc. Patriarchal Islam becomes matriarchal in Kerala. Indeed this is the land of the Madhu Vidya in daily life, turning ‘all things to honey’. In forest, field, town or palace material living is culturally, even if unconsciously, rooted in the supreme Self. The labourer Sūdra, the cosmic Foot of organic society, may be ‘lowly’ according to scholarly vested interest fanning continuing division, but Feet are the high point of personified worship in Hinduism. Instances of the visible role of the ‘higher members’ in society empowering the untouchables, continue to be plentiful though downplayed.

Mahāsaraswatī appeared first serialized in *Srī Aurobindo’s Action* during 2001, and celebrates the universality of worshipping the supreme as perfection in Knowledge. One of the Vēdic triad (along with Ila and Mahi), Saraswatī is the power of Truth. She is the supreme Self appearing as four-fold Vāk (Silence, ego, thought, and sense). She is Goddess of Learning celebrated in Buddhist and Jain literature too. She ‘flows through’ the *Mahābhārata* in the Bhishma, Parasurāma, Balarāma, and Vasishtha-Viswāmītra legends. She resides in Temple and Srī Vidyā as goddess Sārādā, and is an abiding inspiration to the classical devotional traditions of southern India, including the great composers, and the line of poet saints of Telugu and Kannada and Tamil, down to Subramania Bhārati.

— J.Jayarāman

THE YOGA VASISHTA: tr. K.N. Subramanian. Pub: Sura Books, 1620, J Block, 16th Main, Anna Nagar, Chennai 600040. pp588, Rs250.

A welcome and faithful translation of the *Laghu Y.V.* with verse number reference to the original and following traditional commentaries. The translator, long devoted to Vasishtha’s *Y.V.* embracing all approaches to Self, has also given a 26-page synopsis of the 216 chapters forming the second half of the final section of the source book, the *Brhat Y.V.* This section being a quarter of the whole work, and forming certain concluding discourses of Vasishtha, was omitted by Abhinanda Pandita the author of the *Laghu* who compiled it from the original *Brhat Y.V.* The translation of the full cycle of Prānāyāma given by Bhusunda Maharshi falls short as do most available translations. [Sw. Venkatēsānanda’s translation, an excellent condensation of the *Brhat* is once again available in Indian edition from The Divine Life Society, Rishikesh].

— J.Jayarāman

OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

SRĪ RAMANA LEELA: (tr. from Krishna Bhikshu’s Telugu, by Pingali Sundaram). Srī Ramanāsrāmam. pp316, Rs.80.

[*A long standing void has now been filled with the translation of the Telugu biography into simple, elegant English. The Telugu work went into some editions even during Bhagavān’s lifetime. Its worth lies in the finer details Bhikshu provides everywhere, and especially of the early childhood and the post-death-experience persona of the young sage placed, without mundane moorings, in ‘God’.*]

ISWARA GĪTHAI: Siva’s comprehensive teaching to the Rishis, with Vishnu by his side; from Kūrma Purāna. Tamil verses of Tattvarāyar. With paraphrase (and metrical notation to aid chanting), by J.Jayarāman. Pub: Srī Ramanāsrāmam. pp195, Rs40.



124th Jayanti at Ashram

The 124th Jayanti of Sri Bhagavan was celebrated with devotion at the ashram on 8th January. The Ramananjali group, Bangalore, gave a concert of light music on the 7th evening. The ashram was gaily decorated with flowers and festoons. Devotees heartily greeted each other. The ashram was full by the evening of the 7th.

The 8th morning was witness to a soulful *parayana* of *Ramana Stuti Panchakam* followed by the chanting of *Chatvarimshat*, the scholarly and moving poem of Kavyakantha

Ganapati Muni in praise of Bhagavan. After breakfast the *Mahanyasa Rudrabhishekam* was performed, followed by elaborate decoration with garlands and flowers. After the *Sahasranama archana*, the *Arati* came off at 11 a.m.

As usual, a special pandal was erected at Kurangu Thottam for feeding *sadhus*. Devotees were also treated to special lunch.

In the afternoon, Sakkubhai Srinivasan and party from Bangalore gave a programme of Ramana music. In the evening again, special *abhishekam* and worship were

performed to Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam. The after dinner concert was a saxophone recital by Kadiri Gopalnath.

Sri Bhagavan's powerful presence and grace, as usual, overwhelmed the devotees.

Sri Vidya Havan at Ashram

Sri Vidya Havan has been performed annually at the ashram in the Tamil month of *Panguni* (Feb-March) to commemorate the conducting of *Sri Chakra pujas*. As notified in the Deepam issue, the *havan* is being conducted in January from this

year. On the 29th, devotees of Bhagavan and of the Mother Goddess gathered in large numbers at the ashram to participate in this elaborate ritual which take about ten hours to complete. The *havan* is performed outside Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi, behind Sri Bhagavan's Nirvana room.

The main items of the programme are: *Navavarana puja*, *Lalita Sahasranama Homa*, *Lalita Trisati Homa*, *Kanya Puja* and *Suvasini Puja*. The *Arati* at 4 p.m. was the grand finale. Ten varieties of materials are offered as oblation to the sacrificial fire including coins, clothes etc.

Trekking on Arunachala

In late December 2003, the Collector of Tiruvannamalai, Mr Dheeraj Kumar, appealed to the public through the press not to trek the Arunachala hill at Tiruvannamalai from January to June in order to protect the thick growth of *manjam pul* (yellow grass) and other plants raised under the greening project taken up by the Tiruvannamalai Greening Society.

Mr. Kumar, who is also the president of the society, said it was necessary to prevent fires as part of a greening project. Three persons who set fire to a plantation near Skandashram on the hills were apprehended. Forest personnel also put out fires caused to the plantations by some people during the Karthigai Deepam festival in December.

One lakh saplings had been planted on 125 hectares on the Arunachala hill and the society and the Forest Department personnel are protecting them. It therefore becomes necessary to prohibit people from trekking the hills in order to prevent fires and protect the growth of the saplings and the yellow grass.

The Collector has said that if climbing the hills was inevitable, the public could do so after getting permission from the Forest Department. They were requested not to carry with them any flammable material. The Forest Department could be informed on phone (254018) when the public notices smoke or fire on the hills.

This does not however restrict devotees from visiting Skandasramam

or Virupaksha cave, the two abodes of Sri Bhagavan on the hill. These two places are managed by Sri Ramanasramam. The order also does not prevent people from going round the hill along the inner path which runs close to the hill.

Arunachala Ashrama Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Centre

Sri V. S. Ramanan, President of Sri Ramanasramam and many of his family members in the USA joined devotees in America for the 124th Jayanti celebrations on December 27th in New York. Also Jayanti programs were conducted in Ottawa and Toronto, Canada, Atlanta, GA, Freemont, CA, and Boston, MA. A strong familial bond pervaded, as devotees pondered the birth of Bhagavan in their Hearts.

Obituary

M.V. Ramanachalam

Sri M.V. Ramanachalam slept in Bhagavan at Madurai in the early morning of 3rd September 2003. He was 82 years old. His father was a devotee and playmate of Bhagavan and he had the good fortune of being in Bhagavan's company during the frequent visits by the entire family to the ashram. Bhagavan presented him with a walking stick which he always treasured. He had seen in early 1923 with a child's eye, Bhagavan as a blazing column of light. As an adult he came as often as possible to receive Bhagavan's darshan. In later life he would sing Arunachala Aksharamanamalai twice a day. They were the

last words on his lips prior to his final rest in Bhagavan.



He was a very fine, humble and honourable devotee and is much missed by those privileged to have known him.

Doris Williamson

Doris Williamson passed away on 29th November 2003 in Sydney, Australia after being afflicted with excruciating bodily pains for the past thirteen years which she faced with great fortitude and humour. During this time she was very much aware of Ramana's words concerning the body. "The dead are indeed happy. They have got rid of the troublesome overgrowth—the body." (Talk 64) She was a living pointer for us to enquire into the source of the mind. She gave herself completely to the quest. Devotees would remember her from the late seventies and early eighties when Doris stayed in the ashram in the building 'Usha' which she donated to the ashram.

Ellenrose Miller

Ellenrose Parshall Miller, also known as Sadhana Saraswati, a loving devotee of Bhagavan passed away on 23rd December 2003 at

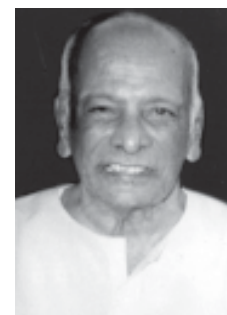
Tiruvannamalai. She was active in the Vedanta Society, Ramakrishna Mission, California, USA.



She was a resident of Ramanagar for the past few years. As per her wishes she breathed her last at Tiruvannamalai and was cremated there. When she arrived at the ashram a few years ago, she recognised that she had found her spiritual home and she is now absorbed in Arunachala.

M.K. Subramanian

Sri M.K. Subramanian attained the lotus feet of Lord Arunachaleswara on 6th January 2004. He was 83 years old.



He was closely associated with Vijnana Ramaneeya Ashram, Palakkad, since 1947. With his demise the ashram has lost a great devotee.

AFTERWORD

The Swami and Dosas

A swami sat under a tree in meditation and minding his own business. Along came a villager who, for some reason was enraged by the sight of this peaceful man and he started to goad him.

“What good are you doing by sitting like that?, he demanded.

The swami did not reply.

“Have you nothing to say for yourself? Can’t you even justify your actions? Do you suppose that anyone is better off for your behaviour?”

Still no word from the swami who sat as though the man who was shouting at him did not exist. This aggravated the villager even more. From being annoying he started to become very rude. Terrible invective was hurled at the silent man and he was called the worst and most insulting names. Even the crowd that had naturally gathered around was shocked and remonstrated with the angry villager, to no effect. He now treated it as a challenge and his foul language and abuse grew wilder and more and more vulgar.

At last the swami opened his eyes and decided to respond. Every time the man called him a bad name the swami replied by naming some delicious food. The man called him a filthy pig. The swami said, “Masala dosa.”

The man called him a dog, the swami said, “Payasam.”

The man called him the son of a donkey, the swami said, “Vadai.”

The crowd became fascinated. They asked, “Why oh swamiji? When that man calls you such bad names why do you reply by naming tasty food?”

The swami replied, “Whatever that man says, he has to swallow. Whatever I say I have to swallow.” ▲



