

CONTENTS

RAMANA ASHTOTTARAM	2
EDITORIAL: Whatever Happened to Simplicity?	3
RAMANA MAHARSHI: HIS LIFE: Gabriele Ebert	7
KEYWORD: SUMMA IRU	16
ULLADU NARPADU VERSE FIVE: S. Ram Mohan	19
BHAGAVAN'S INFINITE GRACE: Ram Natesh	23
BHAGAVAN AND THAYUMANAVAR TWO: Robert Butler	31
JOURNEY OF FAITH: Niall Anglin	47
SRI RAMANA: FRIEND OF ANIMALS: Michael Highburger	53
HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON: T.V. Ramamurthy	63
WHAT IS SELF ENQUIRY?: Patrick Roberts	69
ADVAITA PRIMER: John Grimes	73
THE SIVA PURANA: Ramesh Menon	77
YOGA AND SANKHYA: Rolf Skarnitzl	89
RENE GUENON: Cecil Bethell	95
BOOK EXCERPT: MAN AND HIS BECOMING: Rene Guenon	103
OZHIVIL ODUKKAM: Kannudaya Vallalaar	110
BOOK REVIEWS	120
ASHRAM BULLETIN	123

Ramana Ashtottaram

22. *Om Tapomayaya namaha.*

Prostration to the One who was all *tapas*, whose entire being was *tapas*.

The key to understanding Bhagavan's teaching is to recognise their practical nature. They have a specific purpose: all his teachings are meant to free us from our ignorance.

Tapas literally means austerity; concentrated discipline; energy; to 'heat up' from the verb root *tap* = 'to burn'. It is a burning enquiry and aspiration. It is the spiritual force of concentrated energy generated by a spiritual aspirant. By the power of *tapas* we put into action and live his teachings.

Bhagavan epitomises the supreme accomplishment of *tapas*. He is effortless *tapas*.

23. *Om Udāsīnāya namaha.*

Prostration to the One who is seated high above.

Bhagavan abides in pure Being, unattached and uninvolved in the world without and radiantly happy within. In the same way, when we are on top of Arunachala looking down on all the activities of the world, we are aware of but detached from the multitude of actions far below us.

24. *Om Mahayogine namaha.*

Prostration to the great yogi, the one whose whole being is in the Self.

The summit of yoga is total abidance as the Self. Bhagavan is a mahayogi in the lineage of Dakshinamurti. He represents the perfect ascetic in whom is illustrated the perfection of austerity, penance and meditation.

The state of the mahayogi who has silenced his mind is the state of abiding in the very root of knowledge. It is there he abides harmoniously in the unmanifested source of manifestation.

EDITORIAL

Whatever Happened to Simplicity?

All the letters in this book add up to a single, imperishable letter. This as written you have read. The single letter shines for ever of its own accord within the heart. Who can hope to write it?

— Sri Ramana Maharshi.

THE Mountain Path is dedicated to Ramana Maharshi who epitomised simplicity. What, after all could be simpler than the distilled wisdom of Advaita expressed as 'Who am I?' We all, in our various ways, are trying to learn from him and to follow in his footsteps. Simplicity should equate with innocence, but there seems to be a very real danger that we confuse innocence with ignorance. Putting down on paper a series of difficult and unusual words is possibly clever, but certainly not user friendly nor easy to read. Anyone with access to a dictionary and a Thesaurus can make things complicated; it takes much more skill to write simply.

It is a pleasure, or should be, to read what can be spoken. The fact that it is written down is merely a convenience. 'Literature' or mystical teachings are not necessarily a different language involving the sort of vocabulary that no one uses in everyday speech. Simplicity has been thrown out of the window and readability has been sacrificed

to verbosity, art to artifice. The great writers through the ages almost all advocated a simple style. They were more concerned with what they wanted to say than in impressing their readers with their knowledge of an exotic vocabulary and complex sentence structure. Sometimes, like Shakespeare for instance, they are not easy to understand today, but they were very fluent and topical in their own time.

When we read the writings of acknowledged masters in spirituality there is accessibility to their thoughts. The purpose is to elucidate not to obscure. They are concerned with us, their audience and with their desire to help us, rather than with showing us how many complicated words they know. This could be our litmus test when we read: are we illumined by what we read or are we confused? If the latter, it is best to put the text away. If the former we should take the words to heart and learn from them.

The founder of the Mountain Path, Arthur Osborne, was an M.A. from Christ Church, Oxford. He rarely used a long word when a short one would do. But then, he was confident of his erudition and had nothing to prove in that respect. One could do worse than follow his example.

Winston Churchill, who was a powerful and pithy writer, maintained that short words are best. Particularly old Anglo-Saxon words as opposed to Latin words. He was once asked to look over a speech written by an American friend and give his opinion.

His comment was that if he had written 'We will engage in hostilities with the enemy on the peripheral coastline of the island' it would not have had as much impact as 'We will fight them on the beaches.'

When we read Bhagavan's teachings there is a directness to his words which catches at the heart: we instinctively know that what we read are words of truth. There is a world of difference between the teachings and writings of one who is authentic and the one who fashions clever explanations increasingly complex and elaborate to prove their pet theory. With Bhagavan we know he does not need to

prove anything. He simply states things as they are and even those with the least education among us understands the depth of wisdom in those seemingly ordinary words.

There is a well-known verse from the Bible, Ecclesiastes, King James Version:

'I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.'

This is strong and punchy. George Orwell made exactly the point when he re-translated it and thereby drained it of its blood.

Here is Orwell's version:

'Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must inevitably be taken into account.'

It is now over fifty years since Bhagavan left this physical world and his words are still fresh in our minds. Imagine what their impact was seventy or eighty years ago! Imagine the reception his words received in the early days of the twentieth century when he used the analogy of the cinema to describe the functioning of maya and our sense of identification with the world. How much longer we can expect his words to create their impact on future generations remains to be seen. With the passing of time well intentioned commentators use Bhagavan's writings to 'explain' to us what they mean. There is therefore a danger Bhagavan's words will be devalued. We should keep this in mind and not presume that because we are familiar with the words Bhagavan uses that we also understand what he is saying. If we are true to his teachings his writings will guide us into the silent realm which passes understanding.

Once in the forest the Buddha was asked by one of his disciples to explain the workings of karma. The Buddha took in his hand a snatch

of leaves and said to the disciple: ‘What is greater, the number of leaves in my hand or those on the floor of the forest in which we sit?’

The disciple replied the leaves on the floor of the forest.

The Buddha then said, “In the same way, what I teach you is but the small number of teachings necessary for you to be liberated from the cycle of life and death.”

The implication of this dialogue is that there are many teachings available but they are not necessary if we wish to be liberated.

In the same way Bhagavan did not encourage pointless curiosity. He constantly returned the questioner to the fact of his or her own existence and the sense of ‘I’. His devotees would sometimes jokingly request Bhagavan not to use his *Brahma astra* (the most lethal weapon available to the Puranic gods) but, to please satisfy their craving to know something that really had nothing to do with the teachings. Bhagavan would laugh and, would according to the appropriateness of the situation, indulge their fancy.

The ideal of true knowledge is to see Truth face to face, without any intermediary. But how can we convey or receive the Truth? We are forced to employ words which point, imply, coax us to see for ourselves. Thought is mental speech, so it is already symbolism rather than perception: it is a necessary but limited tool. The best we can hope for is the flash of trans-verbal understanding. Like a spring-board the words propel us to see truly. There is a mysterious alchemy that takes us beyond the boundaries of convention and the familiar into the seemingly dark world that transcends name and form.

Words by themselves cannot do it. It requires from us a commitment to understand in the full sense of the word. To understand we need to be humble and ready to listen to that still quiet voice forever hovering at the periphery of our everyday consciousness. Bhagavan’s words are superb tools that aid us in this search to know who we are. Let us directly return to them as often as it is necessary, so that we too may dive into that universe of silence, understanding and bliss that Bhagavan demonstrated to us every moment of his life. ▲

Ramana Maharshi: His Life

Daily Life at the Ashram

GABRIELE EBERT

The following is an English translation by Victor Ward of Chapter Twelve from the German Ramana Maharshi: Sein Leben. Published by Luchow Verlag: Stuggart, 2003.

Let activities go on. They do not affect the pure Self.

The present difficulty is that the man thinks that he is the doer. But it is a mistake. It is the Higher Power which does everything and the man is only a tool. If he accepts that position he is free from troubles; otherwise he courts them.

— See *Talks* 111 & 63

Ordered Daily Routine

LIFE at the Ashram was extremely well-ordered. Tidiness, cleanliness, thrift and punctuality were expected from everyone. Arthur Osborne remarked, “Bhagavan Sri Ramana was meticulously

Gabriele Ebert works as a librarian in southern Germany. She came in contact with Bhagavan fourteen years ago. She read all the literature available and decided to make Bhagavan more readily available in her own language. After three years of diligent work she completed a biography of Bhagavan which was then accepted by a German publisher.

exact, closely observant, practical and humorous. His daily life was conducted with a punctiliousness that Indians today would have to call pure Western. In everything he was precise and orderly. The Ashram Hall was swept out several times daily. The books were always in their places. The cloths covering the couch were scrupulously clean and beautifully folded. The loin-cloth, which was all he wore, was gleaming white. The two clocks in the Hall were adjusted daily to radio time. The calendar was never allowed to fall behind the date. The routine of life flowed to a regular pattern.”¹

In the later years, when Ramana had ceased working in the kitchen and had started to supervise the building projects, his timetable was as follows — he would rise at approximately 3.30 a.m., at half past five he took his bath and at half past six breakfast was served. This was followed by the first walk on the hill. At 8.30 he read the incoming mail and at 9.45 he made a short visit to the cowshed. Lunch was served at 11.30. Around midday he went for a second walk, which this time lasted an hour and took him to Palakothu. At 2:30 p.m. there was coffee and at approximately 4 p.m. he read the outgoing mail. Half an hour later he again went for a walk for an hour. After this the Veda parayana was chanted, followed by the Tamil parayana. At half past seven the bell called everyone to dinner. Afterwards Ramana went to the cowshed again and at 8.45 p.m. all devotees retired to their lodgings.

It is reported that Sri Ramana slept very little at night. He also never lay down flat, but remained upright, leaning against the back of the couch. After lunch everyone in the Ashram liked to withdraw to take a nap – not so Ramana. He often made use of this quiet hour to feed the animals or make a round through the Ashram and inform himself of the progress of the building projects.

In spite of the increasing numbers of visitors Sri Ramana led an active life. In addition to cooking and supervising the building projects, he read the proofs of the books which were to be published.

By now his works had been translated and printed in a number of Indian dialects. He had written his famous hymns to Arunachala around 1914. From 1923 to 1929 he wrote *Upadesa Saram* (The Essence of Instruction in 30 Verses), *Upadesa Manjari* (Spiritual Instruction) and *Ulladu Narpadu* (Reality in Forty Verses) with supplementary verses. This was followed in the thirties and forties by various translations into Tamil, Malayam and Telugu of important advaita scriptures, such as certain parts of *Vivekachudamani* and other scriptures by Shankara, some verses of the Bhagavad Gita and parts of *Yoga Vasishtha* and the *Agamas*. The English translations of all these works can be found in *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. So Ramana regularly spent a lot of time proof-reading these publications. He also read everything that was written about him and was very particular that everything should be accurate. When a biography was to be published about him in Telugu, entitled *Ramana Leela*, he painstakingly went through it correcting any mistakes.

He was equally conscientious in the way he dealt with the incoming and outgoing mail. He read all the incoming letters and although he never answered letters himself, as others did this for him, he carefully read through the outgoing mail and made corrections if need be or gave instructions as to how the answer should be phrased.

He also did bookbinding work. Now and then people would bring him old books in poor condition. He checked whether they were complete, added any missing pages by copying them out himself and inserting them, and then repaired the books.

Just as he never wasted any food, so he also never wasted any paper. He would collect any paper which was still usable, often cutting it up into small sheets, which he would then bind together to make notebooks. Even the pins from the newspapers would be kept. “They will otherwise be merely thrown away. We shall use them. How should we get new ones? They have to be bought. Where is the money?”, he would say.

The regular walks were also a fixed part of the daily routine, though they became shorter as the number of visitors increased and the

¹ A. Osborne: *Ramana-Arunachala*, p. 17.

various building projects were commenced. In the later years especially, he was not able to put a foot outside the door without being accompanied by a small crowd of people. Solitary walks on the hill had become impossible, although at times he managed to slip away without letting anyone know, as soon as people noticed, they all wanted to come with him. As happened one day when he wanted to go up to Skandashram alone. The result was a kind of mass migration. When he was asked by his devotees to climb to the top of the hill with them, as he knew the way best, he replied jokingly, "If I come, everyone in the Ashram will join me. Even the buildings will come with us!"

In the later years the restrictions became so great that he could no longer move around freely. Everything was governed by a timetable. A barrier was erected to prevent people touching him. He called this enclosure his 'cage'. "They have put bars around me, though wooden, as in the gaol. I may not cross these bars. There are people specially deputed to watch me and they keep watch on me by turns. I can't move about as I like; they are there to prevent it. One person goes and another comes according to turns. What is the difference between these people and the police except that the former are not in uniform? ... Even if I want to go out to answer calls of nature, they must follow me to protect me. Even my going out must be according to the scheduled time."²

In the early years Sri Ramana attempted on a couple of occasions to leave the Ashram for a life of solitude. Vasudeva (the same who once witnessed Ramana's second death experience at Tortoise rock) relates, "Once Bhagavan and I went round the hill during the Skandashram days. When we arrived near Esanya math about 8.30 a.m., Bhagavan sat on a rock and said with tears in his eyes that he would never again come to the Ashram and would go where he pleased and live in the forests or caves away from all men. I would not leave him and he would not come. It became very late. We went there about 8 or 8:30 a.m. and even when it became 1 p.m. we were

still in this deadlock. Bhagavan asked me to go into the town and eat my food and then come back if I wanted. But I was afraid that if I went Bhagavan would go away somewhere."³ Finally the Swami of Esanya math passed and invited Ramana to the math. With that the escape attempt was foiled and he had no other choice than to return to Skandashram with Vasudeva.

Sri Ramana also reports two other escape attempts, "Another time too I wanted to run away from all this crowd and live somewhere unknown, freely as I liked. That was when I was in Virupaksha Cave. ... But on that occasion my plans were frustrated by Yogananda Swami. I tried to be free on a third occasion also. That was after mother's passing away. I did not want to have even an ashram like Skandashram and the people that were coming there then. But the result has been this ashram [Ramanashram] and all the crowd here. Thus all my three attempts failed."⁴

When someone remarked that Sri Ramana could leave the Ashram when he liked, he replied, "What can I do? If I go off to the forest and try to hide, what will happen? They will soon find me out. Then someone will put up a hut in front of me and another person one at the back, and it will not be long before huts will have sprung up on either side. Where can I go? I shall always be a prisoner."⁵

Another fixed part of the daily schedule was the chanting of the Veda parayana. At first, Brahmin boys used to come from town to do the chanting. Later, with the assistance of Major Chadwick, the ashram opened its own Veda school (*patasala*), which still exists today.

The chanting of the Vedas in the morning and evening lasted around 40 minutes. Texts from the Vedas were recited, as well as other Sanskrit texts, such as for example the *Forty Verses in Praise of Ramana* by Ganapati Muni and Sri Ramana's *Arunachala Pancharatna*

³ Devaraja Mudaliar, *Day by Day*, pp. 275ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁵ Alan Chadwick, *A Sadhu's Reminiscences*, p. 93.

² Suri Nagamma, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 366.

and *Upadesa Saram*. This was then followed by the Tamil Parayana with other works by Sri Ramana.

Strictly speaking only Brahmins are allowed to be present at the Veda Parayana, but Sri Ramana wanted everyone to participate, so Brahmins sat next to non-Brahmins and Indians next to Westerners.

The Maharshi attached great importance to this chanting, stressing its calming effect upon the mind. If he was asked if people should not also understand the texts, he would say that it was not necessary, it was sufficient to use them as an aid to meditation. He himself would sit upright on his couch during the chanting, his eyes taking on a faraway look.

The Ashram Management

The various Ashram rules had to be followed by all. For example it was considered important that men and women should sit in separate areas in the Hall. Women were not allowed to stay in the Ashram overnight. In general only those who worked in the Ashram were allowed to live there. Anyone who wanted to meditate could take up residence at the Palakothu sadhu colony, but they had to take care of themselves. Families lived in Ramana Nagar, a settlement near the Ashram. The rich devotee Gounder (the same one who had offered the first couch to Sri Ramana) had purchased the area for this purpose. So in the Ashram itself there was only accommodation for visitors and devotees who worked there, with one or two exceptions, such as, for example, Major Chadwick, Devaraja Mudaliar and Yogi Ramiah.

Sri Ramana left the management of the Ashram to his brother. As sarvadhikari, Chinnaswami endeavoured to retain full control over everything that happened there. This frequently led to arguments with devotees who disagreed with his decisions. But whatever was eventually decided had to be accepted by all. If someone complained to Sri Ramana about Chinnaswami, the Maharshi protected his brother and never reversed his decisions.

If a devotee was guilty of a serious breach of the management rules, he could be banned from entering the Ashram, but this was

generally only a temporary exclusion. It was enough to apologize or to promise to abide by the rules in future, to be allowed to return.

There was no point in complaining to Sri Ramana, as he never interfered in such disputes. When Ganapati Sastri (not to be confused with Ganapati Muni) was banished from the Ashram, he complained to Sri Ramana, “Chinnaswami has told me not to come to the Ashram. Bhagavan is just sitting like a stone Vinayaka statue. I have served the Ashram for a long time. I have also donated three almiras (cupboards) full of books to the Ashram. Will Bhagavan not ask Chinnaswami why he is not allowing me to come to the Ashram?”⁶ But he received no answer to his complaint.

Whenever someone wanted to interfere in Ashram affairs Ramana would warn, “People walk up the drive to the Ashram in search of deliverance and then get caught up in Ashram politics and forget what they came for. If such matters were their concern they need not have come to Tiruvannamalai for them.”⁷ And to enthusiastic reformers he advised that it would be sufficient for them to reform themselves.

If conflicts were brought to him to settle he would answer, “If people with different opinions give up their *mouna* (silence) which is the embodiment of love, and come to me and say, ‘We will do this,’ and ‘We will do that,’ and enquire of me what I like better of the two, what can I say? If you all agree upon a course of action and then ask me for my opinion, I will then say it is all right. But when you are of two opinions, why do you come to me and ask me which I like the better? What I like is to know who I am and to remain as I am with the knowledge that what is to happen will happen and what is not to happen will not happen. Is that not right? Do you now understand what Bhagavan likes best?”⁸

⁶ D. Godman, *Living by the Words*, p. 199.

⁷ A. Osborne, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, p. 120.

⁸ S. Nagamma, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 385.

There were, however, cases when the Maharshi raised objections. When, for example, the ashram management decided to close the doors of the Hall for two hours after lunch because of his weakened health, he protested by leaving the Hall and sitting outside to welcome the visitors, commenting, “The management is welcome to close the doors but I am free to meet the visitors here.” In cases such as this, where the decision of the management meant that his devotees were prevented from coming to him for a time or if it would lead to some injustice, he could be uncompromising, saying, “You can look after your ashram. I am going back to the hill.”

Sri Ramana’s Personal Attendants

Sri Ramana’s personal attendants were chosen by Chinna-swami. Ramana himself never asked anyone to serve him, nor ever sent away an attendant who had been allotted to him. It became the tradition in the Ashram that the attendants were always young unmarried men. Annamalai Swami reports, “Once, when a woman who was a qualified nurse from North India volunteered to be an attendant, Bhagavan replied by saying, ‘Ask the people in the Hall’. Krishna-swami, the chief attendant, and some of the other people in the Hall objected. ‘No! No! We cannot have ladies doing service to Bhagavan. It is not proper.’ Bhagavan turned to the woman and said, ‘These people all think like this. What can I do?’”⁹

One of the attendants’ tasks was to receive the food offerings brought by devotees and give some of it back to them as prasadam. They had to be careful that the men sat on one side of the Hall and the women on the other. Whenever Maharshi left the Hall, one of them had to accompany him. The other one stayed back to clean the Hall. The cloths on the couch had to be kept clean. Washing the cloths and preparing warm water for the morning bath was also the duty of the attendants, as was accompanying Ramana on his nightly walks to the toilet. There was, therefore, someone there to be helpful to him round the clock.

⁹ D. Godman, *Living by the Words*, p. 96.

Sri Ramana was strict with his attendants, insisting that they carry out their duties meticulously and punctually. He did not let them get away with anything.

At first, Krishna-swami often used to fail to chase away the monkeys during their raids into the Hall to steal fruit. He was rebuked for this by Sri Ramana. Thereafter Krishna-swami became a keen monkey chaser. He armed himself with a catapult and drove the monkeys away with it as soon as they appeared.

Something similar happened with the attendant Rangaswami, who also failed to chase away the monkeys and instead liked to meditate. Ramana scolded him, “If you want to meditate like this, go somewhere else. If you want to live here you must do service like everyone else. Meditation is contained in your service to the Guru.”¹⁰

One of Sri Ramana’s characteristics was that he never asked for anything. If the attendant did not know what he might need he did not ask for it. He did not want anyone to be troubled on his behalf, not even his attendants. So the attendants were trained to know what Sri Ramana might want, whether it be something to drink, or the wish to wash his hands or read the newspaper – they knew without him having to say it.. They were helped by the fact that there was a fixed time for almost everything.

Major Chadwick tells the story of the betel nut. In this case the attendant’s omission resulted in Ramana simply giving up chewing betel. “One morning Bhagavan was about to go out and was only waiting for the attendant to give him the betel, which was always placed by his side when it was time for his walk. For some reason the attendant did not do it, everybody in the Hall was waiting expectantly but could do nothing about it as the management did not allow anybody to attend on Bhagavan except those who had been specially detailed. Eventually Bhagavan got up and left the Hall without it. From that day on he never chewed again.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹¹ A. Chadwick, *A Sadhu’s Reminiscences*, p. 36.

Although Sri Ramana could be very strict with his attendants, he was also very concerned for their welfare. In summer, when he used to walk to Palakothu between mid-day and 1.30 p.m., the sandy path was so hot that walking barefoot could be very painful. Ramana always walked at the same steady pace, whether it was raining cats and dogs or whether the sun was blazing down, but he used to say to the attendant walking behind him, “Run, run and take shelter under that tree.” Or “Put your upper cloth under your feet and stand on it for a while.”

Similarly Ramana’s concern was extended to Rangaswami, when he had to copy out several pages of a book. “One day Bhagavan asked me if I had completed the job. ‘I do not have the time for it’, I said. ‘What are you doing now?’ he queried. ‘I am going to Palakothu to wash your cod-piece.’ Bhagavan said, ‘Okay, you do my job and I will do yours,’ so saying, he copied the remaining pages.”¹² ▲

¹² A.R. Natarajan, *Unforgettable Years*, p. 53.

KEYWORD

SUMMA IRU

Tamil: *Summa*: Still

Iru: Be

Summa Iru: Be Still; be quiet (or) be as you are.

THE grace of the guru can only function without any impediment when one can ‘be still’ in the true sense of the expression. ‘Being still’ does not mean ‘to be physically inactive’; it is the mind that should dissolve into pure consciousness. When the mind attends to the sense of self it is no more the mind as such, it is the consciousness aspect of the Self (*atma-chit-rupam*).

Our sense of individuality or ego sense generally identifies with our body-mind complex. However, one can discern that our identity is more with the mind than with the body. This can be easily verified by anyone. When one is physically ‘here’ and mentally ‘elsewhere’ such a person is really ‘there’ and not ‘here’ at that point of time. A person is ‘here’ whose mind is united with the body.

Bhagavan says: ‘Mind is nothing but thoughts; “I thought” (ego self) is the root of all thoughts. “I thought” is (therefore) the mind.’¹

So long as latent tendencies (*vasanas*) are present, thoughts will erupt one after another. It is not possible for anyone to be in a state of pure awareness while in the grip of unconscious identification with thoughts.

Bhagavan instructs us to investigate the ‘I thought’ with the pure mind, that is, with the attention withdrawn from objects and turned towards the subject. (See *Arunachala Pancharatnam*) Alternatively he suggests surrender of the mind to Arunachala, the Self or Heart. When one’s mind is thus immersed in the Self without emerging as a separate entity, Grace automatically takes over and dissolves the mind. The ‘I thought’, the root of all thought is lost forever and Self-brightness alone remains.

To ‘be still’ (*summa iru*) is the same as to be established in the Self after the dissolution of the mind, the ego self. Thereafter, who is there to make the effort? The so-called seeker does not exist. The maker of effort has been liquidated and no more effort by way of spiritual practice is possible as an act of will (*iccha*). Like breathing ‘being still’ becomes a spontaneous expression of spiritual activity.

Bhagavan says: ‘When one is immersed in the (everlasting) bliss of the Self effulgence, revealed after the destruction of the ego self, nothing more remains to be done. How can he think of his state of being (which transcends the mind) who knows nothing apart from Himself.’²

¹ *Upadesa Undhiyar*, v. 18.

² *Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 31.

Only such a Self-realised master can ‘be still’ in the true sense. All others though seekers engaged in spiritual practices, perceive, as individuals, things and beings as apart from themselves. It is self-defeating for seekers to refrain from spiritual practices thinking that all they have to do is to ‘be still’ or ‘do nothing’. For their ‘not doing’ is still a form of doing because they think they are performing actions.

‘What our Lord Ramana firmly advises us to take to, as the greatest and most powerful tapas, is only this much, “be still” and not anything else (dhyana yoga etc.) as the duty to be performed by the mind.’³

Sadhana is not doing, but being. Withdrawing attention from external objects both of the world and the mind, and clinging to the first person, ‘I’, alone is sadhana. All that we need to practice is to be still with remembrance of the feeling ‘I’.

Bhagavan: Effortless and choiceless awareness is our real nature. If we can attain it or be in that state, it is all right. But one cannot reach it without effort, the effort of deliberate meditation. All the age-long *vasanas* carry the mind outward and turn it to external objects. All such thoughts have to be given up and the mind turned inward. For that, effort is necessary for most people. Of course everybody, every book says, “Summa Iru” *i.e.*, “Be quiet or still”. But it is not easy. That is why all this effort is necessary. Even if we find one who has at once achieved the *mauna* or Supreme state indicated by “Summa Iru”, you may take it that the effort necessary has already been finished in a previous life. So that, effortless and choiceless awareness, is reached only after deliberate meditation. That meditation can take any form which appeals to you best. See what helps you to keep away all other thoughts and adopt that method for your meditation.⁴ ▲

³ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, v. 773.

⁴ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11th January 1946.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma’s Commentary

verse five

S. RAM MOHAN

The body is made up of five sheaths and hence all these five are meant by the term ‘body’. (Then) does the world exist apart from the body? Is there anyone who has ever seen the world without a body?

Commentary

AS made clear in the fourth verse, since we see ourselves with forms, such objective knowledge as the World and God are also seen with forms. Our bodies become a dividing line between us and the rest of the world. The reference is not merely to the physical body; it refers to the entire psycho-physical complex of our existence.

The truth that the world and the body appear as one and indivisible is conveyed in the latter part of verse five, and this is of profound

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importance, because as a rule, we take no notice of it in our lives; we learn it for the first time from Bhagavan.

There are a great many worlds: the waking world, the dream worlds, the heaven of the inferior gods, hell and so on. Now, whatever world is seen, the seer of it sees in it a particular body as himself. Therefore it was said, at the start of this chapter, that the seer is included in the spectacle, the world. It is a fact of experience known to all that no world can be seen by one who is incorporeal or apparently does not exist in the specific world experienced.

It may be objected that when a person sees a dream world, he does not see it from the perspective of a gross body because the dreamer is physically bodiless at the time: his gross body lies on the bed when the dreams occur. The first half of the verse says that the term 'body' means more than the gross body which is seen in waking; that this body is only one of the five sheaths making up the entirety of the body; there are four other sheaths also comprised in the complete that the body which are subtler in form. The five sheaths are enumerated by Vedantins as the *annamaya*, *pranamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijnanamaya* and *anandamaya koshas* (sheaths); all these together make up the complete body. If any of these are present and functioning, then a particular world is seen.

In the experience of the Real Self, where none of these koshas is present, no world is seen. Since the body is not the Self, it follows that the world is seen only in the state of ignorance. The world is believed to be real only because it is seen, it will be shown that there is no sufficient reason for the belief that the world is real.

The annamaya sheath, the gross sheath, is made up of flesh, bones and so on. It is termed thus because it is built up of food (*anna*). The pranamaya sheath, which is between this food body and the mind body, the manomaya, unites these two. In this, the sheath of vitality, the sense of action is included. In the manomaya or mental sheath, there is the will, doubt, desires and other constituents of the mind. In the vijnanamaya sheath, the intellect, the ego-sense and the organs of sensation are contained in it. The anandamaya (bliss) sheath is only nescience. In the state of deep sleep, when the other

four bodies are lost, it remains present. Because sleep is a happy state, this body is called ananda. Because this sheath remains active in the state of deep sleep, it is therefore possible for the ego and all the other bodies to revive and for samsara (the worldly life) to continue and for us to suffer. In deep sleep anandamaya, the ego and all its accessories remain in a seed form which is very subtle and difficult to identify and discriminate from what is real. Though they appear lost in deep sleep, on waking these forms revive by the force of the previous accumulated karma. This makes it clear that no one can attain deliverance (*mukti*) from the state of deep sleep, though it seems so close to the Supreme State. The sadhaka by the teachings of Bhagavan can bring about the extinction of the ego by means of sadhana only while he is awake.

Waking, dream and sleep alternate, so long as the ignorance lasts. So long as any one of the five sheaths remains, this Ignorance veils the Real Self. The state of experience of the Real Self, wherein none of the five survives, is called the Fourth State (*turiya*) to distinguish it from the three states of *jagrat* (waking), *swapna* (sleep) and *sushupti* (deep sleep). In the Forty Verses Supplement (*Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*), Bhagavan explains that turiya alone is real, and that the other three are false, pertaining to the state of ignorance, and hence the term 'fourth state' is not strictly correct since in truth there are no 'other three'.

It is in this context that Bhagavan mentions these five sheaths. The Vedantins enumerate three bodies in which these five sheaths are included. These are the gross, subtle and causal bodies, or *sthula sarira*, *sukshma sarira* and *karana sarira* respectively. The gross body is the annamaya sheath. The subtle body, *sukshma sarira*, includes the three middle sheaths, the pranamaya, manomaya and vijnanamaya sheaths. The causal body or *karana sarira* is the same as the anandamaya sheath. Later in verse 24 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, Bhagavan mentions the subtle body. If one while still alive obtains the experience of the Real Self, and thus reaches the Natural State, one is then called a *jivan-mukta*, and one's state is styled *jivan-mukti*. In reaching this State the causal body (the original Ignorance) is annihilated and attachment to the other two bodies is extinguished.

Though, being a jivan-mukta, he continues to live in the world and the body, due to the force of unexhausted karma, but really he is bodiless. This gives rise to a number of difficult questions, which will be dealt with as far as possible in later verses. ▲

Golden Jubilee — Fifty Years of Service



When asked what was the greatest gift of these 50 years as Ashram priest, Appichi Mama spoke with great feeling about the many prayers and petitions, made through him to Bhagavan by devotees, which time and again Bhagavan had answered.

In 1942, at the age of 15, N. Subramanian Swamikal (Appichi Mama) came to Bhagavan as a Vedapatshala student. Though his aim was to learn the Vedas, the demands made on him at the Ashram in those simpler times extended as well to service in the kitchen, gardening, electrical work, food preparation and serving. On numerous occasions, Subramanian had the opportunity to serve Sri Bhagavan as well as receive his darshan when Bhagavan stopped in the kitchen or Vedapashala on his way to the goshala. Twice each day he chanted the Vedas in Bhagavan's presence and was blessed with Bhagavan's grace. Appichi left the Ashram after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana to complete his teacher training. He married and started a family. In 1954, Major Chadwick urged Kittu Mama, the chief ashram priest to write and ask him to return and service as an ashram priest. Already securely employed as a headmaster, the return to Ramanasramam constituted a reduction in his salary from Rs. 49 to a mere Rs.15 per month. In spite of the humble sum the Ashram was offering, he understood the call as coming directly from Bhagavan and left his position without hesitation. Devotees are grateful for that decision and for the fifty years of selfless service since. May there be many more to come!

We intend to publish a special article about Appichi Mama in the Aradhana issue of *The Mountain Path*.

Bhagavan's Infinite Grace

PROFESSOR RAM NATESH

THE ways of the Infinite Consciousness are mysterious. Someone playing by the rules may have to struggle hard to reach the goal. On the other hand, someone undeserving (not doing regular spiritual practice) like me, may get soaked in His infinite grace. This apparent anomaly is sometimes explained by *prarabdha* (karmas from past lives).

My father was a person with strong convictions and a rare ability to argue and convince others of his view points. Coming under the influence of the British rulers of the 1930s, he believed 'God' was a creation of the human mind, created to make obedient, law-abiding citizens out of the masses. When challenged he would thunder, "Show me just one living person who has seen God?" As the Superintendent of the Bengal Nagpur Railway's sprawling maintenance workshops in Kharagpur, he commanded respect for

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his dedicated services to the community and served on the Boards of several community organizations.

Around this time, Kavyakanta Ganapathy Muni (affectionately called Nayana) was living with relatives in a suburb of Kharagpur, known as Kharida. Accompanied by mutual friends, Nayana, an impressive personality, came to visit our home. After exchanging pleasantries, the topic of discussion moved to the spiritual realm. Realizing that my father did not believe in God, Nayana advised that he visit Tiruvannamalai and meet Bhagavan, who was God embodied in a human form. Until then, my father had never heard of Ramana Maharshi. He found the claim by Nayana difficult to grasp, but he listened attentively to Nayana's narration of the experiences of devotees whose miseries were relieved by Bhagavan. Later, when my father went to the library, the librarian handed him a book which was among the new arrivals. It was *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton. My father was impressed by the chapters describing Brunton's experiences with Bhagavan.

First Darshan

Later, our family travelled to Palakkad to our ancestral property. During the return trip, when the train stopped at Katpadi junction, my father suddenly decided to disembark and catch the train to Tiruvannamalai. We arrived in Tiruvannamalai early in the morning, around six thirty perhaps, and hired a *jatka* (horse carriage) to Sri Ramanasramam. As soon as the carriage stopped at the ashram, an attendant came running and told my father that the dining room was about to close and the Maharshi had asked that they go straight to the dining room and have breakfast; otherwise the children may have to starve for some four hours until lunch was served. My father replied that he had not informed anyone about our visit and, therefore, the Maharshi must have some other visitor in mind.

The attendant responded "Maharshi said you would [raise this and such questions]." In Tamil it is *inda kelviyellam ketpaa*, that is, ask these questions!

And asked, "Are you Mr. Natesh Iyer?"

My father said, "Yes, but Natesh Iyer is a popular name in this area."

"Are you from Kharagpur?" asked the attendant.

"Yes, ...yes...." said my father faltering, totally aghast as to how Maharshi could have known about our arrival.

The dining room was empty and we were the last people to have breakfast that morning. Apparently, concerned that the children might have to go hungry for a long time, the Maharshi had sent the attendant running to bring us straight to the dining room. My father greatly appreciated the Maharshi's concern about the children being fed on time, but was amazed that He could have known his whereabouts.

After breakfast, our family walked around the ashram grounds for some time, then we all entered the meditation room. In those days, the men and the women sat separately in the meditation room in front of Bhagavan, where total silence was often maintained. I was four years old and being full of energy, I kept running between my father and mother, who tried to keep me sitting, but in vain. I also made faces at Bhagavan, who graciously smiled back. Years later when I visited the Arunachala Ashram in New York, Bhagavatiji, Evelyn Kaselow, Dennis Hartel and others asked me what my impression of Bhagavan was as a child. I told them that, as a child, one is close to our Self and one experiences profound joy and unconditional love; one's mind is full of *satvic* (pure, holy) thoughts. In a way Bhagavan was also pure and innocent like a child, therefore, it was easy for me to relate to Bhagavan as a dear friend full of love, happiness and understanding. I did find his gaze soothing and I also experienced joy, but I didn't have the knowledge at that time, that I was receiving his silent grace available to anyone with a loving and open mind.

Our family stayed in the ashram for a week. Most of this time my father sat silently in front of the Maharshi gazing at his half-closed eyes. Later, I asked my father how he could just sit there doing nothing

and asked what he thought about during those hours. My father said that he was “drunk with happiness” emanating from Bhagavan; that he did not think, being engulfed by this happiness. Every cell in his body was happy resulting in goose bumps all over. He said that it just was not possible to describe this “bliss”, which is unlike the happiness we come across in our daily life through our senses. This bliss is the grace of Bhagavan and it can only be experienced.

My Father's Involvement with the Ashram

My father's inner longing to be of some service to the ashram during the stay was also granted. The Maharshi tried to engage my father in ashram activities to make him feel that he was not just a visitor but a part of the Ashram family. Several times the Maharshi asked my father to translate questions asked by visitors, from English into Tamil and His reply into English. There were many old disciples who would have been happy to do this, but evidently the Maharshi wanted my father to be 'involved' in ashram activities. Somehow the Maharshi already knew that my father was a good cook and He asked him to come early in the mornings to cut vegetables with Him in the kitchen. In those days, visitors were not allowed in the kitchen, and this was a privilege the Maharshi bestowed on my father.

My father used to ask embarrassing questions of holy men like “Have you seen God? If so, what is God doing right now?” He found that in the presence of the Maharshi, these questions were meaningless, so he did not ask any questions. When the time came for us to depart, we all went to Bhagavan to get His blessings. A question arose in my father's mind whether the bliss he had experienced in His presence would continue in his busy daily life being so far away from Him. Without being asked, Bhagavan replied that if my father practised Self-Enquiry as often as possible and led a satvic life, this bliss would continue. Later, my father told me that Bhagavan's daily activities were done with clockwork precision. He also never wasted a morsel of food; after a meal his plate was completely clean.

Spending just one week in silence in the presence of Bhagavan, my father's personality changed completely. He became humble and helpful, and always spoke with great esteem about Bhagavan throughout his life. He encouraged people, particularly his British friends, to read about and, if possible, visit Bhagavan.

Higher Studies in America

After graduating from IIT, I worked for IISCO in Burnpur in 1960. I wanted to go to the US for advanced study in engineering. I received a fully paid four-year scholarship from the prestigious Rensselaer Institute in New York. However, in spite of concentrated efforts during that year, I could not get my passport, visa, or P form from the Reserve Bank, nor could I get a release from the contract I had signed with my employer. Try as hard as I might, there was zero progress despite meeting several influential people. As a last resort, I made a trip to Sri Ramanasramam, and made giri pradakshinam praying to Bhagavan for help. A special privilege was to meet with Devaraja Mudaliar, Sadhu Arunachala, Arthur and Lucy Osborne, and also with Viswanatha Swami and Kunju Swami and other disciples, who kindly shared their experiences of Bhagavan. All this made me ecstatic. Devaraja Mudaliar told me to stop worrying and quoted Bhagavan's assurance: “Those on whom the gracious glance of the Guru has fallen will never be abandoned.”

Upon my return from the ashram in 1960, all my problems were miraculously solved. Just prior to the ashram visit, I had been to the U.S. Embassy. I stood in line in the hot sun for over six hours to apply for the visa. I had all the original documents with five certified copies. But the Embassy staff refused to accept one of the originals and asked me come again with a new 'original'. This time my train arrived six hours late, therefore I reached the Embassy during the lunch break instead of at 5:30 am as I had planned. When I entered the Embassy there was no one there except for a lady. She told me that the Embassy was closed because of a strike called by the Left parties. When I told her that I had travelled some 400 km to come

there, she looked at the one-page visa form and verified that I had admission and a scholarship. She immediately stamped a visa on the form and attached it to my passport. I asked her if she wanted to examine any other documents. She said, "No, because the University has already verified your credentials and has awarded you a four-year tuition-paid scholarship." It was unbelievable that in less than ten minutes. I had walked out with a visa from a nearly deserted office. When I came out of the Embassy, I looked for a quiet place and facing the southwestern direction towards Arunachala I prayed and thanked Bhagavan for His grace. Within a few months, I landed in New York and then travelled upstate to Albany to attend the Rensselaer Institute.

Incident at the New York Ashram

Several years later, I was a Professor and also Chairman of a high technology consulting company based in Utah. I happened to visit New York to attend an international conference. I visited the Arunachala Ashrama there on a Friday, and Bhakta Bhagawatji, its founder, affectionately asked me to stay at the ashrama so that I could participate in their activities. Every Friday night they did puja while they played tapes of Lalitha Sahasranamam, Sri Chakra Puja, Sri Rudram, etc. The tapes had been recorded live at Sri Ramanashramam. That particular Friday all of them had to go to Canada, and therefore I was asked to play the tapes without doing any puja and to receive visitors and answer their questions. I played the tapes and sat alone before the deities listening to the mantras being chanted. People continuously kept coming and going. Some asked questions, but others simply sat and then left after a while. Around 8:30 pm all the visitors had gone and I was alone listening to the mantras.

Suddenly, a young man in his twenties came inside and sat on one side. He was well built and strong, and his eyes were red as if he was on drugs. He was restless and angry. He was wearing a skull cap and I presumed he was a black muslim. According to FBI undercover

informants, radical groups within the black muslim community were involved in the bombing of Hare Krishna temples in USA and in causing deaths which appeared to look like traffic accidents. After some time, the young man shouted at me and started cursing me in the most filthy language possible. I merely kept quiet and continued to listen to the mantras being played on the tape. He got up and started walking back and forth. Suddenly, he took out a large knife and shouted at me to stop playing the tape. His black face and red eyes full of anger reminded me of some *asura* (demon). Just in front of me was a telephone and I could dial 911, the emergency line for the police, but this would have made the young man, probably already under the effect of drugs, even more angry and he could have, in a fit, stabbed me or thrown a bomb in the place and run away before the police could arrive. I was not at all afraid or angry and was ready to face whatever happened with a calm mind. I closed my eyes and silently prayed to Bhagavan for His grace. While praying, I could hear in the background the boy shouting and screaming and hitting the top of the table with his knife. After sometime, I heard him give a high pitched scream and then the iron gates opened and closed with a shattering noise. He was gone and the room was quiet for a few minutes. I thanked Bhagavan for His mercy. This episode lasted about 45 minutes. After it was over, once again people started coming and going. Having played all the tapes in about six hours, I locked the front gate and went inside and had a peaceful sleep next to the deity room.

Next morning, I was getting ready to catch a flight to Salt Lake City, Utah. Several devotees including Bhagawatji mentioned that I was fortunate to have seen the physical form of Bhagavan, which none of them had been privileged to see. Unconsciously I replied, "Certainly I was fortunate to see Bhagavan in His physical form, however, now that He is no longer confined to a physical form, He is everywhere, ready to help His devotees in an instant." It was as if a higher power spoke through me. The proof of this statement was also provided by Bhagavan in the next few minutes. As I was preparing to leave, I prostrated before a photograph of Bhagavan in

the deity room and prayed that through His grace I may get Realization in this very life and, with that, freedom from birth and death. Immediately, I heard a voice: “Find out ‘who is it that wants realization’ and you will get realization.” I looked up and was surprised to see Bhagawatji standing next to me and reading aloud from a book in his hand. I asked him why he was reading at this time. He said “I saw you praying to Bhagavan for a long time, and you were getting late to go to the airport, so I opened this book at random and read His answers to a question put by a devotee long ago.” When I explained to him what my prayer to Bhagavan had been, everyone around was pleasantly surprised at the simple and direct way His grace had manifested in response to my plea.

Bhagavan’s Grace

Through Bhagavan’s grace, my professional and personal life was a complete success in every way I could imagine. I did not struggle through tremendous adversity like many of my friends did. I just surrendered to Him and practiced self-enquiry as often as I could, even in the middle of a busy professional life. I also chanted as often as possible, Arunachala Siva—the Bridal Garland of Letters or *Akshara Mana Malai* addressed by Bhagavan on our behalf to Siva as Himself. May the love of Bhagavan engulf the entire world and bring peace and prosperity. Arunachala Siva! ▲

Sadguru Sri Ramana Maharshi: Sarithamum Upadesamum (Tamil)
In Eight Volumes

These eight volumes trace Sri Bhagavan’s life from his childhood at Tiruchuzhi, his realisation at Madurai, his historical journey to Tiruvannamalai, incidents connected with his stay at various places in Arunachala, culminating in his stay at Ramanasramam. All the incidents connected with his devotees and Maharshi’s teachings are gathered from various Ashram publications and other periodicals and magazines, and are brought together under a single title.

Pages: 4200

Price: To be announced later.

Bhagavan and Thayumanavar

Part Two

ROBERT BUTLER,
T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN &
DAVID GODMAN

In part one we gave a summary of Thayumanavar’s life and included translations of many of his verses that Bhagavan selected for the ashram parayana. In this second instalment we give more translations of his verses that Bhagavan referred to while he was responding to devotees’ questions.

The state of the Self

THIS first section begins with a discussion that centred on experiences Tennyson, the famous 19th century English poet, induced in himself:

In continuation of yesterday’s conversation about Tennyson, the relevant passage was found in a footnote to the English translation of *Upadesa Saram*. It was not in a poem but in a letter to B. P. Blood. Bhagavan asked me to read it out, so I

Robert Butler worked in the ashram in the 1980s. He now lives in the UK. He is proficient in classical Tamil and has translated many texts. In recent years he has translated three of Muruganar’s works into English: *Sri Ramana Anubhuti*, *Padamalai* and *Ramana Puranam*.

did: ‘...a kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself, silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this is not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.’

Bhagavan said: ‘That state is called abidance in the Self. It is described in a number of songs.’

He took up Thayumanavar and it opened at the very page he was looking for...¹

Mauna Guru, you who declared:

‘The state in which there is neither merging nor separation,
no pairs of opposites, no expansion or contraction,
no qualities, no coming or going,
that leaves no lasting trace;
that is free of the three defilements;
that cannot be conceived
in terms of having a top, bottom or sides;
that in which there is neither *bindu* nor *natham*,
and in which the five elements,
variously constituted, do not exist;
that in which the knower and his knowledge are not;
that which is without decay;
that which, moreover, is not one and not two,
and is without voice and without mind;
that which is free, even, of the ecstatic seeking,

wherein [the devotee] tastes with his lips,
and drinks from the ocean of bliss
that is the eternally enduring
supreme and all-pervading reality –
that is the enduring state.’

Siddhanta Mukti’s Primal Lord!

Dakshinamurti, enthroned in glory upon the lofty Siragiri!

Guru, you who are pure consciousness’s form!²

Bhagavan quoted two other Thayumanavar verses on this occasion, but they are not really expressions of what the Self is like. They are, instead, pleas from a disciple who wants to attain this state. Bhagavan mentioned them because he said that they both contained references or allusions to *sahaja nishtha*, the natural state of abidance in the Self.³

Reality, pervading everywhere!

Like a supplicant who seeks the favour of a benefactor,

begging him, in a manner free of all reproach,

to show compassion and grant his petition

[I apply to You]. Hear my plea! O Transcendent Supreme!

Listen to the petition of one

whose heart is of wood and show pity.

[My plea is] to dwell in *mauna*

in the fullness of your ethereal grace,

the state of *sahaja nishtha*.⁴

...Well indeed does your divine mind know

how my heart melted in tender love,

how I languished,

² ‘Chinmayanandaguru’, verse 8. The last three lines, detached from the main verse, are the refrain. Siragiri is the hill at Tiruchirapalli. *Bindu* and *natham*, which are mentioned in the middle of the verse, are Saiva Siddhanta terms that denote the place or point from where the universe emerges and evolves.

³ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

⁴ ‘Asaienum’, verse 2.

¹ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

hoping that I might clearly apprehend this state.
 If I try to abide in this state for a while,
 then my ignorance, a foe posing as a friend,
 comes and makes my mind its home.
 Shall defiling *maya* and karma return again?
 Shall births, in unbroken succession, assault me?
 These thoughts fill my mind.
 Lend me the sword of true steadfastness [*sraddha*],
 give me the strength of true *jnana*
 so that my bondage is abolished;
 guard me, and grant me your grace!

Consummate perfection of bliss,
 whose abundant fullness reigns,
 without exception, everywhere I look!⁵

In the next dialogue Bhagavan is questioned about *turiya*, the underlying substratum of the Self in which the three states of waking, dreaming and sleep appear and disappear. He answered the query about these states and concluded with a brief quotation from Thayumanavar:

Question: How are the three states of consciousness inferior in degree of reality to the fourth? What is the actual relation between these three and the fourth?

Bhagavan: There is only one state, that of consciousness or awareness or existence. The three states of waking, dream and sleep cannot be real. They simply come and go. The real will always exist. The 'I' or existence that alone persists in all the three states is real. The other three are not real and so it is not possible to say that they have such and such a degree of reality. We may roughly put it like this. Existence or consciousness is

the only reality. Consciousness plus waking we call waking. Consciousness plus sleep we call sleep. Consciousness plus dream, we call dream. Consciousness is the screen on which all the pictures come and go. The screen is real, the pictures are mere shadows on it. Because by long habit we have been regarding these three states as real, we call the state of mere awareness or consciousness as the fourth. There is, however, no fourth state, but only one state.

In this connection Bhagavan quoted verse 386 of 'Paraparakkanni' of Thayumanavar and said that this so-called fourth state is described as waking sleep or sleep in waking – meaning asleep to the world and awake in the Self.⁶

O Supreme of Supremes!
 To remain,
 free of sleep,
 beyond thought's corruption,
 is this the pure state of grace?
 Pray, speak!⁷

In the final verse in this section Thayumanavar describes the moment of Self-realisation and some of the experiences that stem from it. Arthur Osborne wrote that this was a verse that Bhagavan particularly liked,⁸ but there are no recorded instances of Bhagavan quoting this verse in his replies to devotees.

When overpowered by the vast expanse
 that has neither beginning, middle nor end,
 the truth of non-dual bliss will arise in the mind.
 Our entire clan will be redeemed.
 Nothing will be lacking.
 All our undertakings will prosper.

⁵ 'Paripurananandam', verse 5. *Maya* and karma, mentioned in the middle of the verse, are, according to Saiva Siddhanta, two of the three impurities of the individual self. The third is *anava*, the ego.

⁶ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11th January, 1946.

⁷ 'Paraparakkanni', verse 386.

⁸ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge*, p. 61, B.I. Publications, 1979.

There will be sporting in the company
of those wise ones who,
like sunrise at the break of day,
have known the dawn of grace,
where there is neither abundance nor lack.
Our nature will become such
that like babies, madmen or ghouls,
we should not rejoice,
though offered heaven and earth in their entirety.⁹

The mocking comments of the mind

... [Khanna] handed Bhagavan a piece of paper on which he had written something.

After reading it Bhagavan said, 'It is a complaint. He says, "I have been coming to you and this time I have remained nearly a month at your feet and I find no improvement at all in my condition. My *vasanas* are as strong as ever. When I go back, my friends will laugh at me and ask what good my stay here has done me."'

Then, turning to Khanna, Bhagavan said, 'Why distress your mind by thinking that *jnana* has not come or that the *vasanas* have not disappeared? Don't give room for thoughts. In the last stanza of 'Sukavari' in Thayumanavar the saint says much the same as is written on this paper.'

And Bhagavan made me read the stanza and translate it into English for the benefit of those who did not know Tamil. It goes: 'The mind mocks me, and though I tell you ten thousand times, you are indifferent, so how am I to attain peace and bliss?'¹⁰

The translation recorded by Devaraja Mudaliar in *Day by Day with Bhagavan* comes from the second part of the verse. G. V. Subbaramayya has noted¹¹ that Bhagavan explained the first half of the verse in the late 1930s, although neither the circumstances nor the explanation itself is given.

This particular verse seems to have been one that particularly interested Bhagavan for Devaraja Mudaliar has reported: 'On one occasion stanzas 8 to 11 of 'Mandalattin' and twelve of 'Sukavari' [the verse just referred to] were elaborately explained by Bhagavan and were translated into English by me for the benefit of those who did not know Tamil. These stanzas used to be frequently referred to by Bhagavan.'¹²

In the first half of the 'Sukavari' verse the mind of Thayumanavar is complaining to its *jiva*, its spirit or soul, about the division that has sprung up between them.

'Like yourself [the *jiva*] who are spirit, have not I, the mind,
and my friend, the *prana*, always dwelt within the body?
Long ago someone or other separated us,
designating us as "insentient" and yourself as "sentient".
From the day you heard that, right up to the present day,
you have unjustly erected a barrier between us and suppressed us,
exercising your oppressive rule.
What a great task you have accomplished,
right before our eyes!

When my foolish mind thus grossly abuses me,
my heart is scorched and blackened,
like beeswax exposed to a leaping flame!
Can this be right and proper?
Though I have called upon You [God] ten thousand times,
you have not taken pity on me, and bestowed your grace.
Henceforth, how may happiness ever come to me? Speak!

⁹ 'Ninaivonru', verse 7.

¹⁰ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 26th June, 1946. In the same work it is stated that Bhagavan also explained this verse to Dr Srinivasa Rao on 22nd November 1945, but the explanation itself was not recorded.

¹¹ *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, 1967 ed., p. 49.

¹² *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 54-5, 1992 ed.

Supreme Godhead,
 pure and devoid of all attributes!
 Supernal Light! Ocean of bliss!¹³

On the occasion that Devaraja Mudaliar read out and translated the ‘Sukavari’ verse for Khanna’s benefit, there was a further dialogue on this subject, after which Bhagavan quoted three more Thayumanavar verses, the same ones that Mudaliar said Bhagavan had once given a lengthy explanation on:

Then I [Devaraja Mudaliar] said to Khanna: ‘You are not the only one who complains to Bhagavan like this. I have more than once complained in the same way, and I still do, for I find no improvement in myself.’

Khanna replied: ‘It is not only that I find no improvement but I think I have grown worse. The *vasanas* are stronger now. I can’t understand it.’

Bhagavan again quoted the last three stanzas of ‘Mandalattin’ of Thayumanavar, where the mind is coaxed as the most generous and disinterested of givers, to go back to its birthplace or source and thus give the devotee peace and bliss, and he asked me to read out a translation that I had once made.¹⁴

Mind, you who evolve from *maya*
 as jewels are wrought from gold!
 If you are freed from your defects
 so that blissful *samadhi* is attained
 by meditating on [reality] within oneself
 as oneself, by melting within,
 and by making [you] fall away,
 I shall attain redemption.

No one is as kind to me as you are – no one.

When I ponder on this, you [the mind]
 are equal to the grace of God.

Amongst those who have taken on bodies
 to experience [the world],
 be they Brahma, or any of the gods,
 it is true, is it not,
 that for any of them to reject you [the mind],
 and exist without you,
 is impossible, quite impossible.
 Without you, can anything be,
 in this world or the next?
 To vainly label you ‘unreal’ is unjust.
 So I shall praise you as ‘real’ also.
 In order that my wretched state may be ended,
 you must return to the glorious land of your birth.

You who have been my companion
 for many a day, were you to lie dead
 through the enquiry [*vichara*]
 that has separated you from me,
 I should revere that ground with perfect devotion.
 Through the *mauna* Guru who has ruled me
 I will be free from ‘I’ and ‘mine’,
 becoming one with his grace.
 The eight *siddhis*, liberation itself,
 which is a vision delightful to behold,
 shall be mine upon the earth.
 Through you my anxieties shall be ended.

All my interminable wrangling
 with birth will end in this very birth.
 For me, the state of *jivanmukti*,
 which is difficult for anyone to experience,
 will arise.

Oh, Sir [mind]! Will even a cloud

¹³ ‘Sukavari’, verse 12, followed by three lines of the refrain.

¹⁴ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 26th June, 1946. The translation that Mudaliar made no longer exists. What follows is a translation by the authors of this article.

or a grove of *karpaka* trees [wish-fulfilling trees]
 suffice as a comparison to you?
 Can your greatness be described
 in the seven worlds, beginning with earth?¹⁵

Siddhis, yoga, and religious harmony

Though Thayumanavar mentioned in the last verse but one that *siddhis* would come automatically when his mind had, through the grace of his Guru, ceased to function, he generally disapproved of attempts to pursue such powers. Bhagavan mentioned this in the following reply:

One man said that a *siddha* of Kumbakonam claimed to overcome the defects in Sankara's system which deals only with transcendentalism and not the work-a-day life. One must be able to exercise super-human powers in ordinary life, that is to say, one must be a *siddha* in order to be perfect.

Sri Bhagavan pointed out a stanza in Thayumanavar which condemns all *siddhis*.¹⁶

In the English version of *Talks* the Thayumanavar verse is not specified, but in the Tamil edition, the translator and editor, Viswanatha Swami, states that the following verse is the one that Bhagavan was referring to:

To tame a rutting elephant, who has snapped his tethering-post,
 and to walk him under our control – that is possible.
 To muzzle a bear, or a fierce tiger – that is possible.
 To ride upon the back of the incomparable lion – that is possible.
 To charm snakes, and make them dance – that is possible.
 To put mercury into a furnace, transform the five base metals,

sell them, and live from the proceeds – that is possible.
 To wander the earth, invisible to everyone else – that is possible.
 To command the celestials in our own service – that is possible.
 To remain forever young – that is possible.
 To transmigrate into another physical body – that is possible.
 To walk on water, or to sit amidst flames – that is possible.
 To attain supernatural powers, that know no equal – that is possible.
 But the ability to control the mind, and remain still,
 is very difficult indeed.
 God, whose nature is consciousness,
 who as the reality, impossible to seek,
 took up his abode within my understanding!
 Refulgent light of bliss!¹⁷

Thayumanavar did not merely disapprove of the pursuit of *siddhis*. His criticism extended to extreme ascetic practices, attempts to prolong the lifespan of the body, and methods which aimed to raise the *kundalini* to the *sahasrara*. In the following verse, which Devaraja Mudaliar said Bhagavan occasionally referred to, Thayumanavar asserts that none of these practices by themselves can lead to liberation.

Though we firmly stand upon devotion's path,
 though we perform *pradakshina* of the broad earth's nine divisions,
 though we bathe in the ocean, and in the rivers too,
 though we place ourselves between the rising flames
 without a thought of thirst or hunger,
 stopping up the gnawing pangs with water, air and fallen leaves,
 though we dwell in silence, retreat to lofty mountain caves,
 though we purify the ten channels which ever endure,
 though we contain within the sphere known as *somavattam*
 the inner fire, along with the vital air which rises from the root,
 tasting thus the nectar that no words can describe,
 though we practise the acquisition of powerful *siddhis*,

¹⁵ 'Mandalattin', verses 8-11. The last four verses of 'Mandalattin' are given here since Mudaliar has already mentioned earlier in the article that Bhagavan once gave an extensive explanation of all four of them. See *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Devaraja Mudaliar, pp. 54-5, 1992 ed.

¹⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1st January 1936, Talk 122.

¹⁷ 'Tejomayanandam', verse 8.

to prolong this mere trifle of a body through every aeon of time, other than through *jnana* can liberation be attained?

Siddhanta Mukti's Primal Lord!

Dakshinamurti, enthroned in glory upon the lofty Siragiri!

Guru, you who are pure consciousness's form!¹⁸

There are a few technical terms in this verse that may need to be explained:

(1) The five fires (*panchakkini*) are those amidst which an ascetic performs *tapas* – four at the cardinal points, and the fifth being the sun.

(2) The ten channels are the *ida*, *pingala* and *sushumna nadis*, along with seven lesser-known ones.

(3) The *somavattam*, associated with the moon, is a circular area at the centre of the *sahasrara chakra*, located in the area of the crown of the skull. When the vital breath, originating in the *muladhara* or root *chakra*, combines with the *kundalini* energy, it rises through all the six *chakras* until it becomes contained and held in the seventh, the *sahasrara chakra*, the thousand-petalled lotus with the *somavattam* at its centre. At this point a nectar is released through the melting effect of the fiery energy. The yogi, in his state of absorption, is able to feed upon this nectar, and thus remain in this state for long periods. Bhagavan referred to this practice when he said: 'The yoga *marga* speaks of the six centres, each of which must be reached by practice and transcended until one reaches the *sahasrara* where nectar is found and thus immortality.'¹⁹

The key line in this verse is the last one in which Thayumanavar asserts, 'other than through *jnana* can liberation be attained?', a rhetorical question whose answer is clearly 'no'. This conclusion and the preceding comments about the pointlessness of pursuing *siddhis* can both be found in a remarkably similar answer that Bhagavan

gave out when he was asked about the relationship between enlightenment and the attainment of *siddhis*.

Only *jnana* obtained through enquiry can bestow Liberation. Supernatural powers are all illusory appearances created by the power of *maya*. Self-realization which is permanent is the only true accomplishment [*siddhi*]. Accomplishments which appear and disappear, being the effect of *maya*, cannot be real. They are accomplished with the object of enjoying fame, pleasures, etc. They come unsought to some persons through their karma. Know that union with *Brahman* is the attainment of the sum total of all the *siddhis*. This is also the state of Liberation [*aikya mukti*] known as union [*sayujya*].²⁰

Thayumanavar and Bhagavan were in agreement that yogic practices alone will not directly result in liberation. Bhagavan has pointed out in several places that its practices can result in bliss, *siddhis*, and even *nirvikalpa samadhi*, but he also maintained that it is not until the 'I' dies in the Heart that *jnana*, true liberation, occurs.²¹

Though Bhagavan and Thayumanavar both pointed out the limitations of yogic practices, and though both were sharply critical of people who attempted to attain *siddhis*, they had a generally tolerant attitude to different religions and their various practices. They knew that they all ultimately resolved themselves into the state of *mauna* in which all such distinctions and differences were rendered invalid. The next quotation on this subject is from Bhagavan, and it is followed by a very similar statement from Thayumanavar.

The doctrines of all religions contradict each other. They wage war, collide with each other, and finally die.

¹⁸ 'Chinmayanandaguru', verse 11. Devaraja Mudaliar stated in *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 55, that Bhagavan occasionally referred to this verse.

¹⁹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 398.

²⁰ *Spiritual Instruction*, chapter four, answer ten.

²¹ See *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talks 398 and 474 where Bhagavan expresses his views on these yogic practices in great detail.

On this battlefield all the religions retreat defeated when they stand before *mauna*, which abides beneficently, sustaining them all.

The rare and wonderful power of *mauna* is that it remains without enmity towards any of the religions.

The many different religions are appropriate to the maturity of each individual, and all of them are acceptable to reality.

Abandoning vain disputation, which only deludes and torments the mind, accept the doctrine of the *mauna* religion, which always remains undisturbed.²²

Shining Supreme!

If we scrutinise all the religions
that look so different,
we find no contradiction in their purpose.
They are all your sport.
Just as all rivers discharge into the sea,
they all end in the ocean of *mauna*.²³

The two major competing systems of religious and philosophical thought in South India have, for several centuries, been Vedanta and Saiva Siddhanta. The proponents of each school have been criticising the other in their writings for much of the last thousand years. Bhagavan tended to use the language and philosophical structures of Vedanta when he answered visitors' questions whereas Thayumanavar, in his poems, showed a strong Saiva Siddhanta influence. However, neither was dogmatic about his system since they both knew, from direct experience, that in the experience of the Self all philosophical divisions and distinctions are dissolved. As Thayumanavar wrote:

Since my own actions are forever your own actions,
and since the 'I'-nature does not exist apart from you,
I am not different from you.
This is the state in which Vedanta and Siddhanta
are harmonised.²⁴

Bhagavan's own synthesis of the two apparently contradictory philosophies can be found in the following two replies:

Question: What is the end of devotion [*bhakti*] and the path of Siddhanta [i.e., Saiva Siddhanta]?

Bhagavan: It is to learn the truth that all one's actions performed with unselfish devotion, with the aid of the three purified instruments [body, speech and mind], in the capacity of the servant of the Lord, become the Lord's actions, and to stand forth free from the sense of 'I' and 'mine'. This is also the truth of what the Saiva Siddhantins call *para-bhakti* [supreme devotion] or living in the service of God [*irai pani nitral*].

Question: What is the end of the path of knowledge [*jnana*] or Vedanta?

Bhagavan: It is to know the truth that the 'I' does not exist separately from the Lord [Iswara] and to be free from the feeling of being the doer [*kartrtva, ahamkara*].²⁵ ▲

²² *Padamalai*, 'Religions and Religious Knowledge' chapter, verses 1-5.

²³ 'Kallalin', verse 25. The verse appears in full in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21st November, 1945, and was briefly mentioned in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 594.

²⁴ 'Paripurananandam', verse 5. *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17th June, 1946.

²⁵ *Spiritual Instruction*, chapter one, questions nine and ten.



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

Journey of Faith

NIALL ANGLIN

IN 1975 at the age of 27 I experienced a spiritual rebirth during a long hitchhike through the U.S. and Canada. The first phase was seeing a brighter side of life and people as basically good and benevolent rather than, as I had thought prior to the journey, evil and selfish. This attitude had been partly the result of reading the newspapers too much and listening to daily news-broadcasts about disasters and the deceitful behaviour of people. I had become a cynical pessimist.

My renewed interest in spirituality came through Eastern influences that proved a refreshing relief from the hellfire and damnation that was the message received from the religion of my childhood. I began reading many books from various sources including the Sankhya philosophy of Hinduism and popular Western works on Eastern

Niall Anglin lives in Toronto, Canada. From 1977 to 1997 he spent a total of four years in Tiruvannamalai over several visits, staying near the ashram. He now runs a Toronto transportation business and cannot come to India as frequently as he did in the past.

philosophy and religion. Alan Watts' beautiful works on the playfulness of God especially inspired me. I learned of *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda but was never able to find it at the time in the Western bookstores I searched, though it must have been there. At a later date the book did come into my life and exerted a powerful influence.

Having been raised as a Catholic I wondered about the strange ways of a God who could give us prophets and saints hundreds of years ago who were now no longer to be found. We seemed forsaken. Eventually I read *Be Here Now* by Ram Dass, the American disciple of Neemkaroli Baba, and quickly became aware that such saints abound in India even today. From that point onwards I couldn't sit still, and set out making plans to go find them for myself. I had by that time learned the all-important principle that it is the Guru who draws the devotee to him, despite the devotee's feeling that it is he who is exercising his free will in deciding to find the Guru.

My trip to India in 1977 entailed flying from Toronto to London, hitchhiking to the English coast, taking a ferry to Holland, and then hitchhiking from there into Germany, Denmark, back down through Germany, Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia till I reached the Greek Islands. I travelled in an inspired mood and planned especially to visit the island of Crete in Greece, which I'd heard was a spiritually charged place. I spent six weeks in the Mediterranean on the three islands of Corfu, Crete and Rhodes. I had set out to hitchhike as far as it proved a worthwhile mode of transportation, but that half-died in Italy and became hopeless in Yugoslavia. So from Greece I travelled by bus through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and into India.

It was during my southern trip through Germany that the life-altering event happened. One day after being dropped on the autobahn near Stuttgart, I stood by the roadside beckoning for my next ride. I was there four hours, but in that long delay the most amazing thing happened. The longer I waited the stronger the feeling came to me that something great was coming. I had no idea what it could be and the thought occurred that perhaps I might get a lift all

the way to India. I waited and waited and nobody stopped for me but, incredibly, I grew more optimistic. Hunger and tiredness were ignored in favour of anticipation of this coming blessing which I palpably felt approaching. Finally a Volkswagen van pulled over with some young hippy types inside. The ride they gave me was for only 15 minutes. I got in and a young bearded man named Dietmar asked where I was going. I answered "India." He said, "I have a house in India and I'm not using it. Would you like the key?" I said, "Sure" and he wrote down on a scrap of paper, 'Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu', and then added 'OM'. He gave me a small key, which I attached to a string, and carried around my neck for the next two months that it took me to reach my final destination, Arunachala.

This key was the culmination of my wait in that state of great anticipation for the miracle which I expected, without knowing exactly what would happen. I knew without a doubt that this gift was the key to my soul.

Along the rest of the way to India I did meet someone who knew a bit about Tiruvannamalai. He told me there was a mountain with some cottages on the hillside. Dietmar's house, which I thought might become my 'cottage', I eventually discovered on arrival at Arunachala, to be a dilapidated shack beside a teashop in front of the ashram. It was Raja, the old ex-postmaster and ashram inmate, who figured out which hut Dietmar used to occupy, and indeed the key around my neck did open the door to the hovel which, as it was the rainy season, had a roof that leaked on to a mud floor. It was not suitable for occupation. I was to discover then that the Guru does indeed move in mysterious ways.

This was in September 1977. Though I had never heard of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi or seen his face, my days of travel for travel's sake came to an end upon reaching Tiruvannamalai.

On my trip into India while in New Delhi I had stopped to look at a hawker's books laid out on a thirty-foot stretch of the public walkway at Connaught Circus. I felt a book about fifteen feet away

beckoning to me; the face on the cover was shining a light to me. I went to see what it could be. It was the face of Paramahansa Yogananda on the cover of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, the long elusive book I had searched for over many months.

I bought the book and, reading it, I travelled through the parts of India he described. He was with me guiding me. I became interested in yoga. I previously had thought yoga meant only hatha yoga, but learned of kriya yoga and raja yoga. Bhagavan further blessed me with a living guru, Sri Parameswar, who taught me raja yoga as well as kriya yoga.

When I first read Sri Bhagavan's teachings in the book, *Talks*, I found them uninspiring. I came from the bhakti marga so when first contemplating self-enquiry, though I knew a little about what it meant, I could not find the emotion for spiritual fervour in it. I was accustomed to religion being emotional — Jesus on the cross, the Christian Martyrs, the lives of Saints, sufferings and sacrifices, miracles, visions and visitations, Lourdes, Fatima and most recently the amazing experiences of Yogananda, many of which were quite spectacular.

Later I came to realize that the combination of solemnity and intensity of feeling one harbours towards God is the same delicacy or solemnity one should adopt in the path of self-enquiry. Realization must be of the utmost subtlety — transcendental and indescribable.

The devotion that South Indians naturally have towards God or Iswara makes a difference for them — they naturally recognize the Divine in life. Westerners, especially those of us from northern and materially developed countries, with the exception of the passionately devoted in southern European countries such as Spain and Italy, lack the yearning to realize a happier truth than this material life. Most, in fact, wish it to get even better with the consequent incremental satisfactions the pleasures of the world offer; and they tend to aspire to an afterlife heaven very much like an earthly Utopia.

In my early days at Arunachala I had a vivid dream. Bhagavan was seated in a room with many people and I was there with my Guru who suggested to Bhagavan that I give a discourse to those

present on some spiritual subject. Bhagavan gave permission and I carried on at some length discussing aspects of spiritual life I had memorized from book learning. Finally Bhagavan approached me and, blessing me by putting his hand on the right side of my chest, he said, "This is spiritualism, not truck driving."

I awoke from the dream thrilled at having received his personal direct blessing and I absorbed his instruction: that way of showing off limited knowledge by preaching to others was not the way. A little knowledge and a little understanding does not make a man a guru nor does preaching bring us closer to our goal, rather the opposite, it fans the flames of the ego. I had thought that by copying what I had seen others do meant I was doing well, but he was telling me was not to go down that path, but rather to be quiet and absorb the truth inwardly.

How my view on spiritual life changed as a result of absorbing Sri Bhagavan's teachings and coming under his influence is the most important lesson I can pass onto others. From this perspective one can see that Bhagavan's teachings are not an intellectual exercise. So many devotees, I later discovered, get together in what they call satsang, to discuss the philosophy of Bhagavan as an intellectual exercise. Many people, especially Westerners, seem to need some intellectual satisfaction. In the beginning I suspected that self-enquiry was for those who lacked devotion to God but over time and perhaps with some maturity, I realized that a balanced intellectual understanding illuminates the true import of the teachings. However, too much intellectualism can create a superfluous barrier of concepts. Why confound the mind with mental gymnastics when elimination of the mind by letting thoughts subside is what Bhagavan prescribed? At first I too failed to recognize the sublimity of the goal, and indeed the supremacy of Bhagavan himself.

So many books of Bhagavan's words are produced that it is easy to miss the fact that he was mostly silent. One might get the impression that he sat all day, every day, expounding teachings. This was not his way. At the end of the Gospel of St. John it is written that

if the Evangelist could have written everything our Lord Jesus said, it would cover the world with books. I think the books we have of Sri Bhagavan's spoken words pretty well cover everything he said IN WORDS. Of course over the many years he resided at his earthly abode he spoke in ample measure, but from this accumulation of words his central message and who he is can be missed. He is the silent teacher, indeed the Self, Arunachala. He himself told of Sri Dakshinamurthy, the silent guru, who actually started teaching in words but finally resorted to silence to convey the highest truth. It is as though he might be saying, "Let them have some words to draw their minds here, and then they can receive This essential teaching in silence."

As a Christian and a devotee of Lord Jesus I felt him guiding me to India as a companion and friend. I believe he called me for a higher learning, a final path. It was revealed to me that no greater soul than Sri Bhagavan has ever occupied a physical body.

Bhagavan showed us a direct path to the clear, unmistakable goal. In the stillness of our being we can find that happiness we long for, the peace that surpasses all understanding. He showed by his life and his teachings and by his Divine Presence how it is possible to do so and he assures us it is right at hand, it is always and already here. ▲

Love consists in sharing
What one has
And what one is
With those one loves.

Love
ought to show itself
In deeds
more than in words.

— Ignatius of Loyola.

Sri Ramana, Friend of Animals



Friends from the Hill

EDITED BY MICHAEL HIGHBURGER

The following excerpt is from Chapter 1 of the soon-to-be-released Ashram publication, a collection of colour-illustrated anecdotes of Bhagavan and monkeys. The present story is a composite taken from the Ashram literature and adapted in part from Prof. V. Niranjan's rendering of M.G. Balu and Hari Hara Subramanian's Tamil *Prani Mitra*. While segments of the dialogue are imaginary, the story is authentic and has its basis in numerous accounts recorded by early devotees. The artwork is from Surya Park Young Sun.



Introduction

Arunachala is the holy mountain of South India. Of brilliant light, the 'red hill' is said to be the form of Siva on earth. Throughout written history, it has been known as Adi lingam, the original form of Siva, and since before the dawn of civilization, has been a sacred pilgrimage destination.¹ The Skanda Purana tells us that Brahma,

¹ Geological analysis of Arunachala and its area reveals formations some 1.65 billion years old, one third the age of the earth and nearly 20 times the age of the Himalayas. [*Geologische Rundschau* vol. 87, 3(1998), pp. 268-82].

Vishnu, Soma, Surya, Agni, and Indra visited and worshipped Arunachala. The great sage Gautama said Arunagiri is capable of removing all the sins of those who merely see Him or simply utter the name 'Arunachala'.² Bhagavan Sri Ramana follows in a long line of devas, siddhas, sages, and seers who came to pay homage at the feet of the Holy Hill. He made his advent journey to Annamalai in 1896. Having been devoted to Arunachala since early childhood, he came into Arunachala's presence at age sixteen never to leave it again for the rest of his earthly existence.

In 1899 Bhagavan moved up onto the mountain itself, staying mostly at Virupaksha, the holy cave occupied by various saints over the centuries.³ He spent his days and nights within the hallowed walls of this hermitage and by and by befriended the many animals that lived nearby, among them tigers, leopards, snakes, peacocks and various birds as well as numerous monkey tribes. Among the latter were the purple-faced langurs — the powerful leaf-eating monkeys that moved in small bands on the hill. Langurs, being shy, kept mostly to themselves but the more common Bonnet macaque⁴, a small rhesus-like monkey, was quite sociable and befriended Bhagavan early on. The opportunities for interaction were ample and Bhagavan was able to understand their various vocalizations. Likewise, they understood Bhagavan's words and gestures and so, in due course, a bond formed between them, developing to such an extent that in time Bhagavan became an arbitrator in their internal disputes.



² "All rocks here are *lingas*; this is the realm of Siva. The trees here are the celestial plants; water here is the Ganges flowing from Siva's plaited hair. All food here is but ambrosia. To walk one step here is to go round the whole world. Any utterance here is the word of *Veda*; even slumber here is *samadhi*. Can any other place equal this sacred Arunachala?"

³ Virupaksha gets its name from the sixth century saint who belonged to the Vira sect of Shaivism who is said to have attained liberation by yogic self-immolation.

⁴ *Macaca radiate*.

Leaseholder & the Curse

Early in 1908, an epidemic broke out and spread to Tiruvannamalai. Owing to Virupaksha's proximity to the township, Bhagavan was compelled to leave the cave altogether. Accompanied by Ganapati Muni, the great Sanskrit scholar-poet, and other devotees, Bhagavan shifted to the more remotely situated Pachaiamman Koil⁵ on the northeastern side of the mountain. Dedicated to the Mother, this is where



Parashakti elected to do her penance, pujas and oblations when she was sent by Lord Siva to Tiruvannamalai. This holy site had been home to Bhagavan for six months during the epidemic of 1905 and now again from January to March three years later. Statues of devas line the temple approach and to the left of the shrine is a sacred tirtham. Near the enclosure are the companions of Durga, the fighting devas who went into battle against Mahishasura.

In these early days, abutting the temple grounds was a grove of tamarind trees that the municipality regularly contracted out by public

⁵ The Cholas (9th century) constructed a small edifice of granite. In 1904, the structure was expanded. In 2004, further expansion and renovation was done. When asked how the Goddess got the name Pachaiamman, Bhagavan said, "*Pachai* means emerald colour. When Parvati came to Gautamasrama to perform austerities to appease *Iswara*, her form was of emerald colour. She then went around the Hill in *pradakshina*, continuing her austerities, and finally merged into Siva and came to be known as Apita Kuchamba." *Letters*, 22nd Dec, 1948.

auction.⁶ The current leaseholder was a Muslim man who lived nearby. As the grove of trees was known to give a particularly rich yield of pods, the leaseholder was intent on protecting them from the many monkeys fond of feeding on them. The leaseholder was likewise fond of the tamarind pods; for it was with a view to harvesting and selling them that he had bid and paid out handsomely for harvesting rights.

He employed various methods to dissuade the four-legged raiders. Only wanting to frighten them, he took care to see that they were not injured. However, in time these intruders became less and less intimidated by his stick waving. So one day the following conversation occurred...

SERVANT: Sir, the monkeys are ruining our trees. They're taking all the fruit for themselves.

LEASEHOLDER: Yes, I've noticed. This lease will be a financial disaster if they keep it up.

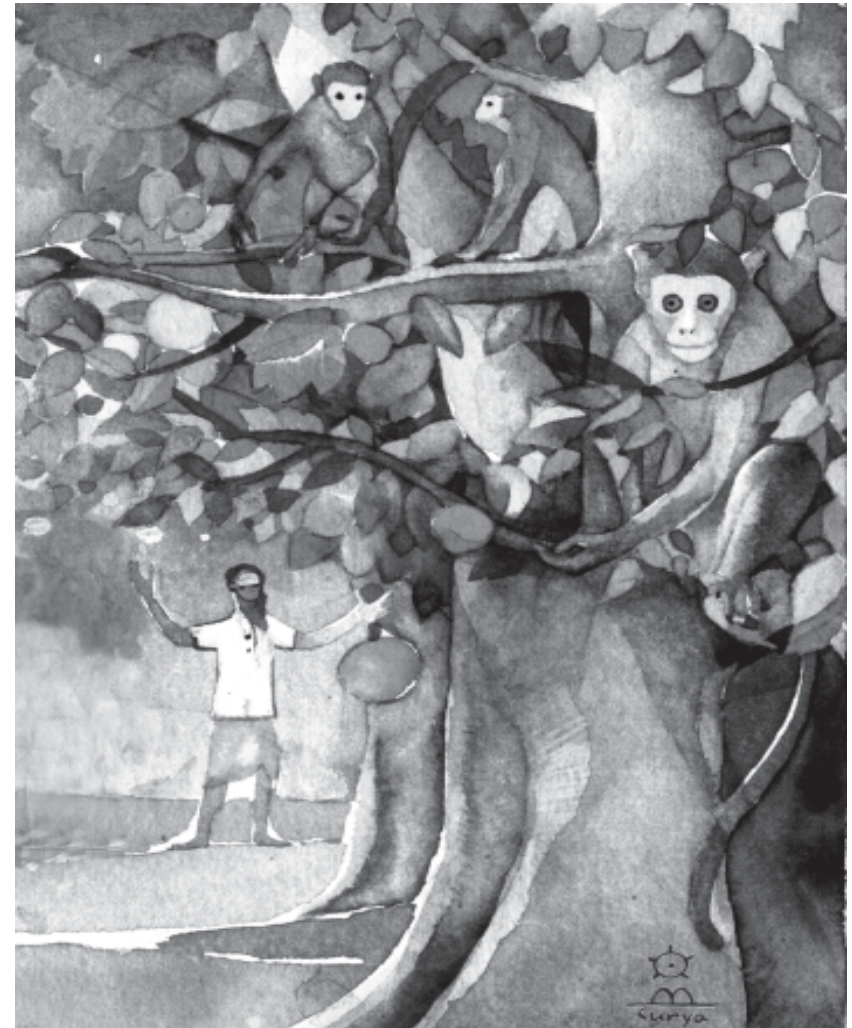
SERVANT: Shaking sticks and hurling stones at them doesn't frighten them any longer.

LEASEHOLDER: I know...I'll tell you what I'll do. Tonight I have to go to town anyway. I'll try and find a catapult⁷. With it we can deliver a persuasive warning!

That evening the leaseholder locates a slingshot in town and returns the next day with his servant and a friend, his newly acquired weapon in hand. As it is their customary raiding time, the leaseholder is not surprised to find monkeys wreaking havoc in his grove. He begins to test the suppleness of his new weapon, shooting various sized stones at them. Finally, as he gets a better feel for it, he begins to shoot with increased accuracy...

⁶ Traditionally it is inauspicious to have tamarind trees on one's property though there is demand for their fruit because of its value in cooking. "In colonial times the government solved this problem in an elegant way. Tamarind trees were planted on government land by the sides of major roads, providing shade to travellers and fruit for the market. Each year the government would accept tenders for harvesting specified sections of the highways, and the highest bidder would get the contract. The money raised in this way would be used to maintain the roads." *Power of the Presence, Pt. Two*, p. 199.

⁷ Tamil *kavandi vil*—forked stick with elastic band used for catapulting small stones.



SERVANT: See, they are starting to retreat in fear.

He shoots again and the monkeys scramble.

FRIEND: There, that one...you see that big one there, try to hit him. Undaunted, he keeps coming back, invariably encouraging the others.

The leaseholder gathers up a large stone and fires it with full force at the insistent one. Only half-intending, he makes a direct hit to the

head. The monkey tumbles down from the heights and lands right at their feet with a terrible thud.

LEASEHOLDER: Oh! My goodness! What've I done!

FRIEND: I'm afraid you've hit him quite hard.

LEASEHOLDER: It doesn't look good. He's not moving.

SERVANT: Sir, do you think he's dead?

FRIEND: *(Other monkeys nearby start screaming)* Come, let's get out of here. The monkeys are starting to react. They could attack us!

The three run away in a panic. The monkeys jump about in fury and grief, shouting and screaming. They gather round the dead monkey and wail.



Soon after the monkey tribe gathers up their dead companion and carries him to Pachaiaimman Temple, laying the corpse before Sri Bhagavan. As they consider Sri Bhagavan their friend, at this time of anger and grief it is quite natural for them to bring him both the corpse and their complaints. As soon as they draw near, they burst into angry cries and tears. Bhagavan, whose heart registers and mirrors the emotions of those around him, responds to their anguish with tears of his own.

BHAGAVAN: What happened?

Bhagavan touches the monkey and looks for a sign of life. Feeling none, he looks sad. The monkeys scream loud shrieks, leaping about from tree to tree. Then, by way of consolation, Bhagavan tells them...

BHAGAVAN: Death is inevitable for everyone who is born. He at whose hands this monkey died will also meet with death one day. It is the law of nature. There's no need to grieve or be angry about it.

Gradually Bhagavan's emanations of soft sympathetic love soothe and calm the turmoil within their hearts. Bhagavan gazes compassionately at their dead friend and notes the pain of all gathered. After a time the

monkeys are pacified by Bhagavan's words and carry away the corpse of their slain companion.

Meanwhile quite of a sudden the Muslim leaseholder falls ill. Bedridden, several doctors are summoned but none is able to cure him. After two or three days, when his condition is critical, the family becomes distressed...

SERVANT: Master's condition is serious.

LEASEHOLDER'S WIFE: He was fine, then all of a sudden he had a high fever. People say that in frightening away the monkeys he inadvertently hit one of them on the head, fatally injuring it.

SERVANT: Yes Madam, I'm afraid it's true.

NEIGHBOUR: Some say the monkeys are friendly with the holy man at Pachaiaimman Temple. People call him Brahmana Swami.⁸ They say he feeds the monkeys with his own hands. It seems that on the day the monkey died, the troop carried the corpse to him and laid it before him, all the while weeping bitterly. The Swami was evidently moved by their grief.

NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE: Don't the Hindus extol monkeys as gods — incarnations of Hanuman? Even if monkeys cause them great inconvenience, they won't resort to beating or abuse.



⁸ Around this time, Kavya Kanta composes five verses in Bhagavan's honour, bestowing on him the name "Ramana". (Ramana had been a nickname when Bhagavan was a child). In a subsequent letter to his relations, he declares the Swami to be a Maharshi and insists disciples call him "Bhagavan Maharshi".

NEIGHBOUR: The Swami is meant to have said that the one who slew him would one day die as well.

LEASEHOLDER'S FATHER: (*Overhearing*) Alas! Is this what the holy man said? (*Pointing toward his half-conscious son lying nearby*) That's why my son has been lying like this unable to open his eyes for the past three days! It's the Swami's curse! Come, we must go and beg him to remove this curse!

LEASEHOLDER: (*Muttering feebly and incoherently in his fevered state*) Only the one who cursed me can lift it. Please (*struggling for breath*) go to the Swami, beg his forgiveness on my behalf! Tell him I'm sorry!

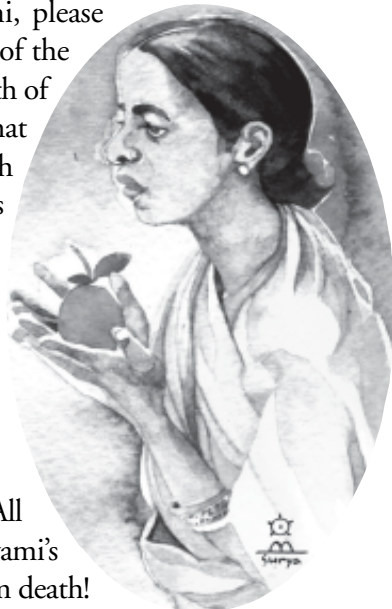
* * *

Preparations are made and gifts packed. As a Muslim family, seeking the guidance and assistance of a Hindu teacher is no small thing and might not meet with the approval of their mullahs. But such is their conviction that Brahmana Swami would help them. So members of the leaseholder's family set off for Pachaiamman Temple to seek Bhagavan's forgiveness. When they arrive Bhagavan is there, sitting silently as usual...

LEASEHOLDER'S FATHER: (*Pranams and bows to Bhagavan who is sitting under a tree, wife offers fruit*) Swami, please forgive this intrusion. I'm the father of the man who was responsible for the death of the monkey three days ago. Since that time, my son has been ill with a high fever. He's raving erratically about his having accidentally killed a monkey. In his delirium, he's crying out for your forgiveness!

BHAGAVAN: (*Sits quietly listening and observing but does not speak*)

FATHER: (*Indicating those accompanying him*) See here Swami, these are my son's wife and children. All have come to beg your forgiveness. Swami's blessing alone can rescue my son from death!



Bhagavan looks on quietly.

LEASEHOLDER'S WIFE: Please Swami! Please give us *vibhuti*. If we receive it from your hand and apply it to my husband's forehead, he will surely be spared. Swami! Please be merciful. Please save my husband!

The father of the leaseholder, his wife and children fall at Bhagavan's feet...

FATHER: (*Imploringly*) Swami, I'm a pious man. Please be compassionate and give us some holy ash. I am certain it's your curse that is afflicting my son!

With a look of bewilderment, Bhagavan breaks his silence...

BHAGAVAN: Curse! You are quite mistaken. I did not curse your son! I never curse or bless anyone! When the monkeys came here I merely told them that whoever takes birth cannot escape death. This is a law of nature common to all beings. Moreover, I am not in the habit of giving *vibhuti*. You all seem to have left the sick man alone in order to come here. Go home and nurse him! Then take him to a good doctor and get him treated.

LEASEHOLDER'S WIFE: Swami! Without getting some holy ash from Swami we will not leave!

FATHER: Swami! Please have compassion for my ailing son! If you give us some holy ash my son will surely recover. His life hangs in the balance; it is in your hands!

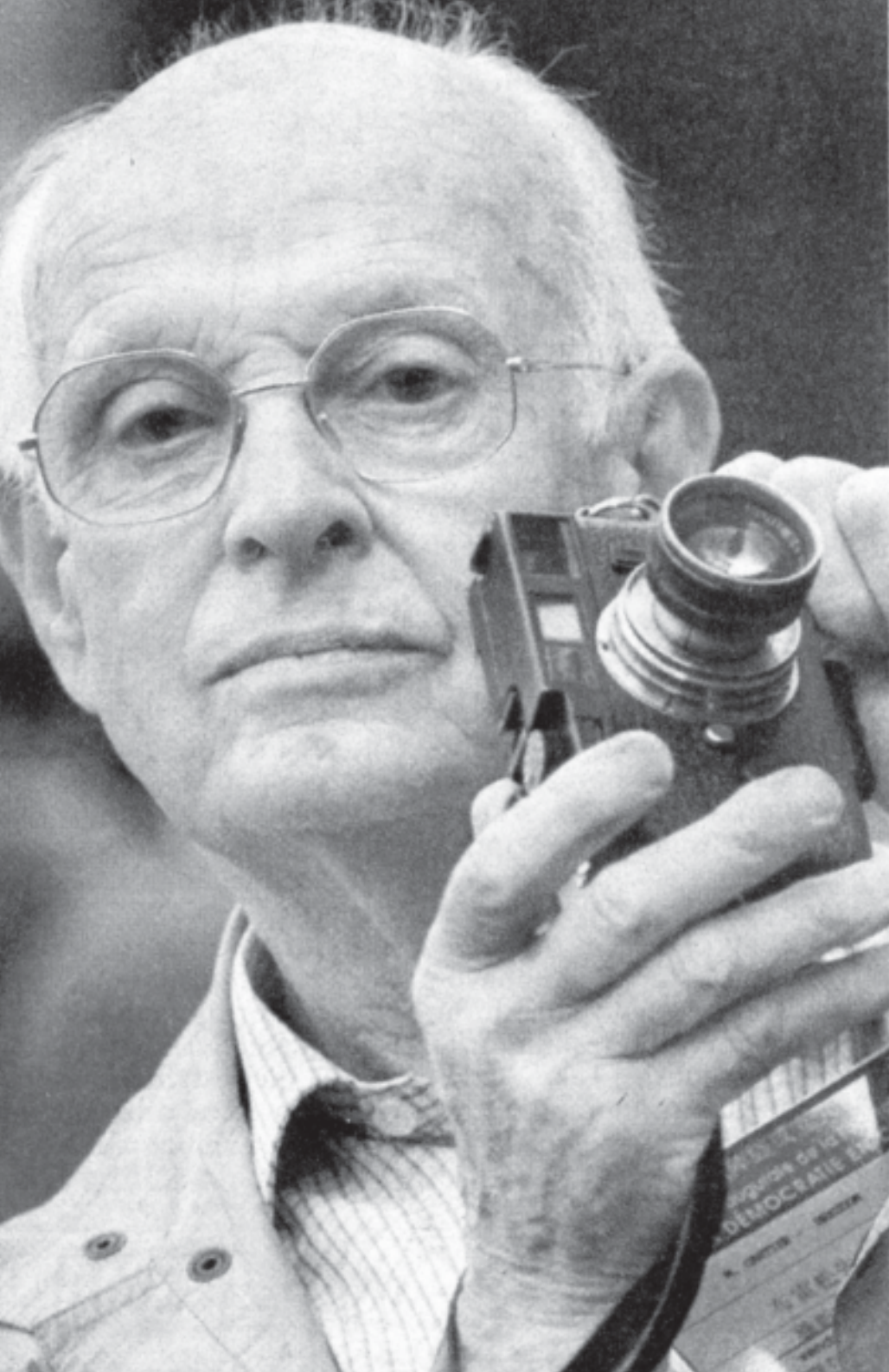
BHAGAVAN: What can I do if you all are so very insistent?

Bhagavan goes near the fireplace, takes a pinch of wood ash, and hands it to them. On receiving it their faces beam with joy.

LEASEHOLDER'S WIFE: (*Falling at Bhagavan's feet*) We're very happy. Now everything is sure to be all right!

LEASEHOLDER'S FATHER: I'll return and apply the ash Brahmana Swami has given us from his own hands.

All worship Bhagavan, falling at his feet, and then, one by one take leave. After applying the ash given by Bhagavan to the forehead of the sick man, a complete recovery ensues. Many say the Leaseholder remained a devotee of Bhagavan till his final day. ▲



Henri Cartier-Bresson, Photographer

T.V. RAMAMURTHY

THE French photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson died in early August 2004 at the age of 95. He was instrumental in influencing a generation of photographers on the way they viewed their subjects. In *The Decisive Moment*, a seminal essay written in 1952 for a book of photographs he released, he wrote about capturing the 'decisive moment': "Your eye must see a composition or an expression that life itself offers you." This term 'the decisive moment' has become synonymous with him. (The English title of *Images a la Sauvett* is literally, 'Images on the Run')

With his relatively unsophisticated but superb 35mm Leica camera, he created a new direction in his medium. Like Hemingway in English literature or Picasso in painting, he reduced the subject to the barest fundamentals of geometry and revealed the essence of the moment. His work was about plain composition, immaculate clarity, stillness

T. V. Ramamurthy is a long time devotee of Sri Ramana. He is particularly interested in the lives of sages and saints and draws inspiration from them.

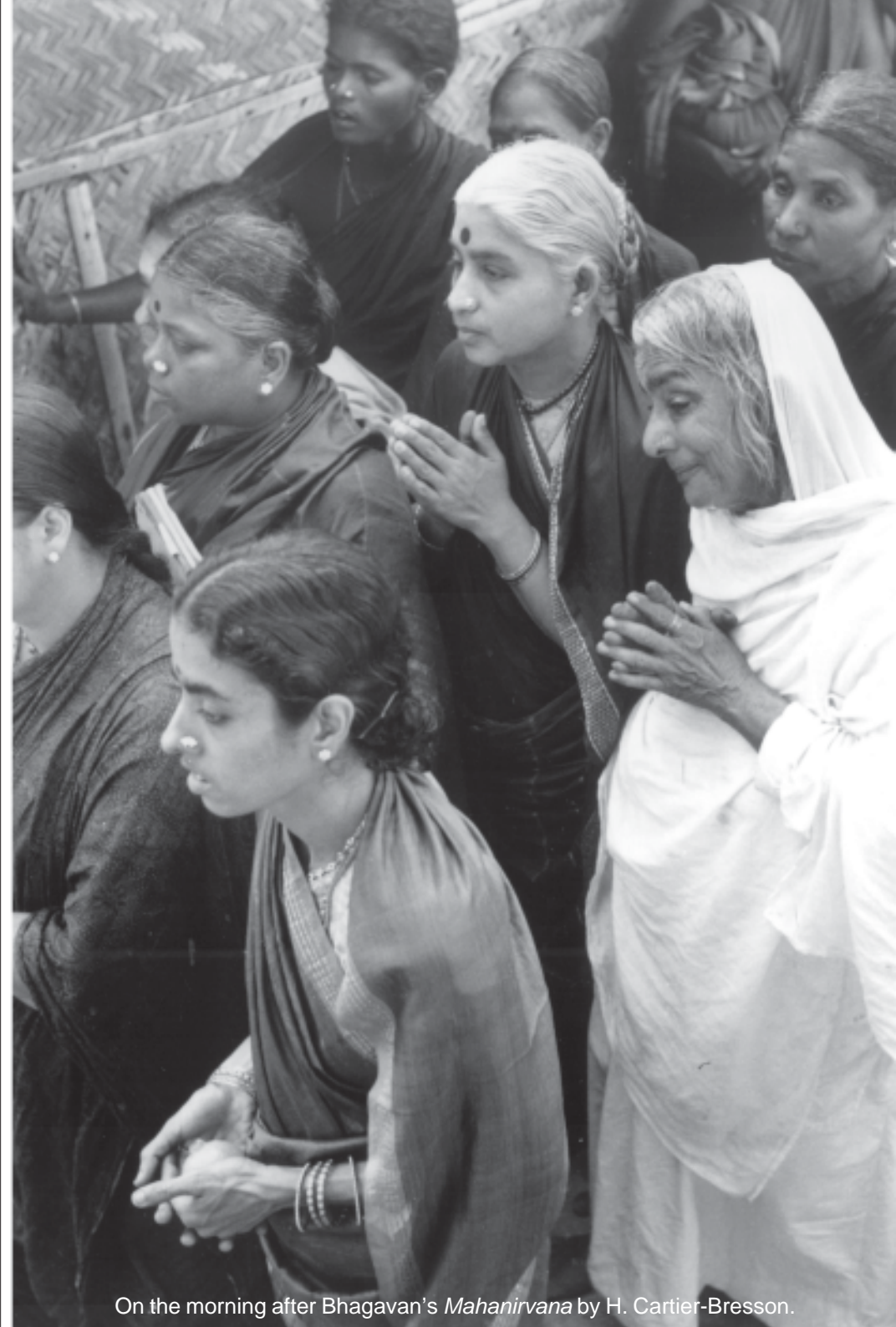
in movement and pure emotion — the decisive moment. Many of his images have a timeless quality because they are so ‘true’. Though they do reveal sensations to the eye, the intent is not to excite but calmly reveal the composition’s underlying harmony.

An amateur photographer clutters a scene with objects, in the belief that the more there is, the more is being said. In the end the viewer sees only irregularity and confusion. With Cartier-Bresson the meaning and value of the image is not in conveying information but the creation of stillness in the spectator where he can gaze and gaze free of preconceptions. We see with his eyes. His genius lay in his extraordinary ability to freeze-frame the ‘decisive moment’ and bring to our attention the depth in a seemingly ordinary moment. As meditators, we can learn much from his restrained attitude. The detachment he brought to the framed subject exposed a depth of understanding that made the scene fascinating even with repeated viewing. That is why many of his images have become icons of the twentieth century.

He had a gift that was a mixture of intuition, patience, discipline, and it seems, sheer chance. This extraordinary ability to catch the moment was repeated so many times that one could not say it was accidental. It was a distinctive capability in tune with his nimble temperament.

It is no wonder other photographers were incredulous at Cartier-Bresson’s consistent luck, as well as his skill which Cartier-Bresson described as “the simultaneous recognition in a fraction of a second of the significance of an event, as well as the precise organisation of forms that give that event its proper expression.” This is the content plus geometry mentioned earlier.

One of his most famous pictures is the silhouette of a man frozen in mid-leap against the background of a Parisian railroad station. It has become emblematic of a style that reminds us that in photography the creative act must be performed immediately or lost forever. He stressed the importance of catching that vital moment, that fleeting instant separating good photography from



On the morning after Bhagavan’s *Mahanirvana* by H. Cartier-Bresson.

cluttered images and chaotic composition and in doing so he revealed the sublime in the mundane. To live in the moment requires a mind that is focussed in the moment with an intense and clear intent. In his view, the photographer is not unlike an animal stalking its prey, waiting for that precise moment to 'seize the instant in its flight'. The metaphor of hunting naturally became a familiar one in writings about his photography. Cartier-Bresson himself used it often: "approach tenderly, gently on tiptoe — even if the subject is a still life." Or, "A velvet hand, a hawk's eye — these we should all have." He also said: "I adore shooting photographs. It's like being a hunter. But some hunters are vegetarians — which is my relationship to photography." And later, explaining his dislike of the automatic camera, he would disparagingly say, "It's like shooting partridges with a machinegun."

We do not know how he was able to create his images because the moment itself cannot be taught, as he told the aspiring young photographer Eve Arnold. He explained, "Learn your technique and then forget it, because if you are conscious about your technique all the time, you are doing it self-consciously." At another time, "You must know with intuition when to click the camera." More easily said than done.

His advice can be applied equally to our efforts at meditation and in particular, self-enquiry. At a certain point after mastering the basics of concentration we need to let go and trust that the present will unfold the truth in the mirror of our mind.

Cartier-Bresson had an extraordinary ability to be in the right place at the right time when some of the momentous moments in the twentieth century occurred. For Indians and those who love India, Cartier-Bresson captured some unforgettable moments: Nehru standing on the railings of the gate at Birla House to officially announce the death of Mahatma Gandhi; and the ensuing funeral with lakhs of people perched even on precarious tree branches to gain a glimpse of the cortege and the funeral pyre. The scene refrained as always from the easy melodrama by the rigorous form one expects



H. Cartier-Bresson and Dr. T.N. Krishnaswamy on the morning after Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*.

from a French intellectual. A man of broad sympathies and a humane witness to suffering in the world, he did not fall into the trap of mushy sentimentality.

He was one of the last people to speak with Mahatma Gandhi, some fifteen minutes before the death of the great man. They discussed a particular picture in a photographic book that CB had showed him. Gandhi reportedly said, "I see death, death, death."

Other memorable images taken were the late patrician photos of the master Sri Aurobindo and of Swami Shivananda majestically captured sitting on a tiger skin by the Ganga, images indelibly impressed on the memories of their respective followers.

For Ramana devotees he is best known for the last three photos taken of Bhagavan on 4th April 1950. He was also at the ashram the night Bhagavan attained mahanirvana. In fact, he witnessed the glowing meteor that travelled north over Arunachala the moment Bhagavan left his body. Most people in the ashram were so engrossed in the trauma of his death that they did not look up into the night sky. The photographer's words have been quoted in many books and articles about Bhagavan's last days.

Some of the photos he took on the subsequent day of devotees in grief during the ceremonies for Bhagavan's internment are among his most familiar images from his portfolio on India. In the haze of collective sorrow he recorded the intense emotions when a great soul had departed from this physical realm, with a dispassionate eye sensitive to the individual's despair and disbelief. One does not feel he has intruded. Quite the reverse, he is absent from these pictures.

Many of us have a favourite photo and for me it is the famous one taken in Kashmir of four Muslim women clothed in burkas with their backs to the camera. As they look out over the valley, one woman has raised her hands in supplication while the others mysteriously gaze out. What are they looking for? We shall never know and yet it doesn't matter. What does, is that Cartier-Bresson has memorably caught a timeless moment. The photograph breathes an ageless air. The photo eloquently speaks for itself. It does not need words to explain it; it is self-sufficient.

It was while recuperating in Marseille in 1931 from a life-threatening attack of blackwater fever, that Cartier-Bresson acquired his first Leica. "I prowled the streets all day, feeling very strung-up and ready to pounce, determined to 'trap' life — to preserve life in the act of living," he recalled. "Above all, I craved to seize the whole essence, in the confines of one single photograph, of some situation that was unrolling before my eyes."

We do remember his photos because they are so fresh and eloquent. He captured the fleeting moment and articulated it for us, as if we too, could live that instant with him. ▲

What is Self-Enquiry?

PATRICK ROBERTS

MOST people, especially Westerners, on hearing the term Self-enquiry for the first time probably suppose it to be some kind of therapeutic psychological analysis. However, it has a special meaning in the Ramana way. One approaches the subject cautiously and humbly because it is easily misunderstood. In my opinion Self-enquiry (*atma vichara*) is a problematic term and it can even be misleading if taken too literally. This is because Sri Ramana repeatedly said that since the Self is absolute consciousness it is not an object of meditation. You cannot *know*, let alone *see*, the Self. You can only BE it. Which is what you are. Paradoxically, the Self which is beyond duality cannot even be said to know itself, so how can there possibly be any enquiry into it?

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So what then is the enquiry? It is the search for the source of the 'I'-thought which is pure consciousness, the Self. Because the 'I'-thought (*Aham-vritti*) is the root thought without which there can be no other thoughts, it is implicit in all thoughts. 'Without the Aham-vritti there can be no other vritti, but the Aham-vritti can subsist by itself without depending on any other vritti of the mind. The Aham-vritti is therefore fundamentally different from other vrittis.'¹ 'I' is ambiguous thereby causing confusion because it can refer to both the illusory or false self (ego is 'I' in Latin) and the real Self (atman). Atman is identical with Brahman but very few people can ever realize this. Some people might even consider this statement to be 'blasphemous' but they do not understand it, being unable to conceive of the total dissolution of the ego. Sri Ramana stated, "The 'I' casts off the illusion of 'I' and yet remains as 'I'. Such is the paradox of Self-Realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it."²

It is my understanding of Bhagavan's teachings that the 'I' in the 'Who am I?' question is the ego, NOT the Self. This question is not concerned with any kind of psychological investigation. Indeed there is no answer to it, as its purpose is simply to silence the mind and introvert it. Doubting its existence by asking 'Who am I?' finally makes it disappear, vanish like the ghost that it is. In Sri Ramana's terminology mind and ego are synonymous. Bhagavan says, 'In the enquiry 'Who am I?', the 'I' is the ego. The question really means, what is the source or origin of this ego?'³ Again, 'One must find out the real 'I'. In the question 'Who am I?' by 'I' is meant the ego. Trying to trace and find its source, we see it has no separate existence but merges in the real 'I'.⁴ Far from being dry, Self-enquiry is an adventure but it is not detective work. "If the enquiry 'Who am I?' were a mere mental questioning it would not be of much value. The

very purpose of Self-enquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source. It is not, therefore, a case of one 'I' searching for another 'I'."⁵

Sri Ramana compared the process of Self-enquiry to a dog tracking. 'Self-enquiry by following the clue of Aham-vritti is just like the dog tracing its master by his scent...To that scent the dog holds on undistractedly while searching for him, and finally it succeeds in tracing him. Likewise in your quest for the Self, the one infallible clue is the Aham-vritti, the 'I-am'-ness which is the primary datum of your experience. No other clue can lead you direct to Self-realization.'⁶ So if you hold onto the 'I'-thought with sufficient persistence and determination other thoughts will fly away of their own accord. "If you mean that other thoughts distract you, the only way is to draw your mind back each time it strays and fix it on the 'I'. As each thought arises, ask yourself: 'To whom is this thought?' The answer will be, 'to me'; then hold on to that 'me'."⁷

In Self-enquiry the subject is its own object as it were. Sri Ramana called this method the direct method because all other methods are dualistic, employing the mind in their practice. He used to say that to ask the mind to kill itself is like asking the thief to turn into a policeman and catch the thief who is himself. 'I have a mind and I want to kill it' is a futile attitude incompatible with Self-enquiry. How can the ego ever eliminate itself? The rope never was a snake so killing it is out of the question. Self-enquiry is only possible on the understanding that the ego is *unreal*. Another way of saying this is to declare that the ego does not exist. 'What is the standard of Reality? That alone is Real which exists by itself, which reveals itself by itself and which is eternal and unchanging.'⁸ The practice of Self-enquiry then brings about the total experience of this unreality, this passing show. Sri Ramana assures us that eventually the mind merges into the Self, 'dissolved like a salt doll in the sea.'

¹ *Maharshi's Gospel*, tenth ed. p 79.

² Talk No 28.

³ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 3-1-46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-1-46.

⁵ *Maharshi's Gospel*, tenth ed. p 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 78/9.

⁷ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 8-5-46.

⁸ *Maharshi's Gospel*, tenth ed. p 61.

“People ask me how to control the mind. I reply: ‘Show me the mind.’ The mind is no more than the series of thoughts. How can it be controlled by *one* of those thoughts, namely the desire to control the mind? It is foolish to seek to end the mind by the mind itself. The only way is to find the mind’s Source and keep hold of it. Then the mind will fade away of itself. Yoga enjoins Chitta-vritti-nirodha (repression of thoughts); I prescribe Atmanveshana (quest of the Self), which is practicable.”⁹ It must be emphasized that Self-enquiry is not so much the effort to stop the mind thinking by continually rejecting thoughts, as to find its source and abide there. It is better to ignore thoughts rather than to fight them, thereby giving them oxygen. Try not to pay them any attention but let them be like clouds in the sky. Some people confuse thinking with consciousness, so that they are afraid that being thought-free will mean falling into a void. The practice of Self-enquiry requires great courage because of the lingering fear that the disappearance of the ego means a complete loss of identity.

The state of ‘no mind’ does not mean that one becomes a stone Buddha and can no longer function normally, but that one has overcome the sense of individuality and of being the doer. This is mysterious to us who are as yet ignorant but everything then happens spontaneously without any will or desire. Self-realization is so elusive because the Self cannot be objectified. The ego is fundamentally the ‘I am my body’ idea and it only appears to exist because of this objectification. Loss of body consciousness or ceasing to identify oneself with the fascinating physical body seems to be well nigh impossible, but Sri Ramana demonstrated complete transcendence in his impeccable earthly life by enduring the agony of his sarcoma with total serenity and in perfect love and service of mankind. Moreover, he could have cured himself at any time. Let us pray for his grace without which Self-enquiry is impossible. ▲

⁹ *Maha Yoga* by ‘Who’, p. 194.

ADVAITA PRIMER

Maya

JOHN GRIMES

THE cornerstone of any philosophical system is that ‘key concept’ upon which the system revolves. The key-concept of Advaita is *maya*. This entails a little elaboration in order that a possible misunderstanding does not result. According to Advaitins, *maya* does not mean ‘illusion’ as is ordinarily understood in English. Nor does it mean that nothing exists. *Maya* is an appearance — and the only person who enquires into this experience, to explain it, is someone under the sway of the appearance. To ask where it came from or if the world is real necessarily implies that that person is presently bewitched by *maya*. First one assumes duality is there, and then one wants to investigate it. The snake is not a snake at all; it is a rope and always has

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been a rope. The sun does not move—yet one sees it moving. The sun is self-effulgent, shining on all alike. The sun has never seen, nor will ever know darkness. Yet, how wonderful, as soon as one moves out of the sunlight, one discovers darkness. The sun didn't produce the darkness. The Absolute Reality is what it is and never is otherwise. How is it conceivably possible for someone to escape to a place where It is not!? Yet, that is exactly one's condition. One experiences distance, separation from that which one eternally is!

That this misinterpretation/misunderstanding arises is borne out by the fact that critics sometimes label Advaita as *mayavada* and Advaitins are called *mayavadins*. These terms are used disparagingly and yet there is a grain of truth in the matter. What is it? Maya cannot exist or function independent of the Absolute Reality (*Brahman*) and it ceases to bewitch when Brahman is realized. Still, maya is the linguistic device by which the Advaitin explains how the non-dual Absolute Reality 'appears' as multitudinous. Strictly speaking, Brahman is the be-all and end-all of Advaita, and if anything, Advaita should be called *Brahma-vada*. This is so because Advaita never loses sight of its central doctrine that Brahman is real, the world is non-real, and the individual is non-different from Brahman.

What the critics have done is to mistake the means for the end. The reality of the great Inner Self is Advaita's sole concern. The Advaitin is not interested in proving the existence of maya. Nonetheless, though maya is not ultimately real, its importance cannot be exaggerated for the role that it plays in Advaita philosophy. Yet, as real illumined sages (jnani) know, Advaita is not essentially a philosophy but a state of Being. No one would deny that individuals perceive multiplicity and distinctions. How does this happen? "Atman, the self-luminous, through the power of one's own maya, imagines in oneself, by oneself (all the objects that the subject experiences within or without)."¹ "This unborn (changeless, non-

dual Brahman) appears to undergo modification only on account of maya and not otherwise."²

According to Advaita, the real is that which lasts, which suffers no sublation, which is eternal. Appearances are perceived and thus they are not unreal (*asat*). According to Advaita, the unreal can never appear, not even in one's wildest dreams, e.g., a square-circle or the child of a barren woman. The real (*sat*) never changes and thus appearances cannot be called real. Yet, miraculously, mysteriously, inscrutably, distinctions/multiplicity, all that is perceived as 'other than you' (seemingly) is perceived. Thus, appearances are called 'what is other than the real or the unreal' (*sadasat vilaksana*), 'illusory' (*mithya*) 'indescribable' (*anirvacaniya*), maya. How wonderful!

It is by means of this concept that Advaita delineates its epistemology, metaphysics, and practical teachings. For instance, epistemology presupposes a subject who knows, the object which is known, and the resulting knowledge. The justification and elucidation of this triple form (*triputi*) is accounted for by maya. Similarly with error, maya is its material cause. Superimposition (*adhyasa*) and the theory of illusory appearance (*vivartavada*), which both help to explain the problem of error, presuppose maya. An inert, material mind needs the help of consciousness for knowledge to arise. Knowledge exists in and through a conscious experience of multiplicity. And it is maya which is the cause of all these empirical distinctions. The Advaitin contends that the very possibility of empirical distinctions rests upon the existence of maya.

According to the metaphysics of Advaita, the Absolute is one and non-dual. Thus arises the apparent problem of the One and the many. What is the relationship between the One and the many, between the Absolute and the relative? The Advaitin must account for the seeming plurality of the universe if the Reality is One and non-dual. An explanation is also called for in regard to the distinction which the Advaitin makes between the Reality with form and the

¹ *Mandukya Upanisad*, 2.12.

² *Mandukya Upanisad*, 3.19.

formless Reality. The seeming difference between the individual self and the Absolute needs to be explained. The place of God (*Isvara*), as well as the creation of the world, must be accounted for. Every Indian metaphysical system endeavors to explain these three entities, i.e., the Reality, the individual self, and the physical universe. Advaita must explain how these three entities are really only one. And this Advaita does by elucidating how the concept of maya is presupposed in each of these issues.

Finally, the entire practical teachings of Advaita presuppose the concept of maya. The bondage of the individual, as well as his/her liberation, hinge upon maya. Maya is the root cause of bondage and knowledge is the direct means of its removal. Ethics, aesthetics, and values all have meaning only within the context of maya. Likewise, all disciplines prescribed for attaining release only become meaningful within the context of maya. By this criterion, Brahman alone is absolutely real, never being subject to contradiction. All else will be called 'real' only by courtesy. The distinction between one individual and another, the existence of a plurality of things, the attribution of attributes to the Absolute are all concessions to the Truth made from the relative point of view.

Thus, maya has a special place in Advaita. It is a philosophical, methodological device to provide an explanation for the inexpressible. There is no water in a mirage. There never has been, nor ever will be. And yet water is seen! How wonderful. To experience something does not necessarily imply it is really real. Appearances appear and believers believe. But that does not make them Real. ▲

Siva Purana

The Creation of Arunachala

RAMESH MENON

Foreword

THE length and breadth of India is strewn with temples that have a startling commonality of themes. I do not believe the Puranas, the books that describe these themes, are merely the fiction of the ancients. Rather, they seem to describe a human history more primal than the one of a few thousand years to which we habitually think we belong. In the Puranas we see reflections of a cosmic history when this earth was open to the universe.

It is difficult to accept that the greatest glory of ancient India was the drainage system of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. We know from modern cosmology, that the universe is much older, vaster and more complex than we imagined a hundred years ago. We know our own history is less than a speck against universal horizons of space and time.

It is absurd that we pass any judgement whatever on a universe in which we are such infants: that we dare say 'This is so and this not, in the cosmos'. Surely, our human history is an infinitesimal part of the history of the universe, not vice versa; and our ignorance is far more profound than our knowledge.

The characters in the Puranas are ‘cosmic’ in dimension, even the lesser ones; as is the sweep of time, space and spirit we encounter here. We can easily dismiss it all as the exaggerated fantasies of nameless writers of the dim past. Or else, we begin to suspect there is more to learn here than we dreamt: that human history is fundamentally different from what we have been taught.

The beings we meet in the Puranas are godlike, grandly demonical, and incomprehensible when we compare them to ourselves. They live for thousands of years, fly in sky chariots — *vimanas* fleet as thought; command great astras: weapons that consume cities in a flash.

This chapter on the creation of Arunachala is part of a book which is a condensed, rearranged and retold translation of the Siva Purana, which I hope, in a more contemporary and imaginative style than is generally available in English. Much of it deals with characters and events that are incredible from our perspective.¹

But is it possible that beginningless Siva, of the eight cosmic bodies, the fire from whose third eye ends the universe, Brahma, the four-headed Creator, and four-armed Vishnu, who sleeps on an infinite sea, are not imaginary beings, but inconceivable masters of the stars?

In the Purana, we find this description of time, which is hardly the invention of brutish man scrabbling to create the spoke and the ploughshare:

The basic unit of life is the nimesha, the instant.

Fifteen nimeshas make one kashtha, thirty kashthas one kaala, thirty kaalas one muhurta, and thirty muhurtas one day.

Thirty days is a maasa, a month, which is one day of the gods and ancestors; six maasas make an ayana, two ayanas a year.

One human year is a day and a night for the celestials, uttarayana being the day and dakshinayana the night.

Three hundred and sixty-five human years make a divine one.

¹ Rupa & Co. New Delhi will publish *Siva Purana* by Ramesh Menon in March 2005.

Four are the yugas in the land of Bharata: the krita, treta, dwapara and kali.

The pristine krita lasts 4,800 divine years, the less perfect treta 3,600 years, the half-corrupt dwapara 2,400, and the almost entirely evil kali 1,200.

A chaturyuga, one cycle of four ages, is 12,000 godly years long, 12,000 x 365 human years. 71 chaturyugas make a manvantara, 14 manvantaras a kalpa.

A kalpa, of 1000 chaturyugas, 12 million divine years, is one day of Brahma, the Creator.

8,000 years of Brahma make one Brahma yuga; 1,000 Brahma yugas make a savana. Each Brahma lives for 3,003 savanas.

A day of Brahma's has 14 Indras, his life 54,000 Indras.

One day of Vishnu is the lifetime of Brahma.

One day of Siva is the lifetime of Vishnu.

Can it be that our past was more than we think? Was it, in its way, inconceivably superior to the present?

By the Puranic calendar, we live today at the outset of a kali yuga. Thus, Rama lived in the world 1,750,000 years ago, and Krishna 5000, at least: one in the treta yuga and the other in dwapara yuga.

According to the Purana, it is natural for men of the kali yuga to be puny and short-lived, and for them to forget the Sanatana Dharma and the eternal Gods. For this is the very nature of the evil age. It is also the sinister ‘Iron Age’ of Greek legend, when the Gods seldom visit the earth anymore, or beget sons on the daughters of men. It is the time when our planet is sealed from the rest of the universe.

However, my purpose in writing the book was not to rearrange the reader's notion of history, but to present the Spirit of Siva, auspicious, complex and immortal God, as best as I can, with as much devotion as I have, from material found in the Siva Purana.

Introduction

The sacred Puranas have come down to us in the great oral tradition of the rishis of Bharatavarsha. Once, the peerless Vyasa composed them from ‘ancient material’: *ancient for him*.

Traditionally, a Purana deals with five subjects, called *panchalakshana*: the primary creation of the universe; secondary creation after periodic destruction; the genesis of the Gods and rishis; great epochs of time, the kalpas, manvantaras, yugas; and the history of some royal dynasties of the earth.

More recently, after BC 4000 until roughly AD 1000, a lot of other material has grown around the central Purana. These concern rituals for sacrifices, other customs, festivals, caste customs, and specifications for temple construction and so on.

There are 18 principal surviving Mahapuranas. The Siva Purana is one of these. They are collections of revelations, often in the form of stories, usually narrated to some rishis by a *Suta*² who heard them from Vyasa, who in turn heard them from Narada, Brahma or another fabulous raconteur in time out of mind. They have come down, invariably, in Sanskrit couplets.

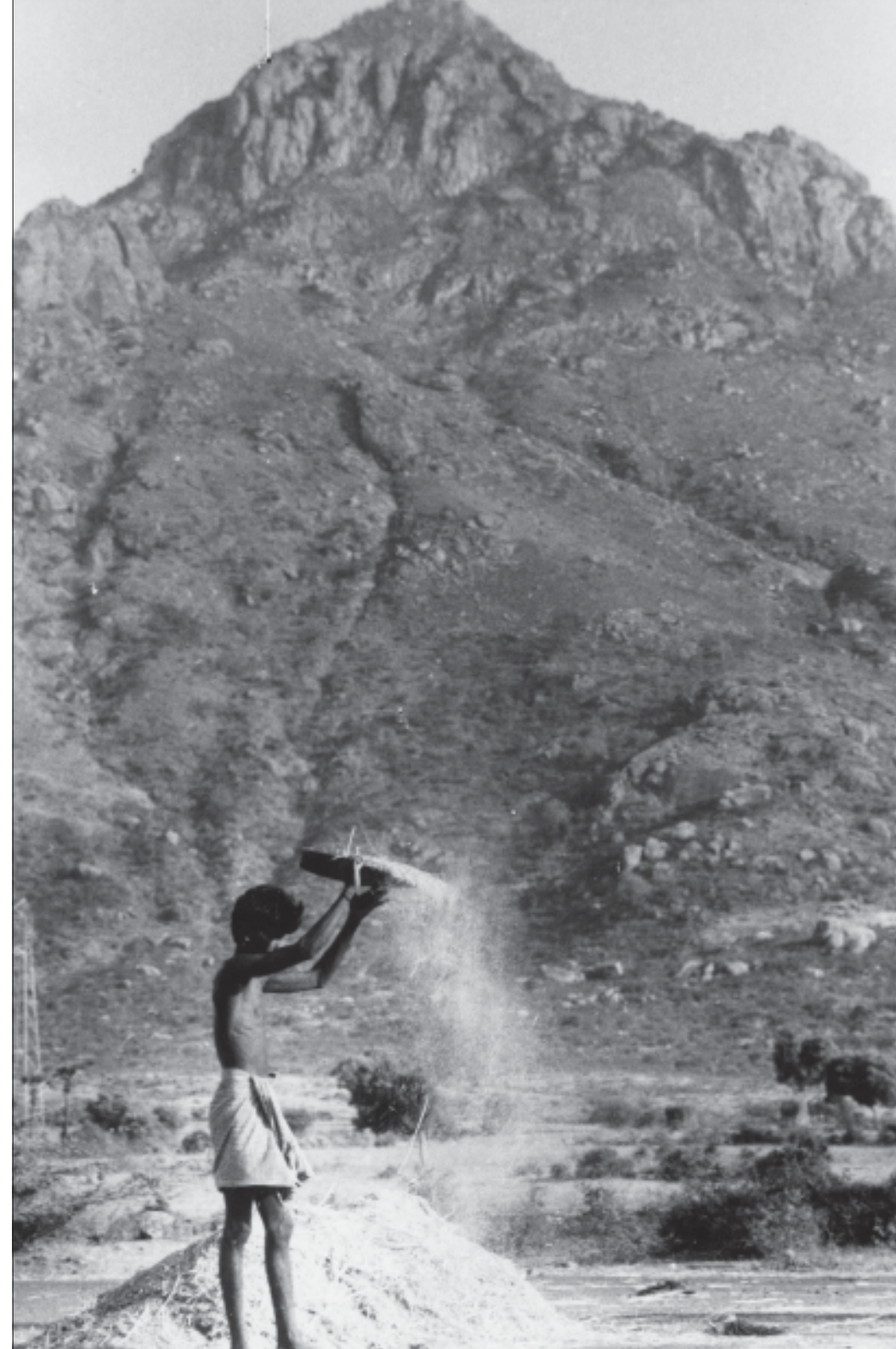
The Siva Purana is considerably longer than the portions of it that I have included in the book. My aim was not to undertake a scholarly translation (of which there are a few), but to write as readable a version as I could, without diminishing the spirit and the scope of the original.

For example, large sections of the original deal with rituals, and others list all of Siva's thousand names, with their meanings. In the book I have only touched upon these, which hold little narrative appeal for the ordinary reader. Also, the sequence of tales in the recorded Purana is often different from mine; but I have retained all the important legends of Siva. In some sections, I have taken stylistic and fictive liberties: but never changing the meaning and flavour of the original. No doubt, generations of *pauranikas*,³ in the oral tradition, did the same.

The Puranic tradition is mainly lost to those of us that do not know Sanskrit and lack the patience to plough through scholarly translations, many of which tend to dispense with the poetic magic of the originals.

² *Suta*: A son of a Brahmin and a kshatriya.

³ *pauranikas*: masters of Puranic knowledge.



These luminous stories are our race's soul. The days when we would hear them at our grandmother's knee are over. We know less of them than our parents did, and our children shall know even less than we do. My rendition of the Siva Purana seeks to restore it to the English-speaking Indian in some small measure; and, hopefully, to preserve it for a time in our consciousness.

It also seeks to introduce the non-Indian reader to another rare facet of our heritage. I am aware that an English rendering cannot remotely approach the Sanskrit in depth or resonance: I pray that I have not trivialised the Purana.

In the Naimisa vana

Obeisance to Siva with Uma beside him, his ganas and his sons. Obeisance to the Lord of Prakriti and Purusha, the cause of creation, nurture and destruction.

I seek refuge in Siva whose power is unequalled, whose glory spreads everywhere, who is Un-born!

Some rishis from the six noble families begin a yagna in the Naimisa forest, at Prayaga, confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna, from where a subtle path leads to Brahmaloaka. The Suta Romaharshana, peerless raconteur, whose sacred lore can make one's hair stand on end, hears about the sacrifice. He is one of Vedavyasa's five sishyas to whom his guru imparted the Purana he composed from antique revelations. Romaharshana is a most erudite pauranika, a master of syllogisms, who can answer the metaphysical queries of Brihaspati himself. This Suta, who is a seer and a poet, a mahakavi, arrives in the Naimisa.

Saunaka's rishis are delighted. They receive him with honour; they worship him. They settle him into a *darbhasana*,⁴ and say, "Omniscient Romaharshana, ocean of the oldest lore, tell us the holy Siva Purana."

Romaharshana begins in his majestic voice, "I bow to the splendid Rishi Vyasa, who blessed me with the Purana. Vedavyasa said to me:

⁴ *darbha*-grass; *asana*-seat.

'When a long time had elapsed after the Beginning, when many *kalpas* had come and gone, and this one's civilisation was established, a dispute arose among the rishis of the six clans. One said "This is the greatest God," and another disagreed. They set off to see Brahma, the Creator. They went to Mount Meru, to Devaparvata where *devas* and *asuras*, *siddhas* and *charanas*, *yakshas* and *gandharvas* roam, to Sumeru, four-armed swastika, mountain at the crux of the world, Ratnasanu, jewel peak, Hemadri, the golden mountain.

They came to a Brahmavana there, ten *yojanas*⁵ wide and a hundred long, luminous with lakes and rills. They saw a city brilliant as the midday sun, its portals and ramparts licking the sky. Golden and silver mansions lined its thousand streets: each one as big as a palace, every one embedded with unearthly jewels. At the heart of the secret city, the Lord Brahma lived in the greatest edifice.

In his ineffable court, the rishis saw the Creator like molten gold, wearing white silk. He was utterly gentle — his eyes large as lotus petals, his body draped with celestial garlands. His lustre was everywhere; his fragrance was like a river flowing *kalaharas*⁶ in spring. Saraswati sat at his side, the cowries of fate in her hand. The rishis glowed to see the four-faced Lord. They joined their palms above their heads; they lauded him thus: "Obeisance to you, ancient Purusha, source of creation, life and death. Obeisance, O Brahma, great Atman. Obeisance to you who has the universe for his body!"

In his oceanic voice, Brahma said, "Welcome, Rishis of splendour. Tell me why you have all come here together."

The leader of the sages said, "We are taken with darkness, we don't know who the greatest God is. You are the creator of the universe, the cause of all causes; nothing is hidden from you. Tell us, Lord, who is the most ancient one of all? Who is the greatest Purusha? Who is the purest, most perfect being?"

Brahma shut all his eyes and was lost briefly in himself. Opening them again, the Pitama⁷ said softly, "Rudra."

⁵ *yojanas* is equal to approximately 8 miles or 13.5km.

⁶ *kalaharas*: a row or succession of black clouds.

⁷ Pitama: a term of respect. Lit. Ancestor.

Plucking a wheel of light from the air like a sliver of the sun, he cast it down into the world. “Where the hub of the wheel breaks, offer your worship to Siva.”

The blinding wheel whirled down the mountains. It broke against an age-smoothed and auspicious crag in a forest: this *Naimisa vana*! Ever since this place has been a holy ground, sanctified for its power of revelation. Here the first Purana was given to men,’ said my guru Vyasa.”

Thus, the Suta begins, his body swaying to the rhythms of his fathomless tale.

“Incomparable Suta, tell us how Siva is worshipped,” says Saunaka, chief among those sages of the forest, thirsty for the occult Purana.

“Siva is worshipped both as *murti* and *linga*,” says Romaharshana gravely.

Saunaka says, “All the other Gods are worshipped just as idols. Why is only Siva worshipped as both image and *linga*?”

Suta says, “Siva alone is *nishkaala*, nameless and formless, as well as *sakaala*, embodied. In his formlessness, he is worshipped as the *linga*. Long ago, in the first kalpa, Siva revealed his *nishkaala* form as a *linga*, and since then is he worshipped so, as the eternal Brahman. Listen.

Once, blue Vishnu, thousand-headed, thousand-armed, with his *sankha*, *chakra* and *gada*, lay asleep with Mahalakshmi on Anantasesa upon the *naara*, the primordial sea. The universe lay dissolved. As he slept, a lotus with an endless golden stalk and a blue corolla thrust itself out from his navel. Brahma, grandsire of the worlds, was born within this umbilical lotus, from Vishnu’s golden womb. Brahma roamed that lotus for a hundred years but could not climb out of it. He began to climb down the infinite stalk, but he did not reach the place from where the flower grew. Then a disembodied voice said to him, “Tapasya is your way.”

Brahma sat in meditation inside the lotus for twelve of his interminable years until, one day, he found himself at his father Mahavishnu’s side.

Narayana lay asleep but he shone like kaala as he breathed, like chasmal Time. Striking the sleeping Blue God with his hand, Brahma said, “Who are you? You lie there haughtily even when you see me. Don’t you know who I am?”

Vishnu was furious. However, controlling himself, he said calmly, “Welcome, my son. Tell me where you have come from, and why you are so agitated. Sit here and tell me,” said Vishnu, patting his serpent bed.

“I have come as swiftly as time! I am the Creator. How dare you call me ‘my son’ as a guru does his shishya? I am the Pitama, yours as well. I create, protect and destroy the universe.”

Vishnu replied languidly, “You, my son, were born from me. Brahma, I am your father. The lotus in which you were born sprouted from my navel. But no matter, my own maya deludes you.”

At which Brahma struck him again and a terrific fight erupted. They first fought like common men, with fists and rough punches. Then Vishnu mounted his eagle and Brahma his white swan, and they fought with astras, cosmic weapons. The devas gathered in the sky in their silvery chariots to watch the battle. Vishnu hurled the Maheswarastra at Brahma, who unleashed the unfathomable Paasupatastra. These missiles spumed into the sky and, blazing like ten thousand suns, locked on high.

As the devas watched in horror, flames from the astras began to consume the three realms. Suddenly, between the two maddened Gods, a column sprang up through the ground — a column from nowhere, without top or base, a column of light and fire into which the apocalyptic astras were absorbed like two sparks. It was a *linga*! With thousands of garlands of flames, flames like galaxies spewing in every direction: an incomparable, incomprehensible *linga*. Awestruck, Vishnu and Brahma fell quiet.

Brahma breathed, “What is it?”

Mahavishnu whispered, “It is beyond me. You find its head, while I seek its root.” Turning into a golden boar he dived down through the ground of that first battlefield to seek the root of the mysterious *linga* of fire. Brahma became a swan, and flew up at the speed of

time, quicker than light, to seek the top of that manifestation. For longer than we can conceive, the boar dived and the swan flashed up; but, above or below, there was no end to the blazing linga.

Exhausted and frightened, Vishnu came back to the battlefield. Brahma flew on up.

When Siva saw them distraught in their arrogance, he laughed, and dislodged, the *ketaki*⁸ flowers on his head fell down that infinite column. Down wafted those flowers, turning about one another, falling countless divine years like a blessing, with neither fragrance nor brightness dimmed. They fell over Brahma, the flashing feathered ascender in a rain of petals.

Perplexed, Brahma the swan said, "Lord of flowers, from whose head do you fall down this column? Why do you fall, good flowers?"

The flowers said, "Friend, we have been falling forever and we do not remember where we began. How will you find the column's pinnacle?"

Tired and annoyed as he was, Brahma had a thought. He bowed to the ketakis, and said humbly, "Friends, a small favour for me: tell Vishnu I saw the top of the linga, and that you bear witness to it." In dire straits falsehood is recommended by even the oldest lore.

They found Mahavishnu in distress, and Brahma smiled. Like a eunuch confessing his inability, Vishnu said ruefully, "I could not find the root of the linga."

Brahma replied smugly, "I found the column's head. These ketakis are my witness."

Hari bowed to Brahma; he worshipped him with all the sixteen types of homage. When he lay in the dust to worship Brahma's feet, a tremendous AUM resounded in that place, a thunderclap that would shatter the universe. Siva stepped out of the linga, taller than the pillar of fire, a wild, matted-hair *Yogin* bright as a billion suns. He stood before the terrified Gods, with bow and trident, wearing tiger-skin, a shining serpent the sacred thread around his body. He seemed to swallow the heavens with his million mouths, the AUM still dying

⁸ *Ketaki*: Tamil. *tazhampu*; Bot. *Pandanus odoratissimus*.



in his blue throat like the battery of thunder that heralds the final deluge in which the stars drown. From that Vision's brow, from his third eye, sprang the dreadful Bhairava.

Bhairava knelt at Siva's feet, "Command me, almighty Lord!"

Siva said, "Here is Brahma, the first God of creation. Worship him with your sword."

With a roar, Bhairava seized the tuft on Brahma's fifth head, the one that lied to Vishnu, and raised his curved blade. Brahma howled; he sweated, he trembled and fell whimpering at Bhairava's feet. Bhairava's arm was drawn back to take off the lying head. Then Vishnu knelt at Siva's feet. "Lord! You gave him five heads. Pardon him in your infinite mercy, this is his first offence."

Siva blessed Vishnu, "Hari, you were truthful though you also wanted to be the Lord of all things. From now, you will have as much worship as I do. But this liar shall not be worshipped any more, or have a temple of his own in the world."

Bhairava released Brahma, and the chastened God prostrated before Siva, "Lord, I am humbled. Now bless me."

Siva said musingly, "The universe is ruined without the fear of a king. Rule the universe from now, Brahma, and be the lord of sacrifices."

That day, Brahma and Vishnu first worshipped Siva. Ever after the day of the Ardra nakshatra in the month of Margasirsa is when Mahadeva is worshipped, as both linga and murti. The bhakta who fasts day and night on holy Sivaratri, who worships the Lord, and *deceives no one*, — he shall have the blessings of a year of ordinary worship. Siva made the blazing linga, without root or tip, diminutive and quiescent. He installed it upon a yoni pedestal, which is Uma!

Said Vyasa,

Says the Suta Romaharshana.

Never again did Siva wear the ketaki on his head. ▲

Yoga And Sankhya

ROLF SKARNITZL

The systems of Yoga and Sankhya are so similar that most statements about one are true of the other. Actually there are only two differences: Sankhya is atheistic and Yoga theistic. Sankhya considers metaphysical knowledge to be the only path, while Yoga emphasizes techniques leading to successful meditation. We can say that Patanjali concentrated his effort especially on co-ordinating the philosophical material that he had borrowed from the Sankhya system. He used it for the practice of concentration and meditation with the aim of attaining samadhi and liberation. In Yoga Sutra II, 18, it is said: "The Seen (the objective side of manifestation) consisting of the elements and sense organs, is of the nature of cognition, activity, and stability (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) and has for its purpose providing Purusha with experience and liberation." The Sutra says

Rolf Skarnitzl lives in Prague. He has been attracted to yoga since his youth and later Vedanta and the path of Ramana Maharshi. He has made a deep study of Sankhya and the gunas. He is the author of numerous books on yoga.

that the purpose of creation is to provide an individual with experiences useful for liberation. The sensual perceptions of phenomena and objects, and the experiences gained from these are due to the activities of the gunas. Such activity enables the individual to develop and finally become liberated. The experiences gained by an individual arise from the action of the gunas upon each other.¹

The theory of gunas is one of the basic doctrines of Indian philosophy and there is no important religious or philosophical work that neglects to mention it. They are generally assumed to have something to do with qualities or specific characteristic features. A complete account is rarely given, though. Mostly we find only generalities, insufficiently explored, and we are thus unable to get a true notion of the immense multiplicity of their functions and their importance.

It has already been mentioned that the word *guna* is commonly translated as a 'quality' that is perceptible through the senses. Another interpretation is the substratum of qualities, that is, inner essence of things. An example of this can be, for instance, light and sound.² We perceive light as a colourful reflection, although it consists of electromagnetic and wave vibrations. Sound is perceived as a combination of tones, although these are based on rhythmic vibrations of molecules and atoms. Thus the meaning of the word *guna* is not limited to qualities perceived by the senses. I. Taimni mentions that the gunas are based on three basic types of movement. According to him, gunas are bundles of energy, always in motion. Each form is somehow fundamentally different from the others, somehow contradictory, yet inseparable from the others. Each *guna* represents a specific type of movement. This may be rhythmic, arrhythmic, or motionless.

A rhythmic harmonious movement is called a vibration, as in the case of light and sound. If vibrations of light and sound emanate

from an object, or if an object reflects them, the object can be identified. This corresponds to *sattva*.

A non-rhythmical, irregular movement denotes activity, as in the case of the movement of molecules in a gas or liquid. This corresponds to *rajas*.

The word *sthit* in Sanskrit means that an object takes up a steady position, that it is stable and motionless. This can be understood as the basis of movement corresponding to *tamas*.

Philosophically, we can see *sattva* as the aim that is to be realized, *tamas* as the obstacle standing in the way of realization, and *rajas* as the force used to overcome obstacles. On the physical level of creation in Nature, there is more *tamas* and *rajas*, while on the psychological level *rajas* and *sattva* are dominant.

It is clear that each *guna* has its characteristic qualities. If we consider *sattva* to be positive and *tamas* to be negative, *rajas* has to be neutral. Both the outer gunas can, by their activities, influence the middle, which is the space, the field between them. Only *rajas* can take upon itself the influence of another *guna* and become tinged with it. The other two cannot because they are by themselves the influencing factors. They are qualitative extremes, where one is in an upward motion the other one is in a heavy downward movement. They are opposite to each other.

Since activity and discriminating faculty are influenced by *rajas* *guna* the quality of a person depends on which *guna* — *sattva* or *tamas* — influences his/her *rajas*. *Sattva* softens and brightens *rajas*, while *tamas* veils and obscures it.

On the physical level, *sattva* creates vibrations that are luminous. *Tamas* gives rise to vibrations that create dense darkness. And vibrations of *rajas* create warmth and dynamic movement.

The order of the gunas *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* is not random, but graduated. Only with the help of *rajas* can one be extricated from a *tamas* state. A direct passage from *tamas* to *sattva* is impossible.

It is, however possible to pass to *sattva* from *rajas*. In other words, a man can wade out of the inert, dull state by physical activity, for

¹ See *Bhagavad Gita* III, 27-28.

² I. Taimni, *Glimpses into the Nature of Yoga*.

example by manual work. Light or sattvic ideas can enter into a state of activity or rajas, but a desire for sattva's luminosity cannot be awakened in a dull inert condition.

Another general characteristic of the gunas is that no one is free from their activities.³ Their activities are not always constant, though. Sometimes sattva or tamas predominates, but most of the time rajas does. Only through perseverance and steady effort or sadhana (a discipline practised in order to gain spiritual knowledge) can an aspirant gradually achieve a more permanent ascendancy of sattva in his mind which, is from the viewpoint of sadhana, is essential.

A full explanation of the three gunas, the most important compounds of our lives, does not exist.⁴ The obstacle to understanding lies allegedly in the basis of the manifest world and in the activities of the mind itself. The problem is that we are trying to understand the gunas through the limitations of our minds. However because everything, both the manifest world and the mind itself, is nothing but the complex of the gunas functioning. To attempt by means of the mind, or mental process, to know the character of the gunas' functioning, is like trying to catch one's own hand with the pincers that it is holding.

We should be aware in describing the gunas that we are operating from the functional level of rajas and it is really impossible to explain rajas by rajas. It is a vicious cycle. The activity of rajas, the above-mentioned non-rhythmical movement, can be explained only by means of something which is not the non-rhythmical movement.

To know rajas, we have the two remaining gunas, out of which tamas must be rejected due to its veiling quality. Sattva is brightness, it illuminates and allows accurate recognition. Its exercise in the knowledge of rajas is therefore most important and it is thus possible to reliably know the vibrating activity of rajas by the distinguishing power of the calm brightness of sattva.

³ Compare *Bhagavad Gita* XVIII, 40

⁴ See I. Taimni, *Science of Yoga* p.173

Sattva does not veil anything; it does not stand in the way of anything, it reflects clear knowledge.⁵ Sattva is therefore a suitable means of knowing the other gunas, as well as sattva itself.

It is important to recognize the gunas' characteristics and dynamic relationships since once they are understood as the basic constituent elements of a character, the resultant knowledge assists the aspirant to transcend his limitations and appreciate who he really is. ▲

⁵ Bhagavata Purana: "When our nature is purified through sattva and the mirror of understanding is cleansed from the dust of desire, then the light of pure consciousness is reflected."

Muruganar Mandiram

In April, Sri Ramanashram President V. S. Ramanan inaugurated the shrine dedicated to Bhagavan built on the site of Muruganar's family home in Ramanathapuram (near Rameswaram). Special *havan* was performed together with chanting of *Ramana Puranam*, the verses written jointly by Sri Bhagavan and Muruganar. Local dignitaries were in attendance as was Anjaneyalu who oversaw construction and devotees from Madurai, Coimbatore, and Madras who joined in the singing of Muruganar's verses. The President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, a native of the area, later phoned to congratulate the caretakers on the project and to praise Muruganar's devotional poetry on Sri Bhagavan. It is hoped to add a library of Muruganar's writings and letters in the upper level portion of the building in the near future.



René Guénon (1886-1951)

CECIL BETHELL

From the moment you came into the world of being,
a ladder was placed before you that you might escape.

— Divani Shamsi Tabriz

THE work of René Guénon¹, whom Ramana Maharshi called 'the great Sufi',² continues to assume an ever more vital importance. Even before WWI Guénon realised that the West was succumbing to ever-increasing decay and dissolution, and he devoted his life to enunciating the immutable principles of the Primordial and Universal Tradition in a series of magisterial books dealing with metaphysical doctrine, traditional principles, symbolism and critique of the modern world.

¹ At long last René Guénon's works are published and available. Previously, only ten of his twenty-three books had appeared in English, and these were mostly long out-of-print; now, thanks to the untiring efforts over some ten years by aficionados and benefactors, the remaining works have been translated, and some revisions made. It happened that a number of the French texts had been translated for private use, and these were collected by the series editor, James Wetmore, and revised and compared with other private translations where available. The books are available from Sophia Perennis, P.O. Box 611, Hillsdale, NY 12529, USA. (www.sophiaperennis.com)

² *Miscellanea*. Sophia Perennis, Ghent, NY. Foreword by Roger Maridort, p. 4.

It was in 1980 that I first met Swâmi Narikutti, who lived on Arunâchala, who was a keen aficionado of René Guénon, whose writings, to which I then turned, have captivated me ever since. The civilisation of which the West is so proud rests on a framework of material and industrial progress that leads to dehumanisation and a greatly increased risk of war. Having broken with its own metaphysical tradition, the West has become abnormal and deviationist, and this collapse of civilisation has, unfortunately, subsequently spread to the East. Guénon's contribution is to be found mainly in a synthetic exposé of eastern metaphysical doctrines, whose destiny it is to awaken the desire in those intellectually qualified Westerners to rediscover and bring back deeper aspects of their own tradition.

Guénon, the son of an architect, was born into a staunchly Catholic family in Blois, France, on the 5th October, 1886. From birth he was of delicate health, but proved a 'brilliant student, always first in his class.'³ Later, when enrolled to study mathematics in Paris, his precarious health prevented his regular attendance, and he had to abandon his university studies. At this time he took a quiet apartment on Saint-Louis-en-Ile, where he was to live for more than 25 years.

He then turned to the fashionable doctrines of neo-spiritualism and occultism. This arena had for its undisputed leader Dr. Gerard Encausse, who, under the pseudonym Papus, led an independent group for esoteric studies. Guénon, believing in the possibility of a regular initiatic transmission, soon had himself accepted into a number of these organizations, including the Martinist Order, where he rapidly attained a high grade. At the Spiritualist and Masonic Conference of 1908, Guénon was present as Office Secretary. However, he withdrew, shocked at hearing Papus say: 'Future societies will be transformed by the certitude of the two fundamental truths of spiritualism: survival of the soul after death and reincarnation.'

³ *The Simple Life of René Guénon*. Paul Chacornac (Paris: Éditions Traditionnelles, 1982), to be published shortly by Sophia Perennis. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the publishers for permission to print extracts.

However, Guénon's involvement in these organizations from 1906 to 1909 proved providential, as his writings enabled others who came after him to avoid wasting their time on paths that led nowhere. He regarded the errors of neo-spiritualist doctrines as a materialism, transposed to another plane, that could never reveal anything other than simple phenomena. After his break with the occult organizations, Guénon was admitted into the Freemasonic Thebah Lodge, coming under the Grand Lodge of France, of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, and in 1913 the review *Le Symbolisme* published a lecture given by René Guénon at this Lodge under the title 'L'enseignement initiatique'. He remained an active member until World War One temporarily closed the Lodges. Although he never thereafter resumed an active role, he continued to take an interest in Masonry, believing that it offered a real spiritual transmission.

During this time, Guénon met two men who were to play an important role in his intellectual development: Léon Champrenaud and Albert de Pouvourville, both of whom were keen students of the true metaphysical doctrines of the East, which they published through the review *La Gnose*. As early as November 1909 Guénon himself seems to have somehow acquired a mastery of metaphysics, especially the Advaita Vedânta, and he began publishing in *La Gnose* articles that eventually formed the greater part of several of his later books. He was, then, already essentially in possession of the life work that was to flow from his pen, although the source of his knowledge has never been completely explained.

In 1911 Guénon married Berthe Loury and the couple lived happily in his small apartment. His adoption of the religion of Islam occurred around 1912 when he received the *barakah* of Sheikh Elish of Egypt through the mediation of Abdul Hâdi (the Islamic name of the Swedish painter John Gustaf Aguéli). Poor health exempted Guénon from active service in 1914. In 1917 he taught philosophy in Algeria, this being his first prolonged contact with Islam since his initiation; in the following year the couple returned to Blois, and within a year Guénon had given up teaching and returned to Paris in order to carry on with his own studies and prepare his first books.

Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines was published in 1921. The first part examines the opposition between the eastern mentality and the modern West, and the second offers a lucid account of the principles of the Hindu tradition. Two thick tomes followed, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion* and *The Spiritist Fallacy*, in which Guénon demolished the pretensions of Theosophy and Spiritualism; understandably, these works aroused anger in Occultist and Theosophical circles. In *East and West* Guénon then asserted his conviction that a reconciliation was both possible and desirable between a metaphysics still preserved in the East and a Western intellectual elite, even though the West had, since the sixteenth century, abandoned the traditional foundations of Christendom in favour of a doctrine of progress cut loose from all traditional moorings.

Guénon was a solitary pioneer when he took up the pen, inaugurating a school of thought completely inimical to the intellectual perspectives entrenched in the Western mind at the time. In 1925 he published his fundamental doctrinal work, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedânta*, of which an ‘embryo’ had appeared in *La Gnose* in 1911. Here the author expounds the fundamental doctrines of all traditional metaphysics, first and foremost the doctrine of the ‘Supreme Identity’ and the possibility for the being at present in the human state to attain liberation in this very life. In *The Esoterism of Dante* Guénon shows that the *Divine Comedy* recounts a process of initiatic realisation, and also testifies to Dante’s knowledge of traditional sciences unknown today. His only known public lecture, given at the Sorbonne, was published as a booklet entitled *Eastern Metaphysics*. In *The Crisis of the Modern World*, Guénon further diagnoses the ills of the West, its science, philosophy, and religion (especially Protestantism) having sunk to the level of mere moralism and sentimentality.

In 1927 Guénon seized the occasion offered by Ferdinand Ossendowski’s sensational travel narrative *Beasts, Men and Gods* to publish *The King of the World*, in which, drawing on many traditional

forms, he dealt with sacred geography and the legendary subterranean kingdom of Agharttha, which he says exists, though it is concealed in the *Kali-Yuga*. A short study of *St. Bernard* illustrates how a contemplative was nonetheless able to exert himself actively to the point of becoming an arbiter of Christianity in his day.

For a short while Guénon contributed to the Catholic review *Regnabit*, but then, for over twenty years, he contributed two articles per month to *Etudes Traditionnelles*. Apart from the royalties from his books, this was his only source of income. *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power* (1929) addresses the relationship between the spiritual and temporal authorities. From a traditional viewpoint, the relationship refers principally to that between knowledge and action, the latter being, in a normal civilisation, hierarchically subordinate to the former.

Having lost his first wife, Guénon left for Egypt in 1930 to seek out treatises on Islamic esoterism, telling friends he would be away for three months. In the end, however, he never returned to France, remaining in Cairo for the rest of his life, where he lived unobtrusively and with very little contact with European society. Sheikh Abdel Wahed Yahia, speaking flawless Arabic, had adopted the ways and customs of his adopted country. *Symbolism of the Cross* appeared in 1931, followed by *The Multiple States of the Being*, both offering expositions of the metaphysical tradition. Much of Guénon’s subsequent work was to be devoted primarily to the means for attaining effective metaphysical knowledge; in this domain his contributions are no less fundamental than the rest. In 1934 Guénon married an Egyptian woman, Fatma, who was to bear him four children. They eventually found an idyllic residence (which he named ‘Villa Fatma’ in honour of his wife) in a quiet street about ten minutes drive from the centre of Cairo; but even here Guénon remained plagued by ill-health.

From 1931, Guénon had a long and fruitful correspondence on the *philosophia perennis* with the brilliant intellectual Ananda Coomaraswamy, whom Guénon would henceforth refer to as a

‘collaborator’. Arthur and Lucia Osborne first heard of René Guénon in 1936, when they were living in Poland, and were visited by Martin Lings. Arthur was immediately struck by Guénon’s books and undertook to translate *The Crisis of the Modern World*, and a correspondence ensued.⁴ Guénon later wrote succinct and instructive reviews of 15 books published on Ramana Maharshi.⁵ During the war Martin Lings, who had also translated one of the books (*East and West*), lived in Cairo and acted as Guénon’s secretary.

World War Two severed connections between Egypt and France, providing Guénon the leisure to complete *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*. An important part of Guénon’s treatise is designed to show the abyss between traditional science and profane science, which, based on quantity, results in the materialistic view of the universe. The second main work to appear after the end of the war was *Perspectives on Initiation*, which expounds the conditions and means necessary for the being to pass from the domain of theoretical knowledge to superior states, until finally ‘Liberation’ or the ‘Supreme Identity’ is attained. In particular, he addresses the nature of initiation, and the characteristics of organisations qualified to transmit it. This work also clarified Guénon’s position regarding Masonry, which he felt was the only organization widespread in the West that could provide a real initiatic transmission. Then followed *The Metaphysical Principles of the Infinitesimal Calculus*, in which Guénon, supported by a critical examination of the theories of Leibniz, addresses the idea of ‘integration’, and the metaphysical distinction of the infinite and the indefinite, both as a mathematical discipline and as symbolism for the initiatic path. Finally, in the last book published during his lifetime, *The Great Triad* (1946), Guénon testifies again to his immense erudition, referring this time especially to the Chinese tradition; it is an exposition of cosmological and metaphysical doctrine.

⁴ See *My Life and Quest* by A. Osborne.

⁵ *Studies in Hinduism*, Sophia Perennis, Ghent, NY, 2002, pp.147-153.

Then, suddenly, on 7 January 1951, the end came and Guénon died invoking the name of *Allah*; thus ended the simple and modest life, devoted entirely to the service of Truth. At his behest, books compiled from journal articles have since been published: *Initiation and Spiritual Realisation, Insights into Christian Esoterism, Symbols of the Sacred Science, Studies in Hinduism, Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles, Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism, Miscellanea, Studies in Freemasonry and the Compagnonnage*. Guénon also reviewed hundreds of books, and many of these reviews are now included in his published works.

Guénon’s *oeuvre* is unique and irreplaceable. Fifty years after his passing, they preserve their power of attraction to those who have discovered, or seek to discover, the Tradition, which he had defined in masterful fashion, and to which he had furnished the moorings. The hegemony Westerners once exercised over the rest of the world is long gone; great cracks are appearing everywhere, and powerful forces are arising in opposition. What the West refuses to see, however, is that the chief cause of the dangers that threaten it lies in the material character of European civilisation—one has only to think of the ceaseless perfecting of weapons of destruction and increasing acts of aggression. Sixty years ago Guénon warned that the Muslim peoples are more warlike than other eastern peoples, and would retaliate if the West committed improprieties against the fundamental conceptions of Islam.

Since his death many books have been written about him. Writing about his function from an Islamic perspective, Charles-André Gilis says his teachings are the particular expression of a metaphysical and initiatic doctrine, that of the one and universal Truth, revealed to the contemporary West. He quotes Michel Valsân, who defines this as a ‘supreme recall’ of the truths still in possession of the immutable East, as well as an ultimate call that implies a ‘warning’ and a ‘promise to the Western world’ and also the announcement of its ‘judgement’; this function is called *tasarruf* by the Sufis.⁶ In a revealing disclosure,

⁶ Gilis, Charles-André. *Introduction à l’Enseignement et au Mystère de René Guénon*. Les Editions de l’Œuvre, Paris, 1985, p. 7.

Guénon told Dr. Tony Grangier that ‘his Truth was impersonal, of a divine origin, transmitted by Revelation, detached and without passion.’ Once, Coomaraswamy asked Guénon about *sayyidnâ El-Khidr*, but he suggested someone else should reply, as this matter touched him a little too closely...’ Gillis says that according to Islamic esoterism, ‘The Green Man’ *El-Khidr* gives initiation and guidance to a few exceptional individuals directly, without human intermediary; he believes that Guénon received an exceptional initiation and full guidance, as well as a direct mission.⁷

Finally, Martin Lings recounts movingly, ‘He had a remarkable presence and it was striking to see the respect with which he was treated. As he entered the mosque you could hear people on all sides saying *Allahumma salli ‘alâ Sayyidnâ Muhammad*, that is, ‘May God reign blessings on the Prophet Muhammad,’ which is a way of expressing great reverence for someone. He had a luminous presence and his very beautiful eyes, one of his most striking features, retained their lustre into early old age.’⁸ ▲

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 25-27

⁸ Martin Lings, *René Guénon*. A talk given in 1994 to the Temenos Academy in London.

Cecil Bethell has been interested in René Guénon since 1980. For several years he has been involved in an internet project to bring out new/revised English translations of Guénon’s 23 major works, which is now complete. He is keenly interested in the spiritual tradition of India and first visited Sri Ramanasramam in 1968. He lives in Perth, Western Australia.

BOOK EXCERPT:

Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta

Fundamental Distinction between ‘Self’ and ‘Ego’

RENÉ GUÉNON

IN order to understand thoroughly the teaching of the *Vedanta* as it pertains to the human being, it is essential to define from the start, as clearly as possible, the fundamental distinction between the ‘Self’ (Fr. *Soi*), which is the very principle of the being, and the individual ‘ego’ (Fr. *moi*). It is hardly necessary to explain that the use of the term ‘Self’ does not imply on our part any identity of view with certain schools that may have used this word, but that, under an Eastern terminology, generally misunderstood, have never set forth any but purely Western views, highly fantastic at that; we

Man and His Becoming According to The Vedanta by René Guénon. English translation copyright Sophia Perennis 2001. The book is available from Sophia Perennis, P.O. Box 611, Hillsdale, NY 12529, USA. (www.sophiaperennis.com)

are alluding here not only to Theosophism, but also to certain pseudo-oriental schools which have entirely distorted the *Vedanta* under the pretext of adapting it to the Western mentality. The misuse which may have been made of a word does not, in our opinion, provide adequate grounds for declining to employ it, except where it is possible to replace it by another word equally well suited to express the same meaning, which is not the case in this instance; besides, too great a strictness on this score would undoubtedly leave very few terms indeed at one's disposal, especially as there exist hardly any which at one time or another have not been misapplied by some philosopher. The only words which we intend to reject are those invented deliberately to express views which have nothing in common with what we are expounding: such, for example, are the names of the different kinds of philosophical systems; such, also, are the terms which belong specifically to the vocabulary of the occultists and other 'neo-spiritualists'; as for terms which the last-named have merely borrowed from earlier doctrines which they habitually and shamelessly plagiarize without understanding anything about them, obviously we need have no scruples about employing such words, while at the same time restoring the meaning which normally belongs to them....

The 'Self' is the transcendent and permanent principle of which the manifested being, the human being, for example, is only a transient and contingent modification, a modification which, moreover, can in no way affect the principle, as will be explained more fully in what follows. The 'Self,' as such, is never individualized and cannot become so, for since it must always be considered under the aspect of the eternity and immutability which are the necessary attributes of pure Being, it is obviously not susceptible of any particularization, which would cause it to be 'other than itself.' Immutable in its own nature, it merely develops the indefinite possibilities which it contains within itself, by a relative passing from potency to act, through an indefinite series of degrees. Its essential permanence is not thereby affected, precisely because this process is only relative,

and because this development is, strictly speaking, not a development at all, except when looked at from the point of view of manifestation, outside of which there can be no question of succession, but only of perfect simultaneity, so that even what is virtual under one aspect, is found nevertheless to be realized in the 'eternal present'. As regards manifestation, it may be said that the 'Self' develops its manifold possibilities, indefinite in their multitude, through a multiplicity of modalities of realization, amounting, for the integral being, to so many different states, of which states one alone, limited by the special conditions of existence which define it, constitutes the portion or rather the particular determination of that being which is called human individuality. The 'Self' is thus the principle by which all the states of the being exist, each in its own domain; and this must be understood not only of the manifested states of which we have just been speaking, whether individual like the human state or supra-individual, but also — although the word 'exist' then becomes inappropriate — of the unmanifested state, comprising all the possibilities which are not susceptible of any manifestation, as well as the possibilities of manifestation themselves in principial mode; but the 'Self' derives its being from itself alone, and neither has nor can have, in the perfect and indivisible unity of its nature, any principle which is external to it.¹

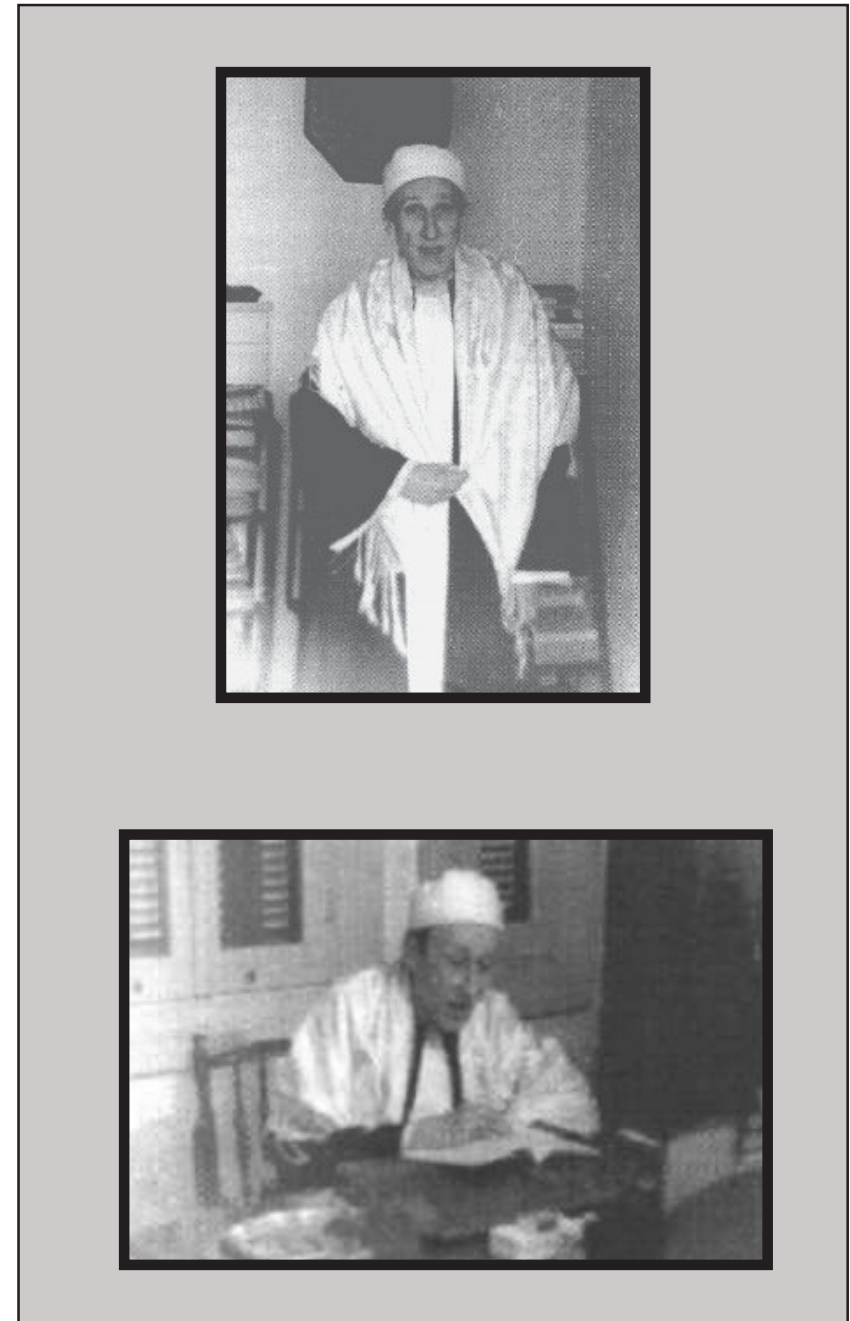
The 'Self', considered in this manner in relation to a being, is properly speaking the personality; it is true that one might restrict the use of this latter word to the 'Self' as principle of the manifested states, just as the 'Divine Personality', Ishvara, is the Principle of universal Manifestation; but one can also extend it analogically to the 'Self' as principle of all the states of the being, both manifested

¹ It is our intention to set forth more completely in other works the metaphysical theory of the being's multiple states; here we need only touch on those aspects of that theory that are indispensable to an understanding of the constitution of the human being. [Guénon later published a separate work on this theory, entitled *Vie Multiple States of the Being*. See also *The Symbolism of the Cross*. ED.]

and unmanifested. The personality is an immediate determination, primordial and non-particularized, of the principle which in Sanskrit is called *Atma* or *Paramatma*, and which, in default of a better term, we may call the 'Universal Spirit,' on the clear understanding, however, that in this use of the word 'spirit' nothing is implied which might recall Western philosophical conceptions, and, in particular, that it is not turned into a correlative of 'matter,' as the modern mind is inclined to do, being subject in this respect, even though unconsciously, to the influence of Cartesian dualism.² And let it be repeated once more in this connection that genuine metaphysics lies quite outside all the oppositions of which that existing between 'spiritualism' and 'materialism' affords us the type, and that it is in no way required to concern itself with the more or less special and often quite artificial questions to which such oppositions give rise.

Atma permeates all things, which are, as it were, its accidental modifications, and according to Ramanuja's expression, 'constitute in some sort its body [this word being taken here in a purely analogical sense], be they moreover of an intelligent or non-intelligent nature,' that is, according to Western conceptions, 'spiritual' as well as 'material', for that distinction, implying merely a diversity of conditions in manifestation, makes no sort of difference in respect of the unconditioned and unmanifested Principle. This, in fact, is the 'Supreme Self' (the literal rendering of *Paramatma*) of all that exists, under whatever mode, and it abides ever 'the same' through the indefinite multiplicity of the degrees of Existence, understood in the universal sense, as well as beyond Existence, that is, in principal non-manifestation.

² In theology, when it is declared that 'God is pure spirit' it is reasonable to suppose that this statement must likewise not be taken in the sense of 'spirit' as opposed to 'matter,' that is to say according to the sense in which the two terms have no meaning except in reference to one another; to understand it in this way would amount to accepting a kind of 'demiurgic' conception, more or less akin to the theories attributed to the Manicheans. It is nonetheless true to say that such an expression is of a kind that readily lends itself to false interpretations, leading to the substitution of 'a being' for pure Being.



The 'Self', in relation to any being whatsoever, is in reality identical with *Atma*, since it is essentially beyond all distinction and all particularization; and that is why, in Sanskrit, the same word *atman*, in cases other than the nominative, replaces the reflexive pronoun 'itself': the 'Self' is not therefore really distinct from *Atma*, except when one considers it particularly and 'distinctively' in relation to a being, or, more accurately, in relation to a certain definite state of that being, such as the human state, and insofar as one considers it from this special and limited point of view alone. In this case, moreover, the 'Self' does not really become distinct from *Atma* in any way, since as we said above, it cannot be 'other than itself', and obviously cannot be affected by the point of view from which we regard it, any more than by any other contingency. What should be noted is that to the extent that we make this distinction, we are departing from the direct consideration of the 'Self' in order to consider its reflection in human individuality or in some other state of the being, for, needless to say, when confronted with the 'Self', all states of manifestation are strictly equivalent and can be regarded in the same way; but just now it is the human individuality which more particularly concerns us. The reflection in question determines what may be called the centre of this individuality; but if isolated from its principle, that is, from the 'Self', it can only enjoy a purely illusory existence, for it is from that principle that it derives all its reality, and it effectually possesses this reality only through participation in the nature of the 'Self,' that is, insofar as it is identified therewith by universalization.

The personality, let us insist once more, belongs essentially to the order of principles in the strictest sense of the word, that is, to the universal order; it cannot therefore be considered from any point of view except that of pure metaphysics, which has precisely the Universal for its domain. The pseudo-metaphysicians of the West are in the habit of confusing with the Universal things which, in reality, pertain to the individual order; or rather, as they have no conception at all of the Universal, that to which they fallaciously apply this

name is usually the general, which is properly speaking but a mere extension of the individual. Some carry the confusion still further; the 'empiricist' philosophers, who cannot even conceive the general, identify it with the collective, which by right belongs to the particular order only; and by means of these successive degradations they end by reducing all things to the level of sensory knowledge, which many indeed regard as the only kind of knowledge possible, because their mental horizon does not extend beyond this domain and because they wish to impose on everybody else the limitations which are but the effect of their own incapacity, whether inborn or acquired through a particular form of education. ▲

A Prayer Before Dying

Sister Irene McCormack

Creator God.
 I believe in your love
 and forgiveness.
 So today
 I chose to face life
 Without fear and to live
 Wholeheartedly in the
 present moment.
 I accept all as a gift
 And ask to find you Lord
 Present in the gift.
 May my heart sing today
 A song of joyful thanks
 and praise.

Amen.

Sister Irene McCormack was murdered in Nicaragua in the late 1970s. This prayer was discovered on her after the event.

Ozhivil Odukkam

Eternal Repose Upon Annulment (Withdrawal as Eternal Being)

three

KANNUDAYA VALLALAAR

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY J. JAYARAMAN

IN this first chapter, named 'Instruction in General', Sri Kannudaya Vallalaar covers in 62 verses the entire scope of the method and the teaching. The remaining chapters extrapolate on the stages of casting away the layers of duality (*charya, kriya, yoga* and *jnana*).

The translation, as indicated at the beginning, will mostly confine itself to a faithful paraphrasing of the Tamil verse while providing amplification only in the case of a few unusual similes. The traditional structure of the transmission has been exhaustively covered through the commentaries and notes thus far. In the translation of the text henceforth, square brackets convey my elucidations within the paraphrasing and which the Tamil commentary does not bring out, while curved brackets convey elucidations gleaned from the Tamil commentary.

J. Jayaraman is the Ashram Librarian. He has made a study over many years of classic Tamil advaitic texts.

THE END-RESULT (*prayojanam*)

18. The loud moaning, of [the bereaved] one [plunged] in the oblivion of sorrow, does not keep harmony with the [ritual and rhythmic nuances of the] drum, the piccolo, and the [death] dance [being performed by professionals on the occasion of a bereavement in a household].

Listen to the merit of this work: its learners can only melt away [as they 'become' its transcendent meaning, losing ego and the fruits of doership, past and present], while probing the nuances of its meaning.

Who [in the capacity of author, under the circumstances] would [foolishly] try to quantify [for the seeker of self] the [non-dual root] benefit that this song [of wisdom] can confer [to the self]? [In every pursuit of worldly happiness, one evaluates the benefit of an experience by regarding oneself as the enjoyer, while regarding the object of enjoyment as other than oneself. This way of evaluation cannot apply to the unique situation of self-enquiry, where the *object* of evaluation is the *evaluating* centre itself].

Notes

(i) It is the intention of this work to remove the layers of false reality attributed to one's sense of self, all of which have arisen due to, and having arisen support, the *avoidance* of self-enquiry.

(ii) For the salt doll plumbing the ocean's silent depth, dissolution is destined, and so there can be no possibility of an entity surviving thereafter to discuss the relative merits of waves. And worse, the work, in the autocracy of *ajaata*, denies that anything is really gained at all, anew, to merit mention as 'gain'.

(iii) The author wishes to caution critics right away, that it is quite futile to point out defects in style and paucity of ornamentation in a song such as this, which is unconventional and direct in its transmission of the 'feeling' (*ananda*) of Self. He appeals to the common sense of the scholarly critic, not to waste precious time in pointing out the rough edge and rustic irreverence in the poet's metre

and method and virile similes, and instead to see that literary elitism has no more relevance here than any attempt by the professionals of the bereavement-band to 'regularize' the wail of the person plunged in the uncontrollable sorrow over the inconsolable loss of a dear one, and to 'civilize' it from its brusque and barbaric expression of the feeling of anguish, and its shocking disregard of the elite and harmonic nuances of the tradition of song and dance.

19. Words cannot *touch* the Space of deflated ego. Can one expect that It too can be *approached* and *touched* in the way a sense-object is approached by the feet, apprehended by the eye, and meditated upon by one's mind? Just as the experience of the (wide, wavy) ocean is [miniaturized and] 'delivered' within the [eye-piece of a] handy telescope (to a youngster located far-away from the ocean), so also I shall say a few words about it [the ego-free state]. With a pure mind make out its significance, in the way a lover makes out the promised rendezvous ('delivered') through a furtive [encouraging] glance from the object of his love.
20. Can speech or mind reach the Silence of Bliss remaining unbroken and non-dual [in its state of awareness itself *as* being, as against being possessed of awareness] like the elephant's trunk (effortlessly serving non-dually as both nose and hand)? One identifies a (distant) spot when told, "The house on which the crow is perched." Also one sees the crescent moon by looking beyond the pointing finger. So too, you shall by insight realize Siva.
21. Like fleas on a cow's teat that suck the blood and not the milk [of direct experience that emerges from the convenient orifice of the sense of 'I' which is so near!]; and like a buffalo which upon entering water, cannot drink it clear, but (must thrash about first, and) soils it — fools are like these. The vain logicians (suffer and inflict needless vocal

discomfort through non-stop mouthing of sterile words, and) are like a fool grinding sandal-paste without adding water. They [make a simple truth fuzzy, and] are like a nozzle breaking up [the forceful stream of] water into a [weakened] shower-spray. Do not be led away by their grandiose charades and come to hellish grief!

22. Right qualification shows itself in the eager search for the right master, like that of (i) a blind man seeking escape from the agony of a (spreading) hill-fire and seeking a water-body [and who, after suffering many bruises from tripping in his blind desperation, stumbles headlong into an accidentally found body of water, totally unmindful of any applicable social discipline, or possible inauspiciousness of times like Raahu Kaalam for such an immersion], (ii) a young calf for the cow, (iii) or an ardent lover for (his/her) beloved.

Note

The rich imagery is reminiscent of the ecstatic swan-song of Vrtraasura to Lord Vishnu before the divine discus destroys him in the *Srimad Bhaagavatam*.

The desperate blind one who is caught in a fire raging on a forested hill in a dry season, does not know where the water is and yet exerts himself in all directions. This level of seeker wishes to escape the sorrow of worldly life and seeks succour. Vrtraasura mentions the fledglings in the nest, awaiting with open beaks the worms fetched by the mother bird. They cannot fly out, nor do they know where she is.

The calf may know where its mother is, but may be temporarily tied and therefore unable to move, and yet will not look anywhere else but in the direction of the mother. This level of seeker sees the world as a dream, and seeks the guru who can awaken him from it.

The ardent lover knows to whom her heart is irresistibly drawn, and may even be sure of her love being reciprocated by him, and yet will await longingly — through a silent signal of surrender, with all

her being merged in the vision of the embrace — his move towards her. This level of seeker has had a glimpse of the non-dual nature of the bliss of awakening, and seeks the bliss without seeking.

The ripe disciple is focused on his ideal, eager for the consummation, and awaits in confidence.

A FOURTH BENEDICTION?

23. Without a predictable pattern there appear, grow and perish countless beings in hues of the male, female (sentient) and asexual (insentient matter). There must be a causal Creator for this. That which points to Him is the Veda and the Agama.

Note

(i) The author is compassion incarnate. Those who did not receive full satisfaction at verse 17, over the Lord of all Beings not being specifically remembered in that Benediction, are fully served through this verse, and on to verse 27. Through these he makes it clear that the causal Creator is a casual Ignorance of self!

24. This [above-mentioned] divine Presence (*sannidhi*) is ever unaware of anything as 'other', [since that could only independently arise] as a consequence of [the ever aware Presence] not knowing itself. [Indeed, should any such 'other' arise] Enquiry [into itself, by the 'I' which experiences the arising] reveals the [unchanging] Presence beyond all arising and subsidence. The five universal phenomena take place in its Presence only. The verbalized outpourings of its Bliss (here springing through song), touch but a fringe of the Bliss *as it is*.

Notes

(i) *'five universal phenomena'*: creation, duration, dissolution, veiling and revelation (*srshti, stithi, samhaara, tirodhaana, anugraha*). *Tirodhaana* or maya is here presented as a benefic force as it veils the full truth from the jiva, and presents a toned down version of the

consequence of Freedom, which otherwise would put off any jiva from striving for the fullness of Truth. Then through *anugraha*, the Lord helps the jiva untie itself from its self-chosen worldly-bonds. The imagery of an immature calf tied with sufficient length of rope to a post is useful here. The rope only limits the extent of enjoyment of freedom, *but* at the same time it ensures a temporarily needed protection from wandering astray from the homestead.

(ii) Superficially, it is a 'tussle' between honouring the Lord propelling evolution, and the Self a-voiding everything. Inherently there is no conflict. This point was covered in the commentary on verse 14.

25. Without beginning, ever-existent, dominating, unchanging, exceedingly subtle, neither waxing nor waning, (undistinguished from the universe) like ether and air when stilled, merging into non-differentiable oneness, such is the stillness of all-Perfection.

Notes

(i) The Supreme Being is witness to the arising of the universe manifesting sentient and insentient being and then the re-absorption of the Phenomenon. Therefore He is without beginning and ever-abiding.

(ii) The phenomenal appears in His Presence, as dreaming appears in the sleeping figure, without necessitating any move or stir in Him. Therefore He is unchanging just as space remains unchanged even as it stirs as vibration (as air) and must do so by 'making room' for air 'within' itself. His omnipresence is implied here.

(iii) Being non-dual, He dominates all duality as the Sun dominates darkness regardless of where it resides. His omnipotence is implied.

(iv) He pervades all, yet remains unknown to the senses or mind, just as a woven white cloth is ever beyond the reach of the white clothing of a person patterned by the weave in the cloth. Therefore He, the whole, is beyond perception and exceedingly subtle. His omniscience is implied here.

(v) The manifest multiplicity has no existence independent of Him. Therefore He neither waxes nor wanes.

(vi) Perfectly still air is nothing but space! At the same time, air can never manifest outside of space. The sentient entity declares the existence of the insentient universe around it. When the entity becomes still, the all-perfection is revealed.

This is an attempt to convey the non-dual and mystic 'flavour' of the Self through listing qualities inherent in the Self.

26. The eight-fold manifestation (the five elements, their seer the mind, its seer the intellect, and the sentient subject), the five universal functions, the form taken at will (the divine descent amidst the manifestation), and its (healing) work, the Perfection beyond objectification, the particulars amenable to objectification, spiritual effort, the Bliss on the loss of the ego, the 'arising' of non-duality and the deflating of duality – all these are all only offerings to that Self-formed Grace!

27. Your sense of self is the central stage, where the enquiry into self (*pasu*), and the kindly revelation (*pati*), regarding the [false] nature of bondage (*paasam*) occur. Just as fire, sought within wood (by churning) ever arises (consuming the wood) as light *inseparable* from heat, your self [the I-'fire' resident in the body as the I-am-ness 'light', and which seems tame and devoid of its legendary power of heat that can negate the waking body-world-'wood' as mere thought-'ash'], enquired into [here and now, within the body], reveals itself as [*sat*; the 'light' of the fire] *inseparable* from the [*chit*; the 'heat' of the fire] [or vice versa: *Sat* the 'heat' inseparable from *Chit* the 'light' of the fire] Lord [who as the material substance is the womb, weal, woe of creation, and who as the eternal witness, is that which renders the substantiality of creation into a self-and-shadow play, an apparition of *lila*, essentially *Ajaata*].

Notes

(i) The 'aware' being of the waking (and dream) lacks true duration as it vanishes in its sleep. This is like the light of the fire (*sat*) lacking the heat (*chit*) to penetrate darkness. Conversely, it is the light (*chit*) lacking the duration (*sat*) to witness dissolution of relative knowledge.

(ii) Verses 20-22 of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's *Forty Verses*, convey the same, minus the simile.

28. The axle [of ignorance of oneself] (the 'I am this body' knot) (which is the casting-mould for the triad appearing as waking and dream experiences), is the cause for the unending sequence of mental states. This (knot) connects the sentient self (the seer) with the non-self (the seen), causing untold suffering comparable to that caused by virulent poison (that has entered one's body). This axle/mould must be dismantled [through self-enquiry]. Then you are on the (royal) road of Grace. Know that the desirability of objects is the impurity along the way.

Notes

(i) axle/mould: the 'm' in the Tamil phrase *padu-macchai* can be broken as *padum-macchai*, or as *padum-acchai*. (*Macchu* is the axle; and *acchu* is the cast-mould).

(ii) '*desirability of objects is the impurity along the way*': A key is being provided to empower the practice of witnessing a mental state. The arising of the feeling of desirability for any object (is like noticing a speck of 'impurity' in a cup of drinking water, and this feeling) can itself serve as a jarring signal to the seeker to 'opt out', 'freeze', take in the whole picture, and witness the triad of the mental state while it is 'happening'.

(iii) Triad: seer-seen-sight; knower-known-knowledge.

29. Having said that for the Self-realised ones, the self and the non-self (individuality and its world) serve no purpose, can we indicate the Siva, (who is to the self as heat is to fire), as a piece of (presentable) knowledge?

[Behold my dear son!] O lord of Chit (consciousness)! As gold is revealed to be pure on removing its dross, so also we shall remove your ego(ic dross) to leave you as Siva (pure Bliss).

30. Can the plenum of Bliss lie beyond one's being? Behold the tainted life of being, like fish swimming in the ocean of ambrosia (and yet searching for fulfilment!). The abiding Awareness of Self knows no rising [or setting, and so it is ever 'asleep' to the states of consciousness]. Just as fire, 'tied' by a magic-spell merely shines, (temporarily) shorn of its heat, the self [under the sleight-of-hand of non-enquiry] experiences itself as a being, shorn (of its inseparable Awareness). This is (like) eclipsing [through closing one's own eye-lid of self-enquiry] the abiding Sun [of Self, which as the persisting witness of even the 'eclipsing' cloud that casts its own shadow, never really suffers any eclipse]!

Note

aggini-t-tambam = *agni sthambha* = 'fixing' fire by nullifying its heat aspect alone; part of Atharva Vedic spells; fire-walking rites, etc.

31. The strong wind of past actions (*kanmam/karma*) raises waves of individuality (*bodham*: the transient sense of self), with saltiness as its taint (*malam*), in the sea of bliss (*sivam*); and [all of] this [upon self-enquiry] is but the water, 'I-I' (*aanmaa/aatma*).

Know that this root inner-instrument [of projection, namely the ignorance of Self, manifesting as seer-seen duality] will ceaselessly twirl you about like a spinning-top, in the field of five sensations. [Alternatively: Know that the alphabet beginning with 'a' is the inner-formation that twirls you (the 'I'-sentience within the triad) around the five sensations, just like a spinning top (as long as the sentience does not enquire into its root)].

Notes

(i) '*malam*': impurity: the 'salt' of non-enquiry into self, which sustains the 'saltiness', which is the false limitation of "I am this body" experienced by the self.

(ii) '*av aadi ul karanam*': a pun on 'av aadi' lending two meanings, (a) *av*: that, *aadi*: primal; and (b) "the alphabets led by 'a'."

(a) '*this root inner-instrument*' (the *antah-karana*, for experiencing duality). The 'seer-seen' primal evolute of ignorance.

(b) the stream of intelligently organized sound groups (Devanagari, the alphabet order of the gods, is grouped by vowels (the causal body of Vaak devi, sentient *chit*; manifested as the sattva, rajas and tamas modes of Vishnu, Brahma and Siva), and by semi-vowels (the subtle body of *chitta*, mind manifested as the Devas), and by consonants (the gross body of insentient *jada*, manifested as the world of sense-objects).

Each vibration manifests an aspect of the triadic creation, from the seer-mind through the seer-senses and onward to the sensations and the gross world thus progressively objectified, on the basis of past momentum.

32. Observing and then rejecting the (five elements led by) earth, the (five sensations led by) sound, (the five *karmendriyas* led by) speech, (the four internal aspects of cosmic mind led by) mind, (the five sense-organs led by) eyes, and remaining beyond the primal I-thought (led by *naada*, *bindu* and *kalaa*), realize your Self within, as pure Awareness that reduces all of the above knowledge (the seen) into the atomic (the seer of the triad) and even that into the ['atmic'] perceiver of that. ▲

Errata: On page 80 of the *Deepam* Issue 2004, the actual date when the first photograph of Bhagavan was taken should read 1900 or 1901 and not 1899 as stated.

BOOK REVIEWS

ZEN HEART, ZEN MIND: The Teachings of Zen Master AMA Sâmy. Compiled and edited by Sridevi Rao. 2002. Pub: Cre-A, New No. 2, 24th East Street, Thiruvannamiyur, Chennai 600041, pp 195, Rs 250.

In his Preface to this book the Zen Master AMA Sâmy has pointed out that today Zen is well known in India but its practice calls for arduous application, such as four hours of formal sitting meditation and complete silence which may extend to over eight hours a day for a week at a time. The fruits of such discipline can be tasted here and now, not in a distant after-life.

The book is divided into two parts with thirteen unnumbered sections, followed by a brief history of Zen and a list of reading material for further details.

It is interesting to note that Arul Maria Arokiasâmy (AMA Sâmy for short) was born of Indian Christian parents in Burma in 1936, fostered by a Muslim saint, managed to finish his school education and then joined the Jesuit Order. His Jesuit career failed to give him the desired “liberation and god-experience”. He familiarized himself with the teachings of various sages and philosophers and eventually established a Zen Centre at Perumâlmalai, Kodaikânal.

Zen is rooted in the Dhyâna tradition of Mahâyâna Buddhism. At the heart of Zen are compassion, equanimity, love and bliss. A renowned Zen preacher has remarked that there are two types of Zen, a considerate and gentle type that allows the aspirant to follow his own pace and take his own time and the grandmotherly type, strict and stern, the “kickass Zen”. Non-thinking and non-attachment are the ways of Zen. Assume the form and posture of the Buddha. Mindful practice is the central pillar of Theravada Buddhism. One may be reminded here of the Savikalpa leading to Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

The book is replete with anecdotes from the life and teachings of Buddha and some of his followers taken from several books on Zen. The book closes with a discussion on Awakening and Enlightenment against the background of relative and absolute truth. What is most important, according to AMA Sâmy, is to live with the Realization of oneness and non-duality in our daily and ordinary life.

The editor has made her own praiseworthy efforts to remould the contents of the Master’s work to suit this compact publication.

— Dr. T. Sankaran

THE BOOK OF ONE: The Spiritual Path Of Advaita: by Dennis Waite. 2003. Pub: O Books, 46 A West Street, Alresford, Hants SO 249 AU, UK. pp.288, \$ 17.95.

What does one expect from a new book in a field where so many exist and many more continue to be published? The blurb says that this “is perhaps the most accessible, articulate, and relevant book on the nature of non-duality.” (Incidentally, the author also wrote *The Spiritual Seeker’s Essential Guide to Sanskrit*). Readers may respond in their own way but a reviewer has no such choice. One has to get a clear idea of the uniqueness of the book; what, in effect, the author’s distinct expository or interpretive originality is.

Fortunately, for me, one reviewer states what this is. Jerry Katz, described as “owner of the first and largest non-dual e-list on the Internet,” says: “Unique about this book is the confident and graceful manner in which the author integrates and moves between Western and Eastern, and, if you will Cyber influence. It is clear that Waite himself is intimate with the terrain of the Himalayas of Cyberspace, the paths, people and places. This book has the fluidity of the World Wide Web.” Moreover, we are told, Waite “creates a

swirl in which the ancient familiarity felt with sages such as Ramana and Nisargadatta, is transferred to Kant, Schopenhauer, Berkeley and Plato.”

The ‘structure’ of the book is quite clear. Detailed contents arranged in three sections—viz. The Unreal, the Spiritual Path and, The Real—with clear chapters (on an average 5 in each section) give us an impressive overview of the book. In addition, we are also given meanings of common Sanskrit ‘spiritual’ words, (and a short introduction to the Sanskrit alphabet and transliteration) as well as information about organizations on the Internet, and the most mandatory recommended reading. These items occupy nearly 60 pages (not to count the index).

Obviously, the scholarly ambience is quite impressive. But one basic dilemma which nags me even as I read the book is: Are the ‘transpositions’ of Advaita and its exponents such as Nisargadatta and Ramana Maharshi with western thinkers really helpful? Perhaps, I am naïve, but I still think that the former break into and break out of the shackles of language and all that it involves from the bedrock of experienced truth. The latter have merely built impressive intellectual constructs. Even Wittgenstein is not, by and large, free from this, though like others, Waite mentions his views and his oft-quoted dictum: “whereof we cannot speak, thereof, we must remain silent.”

Does the silence that the famous philosopher describes become a point of comparison or contrast? Not that Waite is unaware of the implications but I notice a tendency to lump together strange speculative frames with little caution or clarity. (An example is the juxtaposition of Alan Watt’s views on language and his images with those of Wittgenstein, alongside with those of Ramesh Balsekar).

Postmodernism has made the structure of pastiche/hybrid almost the prevailing mode of exposition. I do not otherwise find any reason why Woody Allen should figure or why Ambrose Bierce’s cynical

remark about love should come in a book that proposes to be what Alan Jacobs describes (somewhat over-generously) as “a masterful and profoundly insightful survey of the Advaita teaching and the contemporary scene”. I am curious to know how the ideas of such people illumine or enrich our understanding of the basics of Advaita as exemplified in the sages. If they do, perhaps, I missed this in my reading of the book.

The book seems extremely promising in areas such as apparent contradictions in Advaita and, specifically, in dealing with ‘consciousness’, the Serbonian bog in which whole armies of contemporary explorations sink. Waite’s shrewd analysis would have gained in depth, I felt, if the ‘teleological’ studies by, notably, Ken Wilber, were brought in.

Those who have a special interest in Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi will find quite a few insightful contexts that illumine the Advaitic dimensions of their teachings. In short, the book is a good introduction to Advaita, though it tends to be diffuse and often prolix. Advaita doctrine and experience find here a tolerably convincing overview.

— Prof. M.Sivâramkrishna

SELF-REALIZATION THROUGH SOHAM SADHANA: BG Vellal (1976 reprint) pp171, Rs150.

THE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH: BK Subbiah. pp238, Rs190;U\$5.

Pub: Shri Nath Niwas, Old Siddhapur Rd, Madikeri 571201.

The unvoiced sibilant ‘s’, in the soham mantra, and the aspirate ‘h’ in its mirror-image, the hamsah mantra, are both pure unvoiced breath. They can be regarded as lingual poles bifurcating the quartet of unvoiced semi-vowels (S,sh,s versus h). They represent the poles of the Prana cycle. The one is the upward Kundalinic serpentine hiss, and the other downward heart-destined. The voiced ‘a’ ‘u’ and ‘m’ represent Vak, i.e. Self-knowledge, Jnâna.

Srī Vellāl's Madikēri family of growing sōham sādhakas is among many such vibrant instances of the regenerative response of the organic culture of this soil as it renews its roots radially geographically, interweaving the hearts of disconnected masses caught up in a rat-race beyond their control. This is timely when a faceless materialism which to my mind is clearly religious fundamentalism of the worst degree—since its multi-national body-obsessed business is promoted as being secular, civilized, elite, and its exclusivist members as being a rational 'caste' far superior to those maudlin 'sudras' stuck in religious worship—threaten even large societies to compromise on their traditional ideals that enjoin Man to honour *the right to survival of all forms of life*.

This is Kali Yuga's impersonal colonialism, a North-South divide cutting across even united nations, as well as within each nation. The divide driven by politics funding centralizing of power through modern science and technology, and bulldozing increasing millions (algae, adolescents and the aged) into suffering increasing deprivations of all sorts. Those in political power, under the hypocrisy of 'broadening the vistas of human knowledge', fund the exploration of the secrets behind the efficient biology of the kangaroo's leap, the efficient aero-dynamics of the dragon-fly (the ultimate surveillance and attack technologies!), and the karyota. The latter, cover everything from bacterium (with its awesome ability to regenerate all of its DNA even with 95% blown to bits in 'our' laboratories) to 'us' (with a most complex brain that is beginning to look more like a censor under the control of a cosmic mind than a sensor that generates a mind).

The politics of power under the pseudonym of a 'search for nature's Truth' has given scant regard to the honouring of criteria well-expressed in the history of this soil, for ensuring a vibrant economy of self-regulating human societies founded on ethics derived from Self-knowledge. If this

charade of Kali is making life meaningless elsewhere, the unity in the diversity of our culture is beginning to throw up an 'immune' response once again as in earlier times. Only, the threat is global today, and the corrective response too, fuelled by our devotion-based cultural diaspora, affecting people of all nations, will be on unprecedented scales.

One can be confident of this since all sādhanas of this culture, whether of Bhakti (purified feeling) or Rāja Yōga (purified body and mind), have received the *diksha*, the formal initiation of universalism of the Rishis already. Given such potent 'sat sangha', the sādhanas retain their power even if spread on a media-driven physical level ('power yoga' and so on!). They retain some sattva even at the meanest grossest level and will, slowly and surely, appeal to the divine-centre in each of us, bring the sādhak within each of us to the fore, and wean each away from using money merely for a self-centred animal-life, and push us towards more sattvic habits regarding food and pastime, and promoting ananda through purifying every action to include the common good.

—J.Jayarâman

PHOTOGRAPHS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA & SARADA DEVI (English; B&W): Sri RKMATH, Chennai 600004. pp90, Rs60.

Of the 6 photos taken of Thâkur those usually published are 3 (in samâdhi at Keshub's; standing with raised hand; and the seated pose). The fourth, Thâkur himself remarked, "Who is this? Am I such an angry man?", and so the photographer consigned both photo and negative into the Ganga. The remaining were posthumous and are not included here. All the 30 photos of Mother, covering her three phases at Calcutta, Udbodhan and Jayrambhati (1898-1920) are included with adequate literary coverage of context.

—J.Jayarâman



October 31-Nov 3, 2004

The presence of the Divine in any temple constructed according to the guidelines of *Agamic* tenets, is assured when temple rededication and consecration (*Kumbhabhishakam*) is performed at stated intervals. The last *Mahakumbhabhishakam* was performed at Ramanasramam in July 1995. The repairs to the *vimanam* and *gopurams* above Mother's Shrine and Bhagavan's Samadhi were partially complete. Though only nine years have past, it was decided to finalise these structures and perform appropriate the rites during this auspicious 125th *Jayanti* year.

The preparatory rites began early on October 31st with *gopuja* (cow puja) in front of Matrubhuteswara Shrine, while simultaneously *Anujnai*, Sri Vigneswara Puja, *Acharya Varnams*, Ganapati and Navagraha Homam were performed in the New Hall. A litany of prayers and petitions invoked the names of the gods of the universe, bidding them come and bless this auspicious occasion. The first *Yagasala puja* took place in the evening, prefaced by *Vasthu homam* and *Yagasala Pravesam*. Purification ceremonies were performed in the *Yagasala*.

Kalakarshanam

In August the initial pujas were completed for transferring the divine power from the *vimanams* above The Mother and Bhagavan's samadhis into the deities (*bimbas*). Ramachandran Stapathi and his team commenced work on the domes and their *kalasas* (crowns) were leafed in gold. The *Kalakarshanam* ceremony on the eve of October 31st invoked and transferred that divine power, this time from the deities of the Mother's shrine, into the numerous consecrated vessels containing blessed water from the holy rivers of India. These vessels, *kalasams*, were taken by formal procession to the *Yagasala* and ceremonially installed. These *kalasams* were the principle focus of the six-kaala Yagasala pujas and homam, which culminated in the *Mahakumbhabhishakam*.

The Agamic experts said that Bhagavan's presence is ever there in the samadhi and it is therefore neither possible nor necessary to 'transfer' this Divine power as in the case of a Murthi. Hence Bhagavan's Samadhi remained liturgically active during the three days of Yagasala pujas. Matrubhuteswara, on the other hand, was completely closed down for repairs and cleaning as the power of the Murthis now resided in the *kalasams* at the *Yagasala*.

A *kalasam* for anointing Bhagavan's samadhi was prepared and enshrined at the center of the *Yagasala*. To one side was a *kalasam* for Matrubhuteswara and on the other, *kalasams* for Yogambal and Sri Chakra. Minor deities shared altars just to the rear, one for the Navagraha (the Nine Planets) and the Parivrata Devata of Mother's Shrine and the other for the *vimanams*. In front were altars for Vinayaka and Subrahmanya. All altars had respective *homa kundas*.



There were ceremonies conducted, said to be pleasing to Holy Mother, that honoured young girls and *suvasinis* (elderly women) as they are personifications of all human beings. Similarly, young *brahmacharins* devoted to Vedic studies were honoured as representatives of the Lord (Siva).

Acharyas and Priests

There were some 60 priests and Vedacharyas who performed various ritual tasks at the seven *homa kundas*. *Dravyas* were offered to the chanting of the Mula Mantras and floral offerings with Sahasranama to the deities. An integral part of the ceremonies was the recitation of the four Vedas. Numerous *Odhuvars* (Saivite singers) shared in a revered Tamil tradition: choral recitation of sacred verses from ancient Tamil literature, the twelve *Tirumurais*.

Mahakumbhabhishakam

On the morning of *Kumbhabhishakam*, a ceremonial rope of natural fibers was extended from Mother's shrine and the lingam of Bhagavan's Samadhi out to the *Yagasala* altars that exemplified the spirit of transferring power from the *Yagasala* to the temple deities. In a similar vein, *prohitis* (priests) proceeded into the shrine with ghee contained in the large wooden offering ladles, used for the homam, and touched each of the temple deities six times. In this way the power of the numerous offerings, prayers and mantras would infuse the Murthis. This was performed three times. After the *Purnabhurti*, Prohitis bearing the holy *kalasam*

led devotees onto the roof of the Samadhi hall and Mother's Shrine. At precisely 11:18 a.m. with all in rapt attention and expectation, an eagle thought to be Garuda, Vishnu's vehicle, circled above indicating the propitious moment to initiate this final anointing. At that moment Kumbhabhishekam of the vimanam and gopurams above Bhagavan's Samadhi and Mother's Shrine and above the shrine of Sri Niranjananandaswami was performed to the sounds of by devotees' enthusiastic prayers and praise. Holy thirtam rained down from the towers to bless all those present below. Abhishekam was then performed in the shrines with faithful devotees in attendance.

Later in the evening an elaborate Mahabhishekam with milk, curd, coconut water, ghee, vibhuti, and sanctified water was performed with chanting of the Vedas, which lasted for three hours.

Mandalabhishekam

As customary, following Mahakumbhabhishekam, special abishekam is performed each day for 48 days. At the Ashram each morning *Laghu Mahanyasya* is performed for 40 days followed by eight days of Mahanyasya with Mandalabhishekam on the last day.

Sri Ramana Vidyalaya

In June of this 125th Jayanthi year, after long planning and construction, the Sri Ramana Vidyalaya Montessori Nursery, Primary and Matriculation Schools were inaugurated in Rajapalayam. Chairman Sri T.R. Kannan gave the welcome address and Sri T.R. Jayaraman formally opened the building. Ashram President V. S. Ramanan attended and unveiled the portrait of Bhagavan.

Karthigai Deepam, Nov 17-26

Deepam is one of the major festivals in India, particularly in the south. Devotees and pilgrims come from far and wide to behold and be blessed by Arunachala in His greatest hour. It is said that the one who beholds the beacon flame of Holy Arunachala on Kartikai Deepam is assured liberation in this lifetime. Bhagavan once explained its importance: "To rid the intellect of the 'I am the body' notion, fixing it securely in the Heart, and so perceive the true light of the Self, the one 'I-I' which is the Absolute—this is the significance of witnessing the beacon light of Arunachala, the centre of the earth."

The Deepam festival begins with the flag hoisting (*Dwajaroohanam*) and culminates with *Theppam* (floating festival) on the 13th day. It all centres on the worship of the *Panchamoorthigal* (five deities); Vinayakar, Subrahmanyar, Arunachaleswarar, Apeethakuchambal and Chandikeswarar. Some if not all of the processional deities emerge each morning to circumambulate the temple on a path called the Maada Veedi. In the evenings there is devoted worship at the *Kalayana mantapa* (in southwestern corner of Arunachaleswar temple) where

the night procession commences after final *arati* after 9 p.m. What a wonder to behold spirit-filled devotees dancing Arunachaleswara, Holy Mother and the other deities in the courtyards of Holy Arunachala temple! Led by drums, trumpets, and conch, the procession makes its way through throngs of devotees. In front of Raja gopuram the Panchamurthis are mounted onto vehicles (*vahanas*) for their procession through the four streets that surround the temple. The processions generally last late into the night. Each night the theme changes, as does the vehicle. Day by day the assembly grows in size as pilgrims arrive to receive *darshan* of the Lord on these most holy days.

On the sixth day, devotees carry the 63 Tamil Saints (the Nayanmars). The most spectacular event takes place that night when all the deities go around the four streets on silver cars. The celebration of the seventh day brings the wooden chariots (*Maha Rathas*) that are drawn by devotees onto the four streets. It is believed that on this day all life forms are cleansed of their sins. On the eighth and ninth days the deities process the Kudirai Vahanam and Kailasa Vahanam.

The tenth day is not only the most important day of Deepam but for Tiruvannamalai and devotees of Arunachala, the most exalted day of the year. The Bharani Deepam flame is lit in the inner prakaram around 4 a.m. Maha Deepam is lit in the evening of the same day at exactly the moment when the sun sets and the full moon rises. At that moment, around 6.00 p.m, young Brahmin boys in the inner sanctum, rush out with long torches lit from the temple flame and signal the priests atop the holy hill. Those priests ignite the flame of the giant ghee-filled cauldron and hundreds of thousands gathered below, around the mountain on all sides, shout their heart-filled praises: 'Arohara! Arohara!' They light their respective deepam flames along the *pradakshina* path, at Ramanasramam, in front of their homes, or wherever they may be at this most auspicious moment.

At the Ashram a chair with Bhagavan's portrait is placed where Bhagavan always sat with his binoculars to observe the lighting of the cauldron above. At the appointed moment, the Ashram lights its own small ghee-filled cauldron and devotees facing the mountain sing Aksaramanamalai on this and each successive evening when the flame on the hilltop is relit.

Ramana Kendra Hyderabad

In July, Sri Ramana Kendra, Hyderabad, celebrated its Silver Jubilee. Sri Medha Dakshina Murthy spoke on Bhagavan's teachings and Sri G. Krishna Murthy and N. Pandu Ranga Rao narrated stories about the establishment of Ramana Kendra and its founder, Dr. K. Swaminathan.

Obituary

We regret to inform devotees that Charles Whitworth passed away on Deepavali, 12th of November, in Heidleberg, Germany. Our prayers are with his wife Bernie and their daughter, Aruna. ▲

FORTHCOMING FESTIVALS

Sri Vidya Havan	Monday	17-01-2005
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Tuesday	25-01-2005
Maha Shivaratri	Tuesday	08-03-2005
Telugu New Year Day	Saturday	09-04-2005
Sri Rama Navami	Sunday	17-04-2005
Tamil New Year Day	Thursday	14-04-2005
Bhagavan's Aradhana	Friday	06-05-2005
Maha Puja (Mother's Aradhana)	Tuesday	31-05-2005
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Thursday	21-07-2005
Krishna Jayanti (Gokulashtami)	Tuesday	28-07-2005
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Thursday	01-09-2005
Navaratri Festival commences	Monday	03-10-2005
Saraswati Puja	Tuesday	11-10-2005
Vijayadasami	Wednesday	12-10-2005
Deepavali	Tuesday	01-11-2005
Karthigai Festival commences	Sunday	04-12-2005
Karthigai Deepam	Tuesday	13-12-2005
Sri Bhagavan's 126th Jayanti	Sunday	18-12-2005