

CONTENTS

RAMANA ASHTOTTARAM	2
EDITORIAL: The Guiding Presence	3
THE MANY SIDES OF RAMANA: David Frawley	7
N. SUBRAMANYAN: FIFTY YEARS OF SERVICE: A. S. Krishnamoorthy	15
KEYWORD: KAIVALYA	21
THE HILL: Katya Osborne	23
ULLADU NARPADU VERSE SIX: S. Ram Mohan	29
BHAGAVAN AND THAYUMANAVAR: Robert Butler	35
THE HOBBLER: Michael Highburger	43
VEDA PARAYANAM: Eduardo Linder	55
CLOSING A CIRCLE IN TIME: Andrew Bukraba	65
SRI MAHARSHI, MASTER STORY-TELLER: M. Sivaramakrishna	73
HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN: Shoshi Shophrony	77
WHAT I AM IS NOT WHAT I THINK: Stuart Rose	81
ADVAITA PRIMER: John Grimes	89
BHAGAVAN'S HANDWRITING	93
SATTVIC FEELING: Rolf Skarnitzl	103
BOOK EXCERPT: Sri Ananda	107
OZHIVIL ODUKKAM: Kannudaya Vallalar	112
BOOK REVIEWS	117
RAMANA KID'S CORNER	119
ASHRAM BULLETIN	121

Ramana Ashtottaram

25. *Om Mahōtsahāya namaha*

Prostration to the One supremely ardent.

The *jnani* makes no effort and knows no fatigue; his enthusiasm, his energy is the radiance of blissful peace. His Awareness is itself energy and shines forever like the Sun. This great radiance is Bhagavan's very nature and is spontaneous in its activity.

It is said that what a tamasic person does in a week a rajasic person can do in a day. Similarly what a rajasic person does in a day a pure sattvic person can do in a minute just by their very presence. Though Bhagavan seemingly did nothing but be physically still his very being generated tremendous energy and that action profoundly purified the lives of all those who surrounded him.

26. *Om Kusagradhie namaha.*

Prostration to the One of sharpest intellect.

The intellect merged in the Self is impersonal, unself-regarding and ever-blissful. The analogy used to describe sharpness is the tip of a blade of kusa grass. Like a razor the pure intellect cuts through hindrances. The intellect of the *jnani* is so clear it naturally discriminates between what is real and what is unreal.

When we read *Talks* we see how Bhagavan immediately perceived the level of questioners and intelligently responded to their specific enquiries in fresh and dynamic ways so that they may see for themselves the meaning of their original questions.

27. *Om Sānta sankalpa samrambhāya namaha*

Prostration to the One in whom all the turbulence of thought has been set at rest.

The *jnani's* tranquil mind unperturbed by desire reflects Reality like a clean mirror and he therefore acts with certitude and precision. The *jnani's* actions are accomplished with immaculate precision because they are decided upon calmly and without the confusion of desire or fear. All actions occur in a spontaneous and harmonious manner. ▲

EDITORIAL

The Guiding Presence

The *mahanirvana* of Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1950 left the devotees who surrounded him bereft of the comfort of audible instruction and also of immediate consolation whenever they were in distress. All they had was the published writings, their personal memories and instructions received from the master and the ashram itself to remind them of Ramana's presence. The light that illuminated their lives had apparently vanished and, for a while, many thought they lived in darkness with little hope of recapturing those blissful moments of being in Ramana's actual physical radiance.

For those who understood Ramana best, such as Muruganar, the succeeding years were an opportunity to actualise the teachings and keep alive the flame, not as though they were dealing with stale, fading memories, but to show that they were capable of practising what Bhagavan had spent his life teaching them. For those who truly understood what Ramana taught, his physical passing was, in the final analysis, of no consequence. In fact, those who truly understood realised that instead of being cut off they were now much closer to the divine action named Ramana. Free of physical constraint this power we call

Ramana has by means we cannot understand, become much more freely available to us, albeit in a subtle form.

Over the succeeding years there has been a slow widening of the sphere of influence of this presence. The ashram has opened up, after years of hibernation when it adjusted to the fact that Ramana was no longer there in physical form.

In the first two decades after Ramana's mahānirvāna the ashram was barely able to sustain itself, due to legal assaults by aggrieved, misguided individuals, as well as by a lack of funds; for some time its very existence was at stake. It was only in the nineteen seventies that the ashram found its feet and became self-sustaining. But it was not until after the *kumbhabhishekam* in 1995, that the ashram managed to overcome its remaining problems and a new wave of devotees came to seek Ramana's blessings. Today more people than ever are pouring in.

What is it that draws them here in spite of the fact that there is no obvious reward for their efforts? If Ramana is no longer with us physically, why do we come to the ashram? Yes, his samādhi is available where we can pay our respects. And yes, we can sit quietly in the old hall where he sat for many years, and imbibe the powerful spiritual energy of the room. But is that all?

There is more, as many will testify, who either remain close to the ashram or, if they are unable to do so, come as often as they can.

A question asked by many who come for the first time is whether there is someone they can go to for spiritual instruction. The answer they generally receive is that they should go and sit in the old hall and, when necessary, visit the old devotees of Ramana who are still alive. Unfortunately, with time, many of those senior devotees are leaving this world and we cannot gain the direct benefit of their memories and wisdom.

It may seem a bleak and unsatisfactory prospect to be left only with a grave, a temple and a small room as catalysts for spiritual insight and solace. Buildings by themselves cannot answer our doubts nor provide succour to us in our moments of distress. But here appearance belies the reality. For it is very evident to those who have persevered that there is a guiding presence in the ashram that is alive and responsive

to our needs. A subtle power prevails that heals our hearts and restores our equanimity.

What is this mysterious, potent guiding force which transforms our lives? It is not perceived unless we are open, receptive and aware. We all know from intimate experience what it is. It has been described in historical times as 'the power which surpasses all understanding'. It is the breath of God or as Ramana would say 'automatic divine action'. For those who have been and continue to be the recipients of this manna, they understand and words are unnecessary. But for those who are new, words may perhaps just confuse the subject until such time as they open up and surrender to the Presence.

Paul Brunton in his *A Search in Secret India* wrote of the impact of Ramana on him when he sat in the old hall:

"A hush falls upon the little company. The minutes slowly pass but the silence only deepens. I am not religious but I can no more resist the feeling of increasing awe which begins to grip my mind than a bee resist a flower in all its luscious bloom. The hall is becoming pervaded with a subtle, intangible and indefinable power which affects me deeply. I feel, without doubt and without hesitation, that the centre of this mysterious power is no other than the Maharishi himself.

"His eyes shine with astonishing brilliance. Strange sensations begin to arise in me. Those lustrous orbs seem to be peering into the inner recesses of my soul. . . . There comes a perceptible change in the telepathic current which plays between us, the while my eyes blink frequently but his remain without the least tremor. I become aware that he is definitely linking my own mind with his, that he is provoking my heart into that state of starry calm which he seems perpetually to enjoy. In this extraordinary peace, I find a sense of exaltation and lightness. Time seems to stand still. My heart is released from its burden of care."¹

The essential point is that this grace is available to us even today, always, at any time and at any place. But for most of us the epiphanies occur more often than not at the ashram, because its compelling ambience can lead us immediately into the valley of silence. This grace

² *A Search in Secret India*, pp.161-2, B.I. Publications, 1994.

is a pure light which removes the barriers of ignorance that we have set up to defend our small, private worlds of desires and fears.

Ramana said:

Divine grace is essential for realisation. It leads on to God-realisation. But such grace is vouchsafed only to him who is a true devotee or a yogin, who has striven hard and ceaselessly on the path towards freedom.²

We focus and identify Ramana as the source of this abundant grace, this light which guides and reassures us.

Bhagavan did not belong to any lineage, nor did he personally subscribe to one. He was unique and even in the evaluation of the great masters of his lifetime, he stood alone. His teaching was often in silence, or else it epitomised the simplicity of absolute truth. Some people have occasionally sought to interpret Bhagavan's words, and while there is nothing wrong in helping others to understand advaita, there is a risk of their seeking to insert themselves in some sort of 'lineage', something Bhagavan himself did not advocate.

To truly understand what Bhagavan meant, what he tried in so many ways to teach us throughout his physical lifetime, one has to only remember and try to understand what were among his last words. When someone cried to him not to leave us, for what were we to do without him, his reply encapsulated his entire teaching. This crucial reply resonates powerfully through our entire lives. He said, "You pay too much attention to the body. I am not leaving, where would I go?"

For those with the ears to hear the sweet sound of his gracious silence there is no more to ask. ▲

² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 29.

The Many Sides of Ramana

DAVID FRAWLEY

Writing about my relationship with Bhagavan is like going through my entire spiritual search. There have been many aspects and layers of this contact, which has taken many forms. These have led me to a perhaps a different understanding of Bhagavan and his teachings than is apparent through the usual examination of the books about him. Bhagavan has come to me in different ways and relative to many teachings and practices in a manner I never expected.

My initial encounter with Ramana occurred through books in the early days, the dawns of spiritual seeking when I was nineteen, around 1970. There were so many books, teachers and groups, so many different traditions, a number with much to offer, that naturally it was difficult to know where to concentrate. After having done a general examination of the world's spiritual traditions it was clearly with Vedanta and Yoga that my soul found the greatest resonance, that I felt the clearest presentation of the path of Self-realization. In that domain it was easy to discover the teachings of Bhagavan, which were like their guiding star.

Bhagavan's teachings were simple, clear, and absolute, a solid rock of truth, and with a practical technique, Self-inquiry, to arrive at it. His picture radiating peace, wisdom and compassion was very compelling. Certainly there has been no other human picture that has equaled it in my mind. His life, as presented in his biographies, was also so austere, noble and pure that there is no doubt as to the completeness of his attainment. His teaching directly enunciated the great truths of Self-realization and Non-duality, the essence of Vedanta, and appeared to be the ultimate teaching behind and, perhaps, beyond all teachings.

Contact with Bhagavan

First I came into contact with the few Western books on Bhagavan. Then I discovered the Indian publications, particularly *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, that so eloquently presents all the issues of spiritual practice and realization. I subscribed to the Mountain Path and found in it additional insight. In addition I began to examine in more detail the greater tradition around Bhagavan, the various Vedantic and yogic teachings that he taught or referred to. I also began the practice of Self-inquiry and could see its power.

On an inner level it was not difficult to feel Bhagavan's presence and to sense his guidance, whether through dreams or in the state of meditation. Bhagavan remained with me as a constant inspiration, which has never left. However, two dilemmas arose. First I wondered how I could possibly put his teachings into practice in a realistic manner. Compared to the ascetic majesty of his life, mine appeared quite circumscribed. For me, with my confused mind, to meditate upon the Supreme Self often appeared little more than arrogance. The path of pure Jnana Yoga was said to be for the rare and highest level of aspirants, requiring a pure and ripe mind, and an extreme asceticism. I thought about the years Bhagavan spent in samadhi, letting his body be eaten by ants. How could someone raised in the materialistic West be able to realistically do this practice, particularly while having to live and work in such an unspiritual culture, being constantly bombarded by its disturbances and distractions? Self-inquiry appeared easy at first, but it was definitely not easy to sustain as a practice over long periods of time. It seemed to need some additional support.

J. Krishnamurti and Anandamayi Ma

The second dilemma, which arose from the first, was the need for more direct instruction and a living teacher who could aid in that practice. Both these dilemmas led me primarily into the teachings of J. Krishnamurti. Krishnamurti was an accessible teacher, whose teachings had some similarity with those of Bhagavan and appeared more realistic to follow, as they started on a more basic level of inquiry than that of the Supreme Self. Inquiring into fear, desire or ego was something that one could do, when immersing one's mind into the Absolute appeared like a mere fantasy. I experimented with his teachings for a few years and derived some benefit.

However, there was something missing in his approach that brought me continually back to Bhagavan. It seemed less exalted and somewhat narrow and isolated. I knew the validity of other yogic practices like mantra and pranayama, and of the greater yogic tradition, which Krishnamurti generally rejected, but which Bhagavan recognized as valuable. Hence I kept Bhagavan as the ideal and continued to look for other teachers and additional supportive yogic practices.

This continued search let me to contact, through a series of letters, with the great North Indian saint Anandamayi Ma, who brought both light and love along with her grace. She encouraged me to continue with Bhagavan's approach, but to broaden it with other yogic practices like mantra and Bhakti Yoga. This also helped enkindle an interest in the Vedas that I had developed earlier through the works of Sri Aurobindo, which directed me to an extensive examination of the Vedic mantras. This stabilized me in my sadhana for some time and brought me into contact with M.P. Pandit of the Aurobindo Ashram, who similarly spoke very highly of Bhagavan and his approach. Now it appeared I had discovered a path that was broad and practical as well as preserving the heights of Bhagavan's teaching.

Tiruvanammalai

It was a few years later that I first visited Ramanashramam in India and this brought another major change in my spiritual path. There my contact with Ramana was deepened, though in a way that was

initially disconcerting and very different from anything I had imagined. Ramana came to me through the deity Lord Skanda, the son of Siva, with whom Ramana is identified. I came to understand Ramana as Lord Skanda, the embodiment of the flame of knowledge.

My first visit to the Ashram and to Arunachala was pervaded with the energy of Lord Skanda or Murugar, as he is known in South India. Coming into Tiruvannamalai I felt the presence of tremendous spiritual fire, which also had, in its more benefic moments, the face of a boy. The image a small boy carrying a spear, rising out of a fire, keep appearing to my mind. This brought about an intense practice of Self-inquiry that was literally like death, though it was the ego's death, not that of the body. Going through that fire was perhaps the most intense spiritual experience of my life, to the point that I had at times to pray to keep it from becoming too strong! Yet afterwards it left one feeling refreshed, cleansed, and with a purity of perception that was extraordinary.

Lord Skanda and Ramana

Up to that point I had only a limited understanding of the role of deities in spiritual practice. I had almost no knowledge of Lord Skanda, though he is a very popular deity in South India and one sees his picture everywhere. I did not understand his connection with Ramana, though I had some idea about it, recalling having read about it before. So I was somewhat shocked to come into contact with such an entity, not as some mere fantasy but as a very concrete and vivid inner experience penetrating to the core of my being. That the process of Self-inquiry would be aligned to a deity, in which my personality was swallowed as it were, was not something I had heard of or even noted in the teachings.

In time I learned much about Skanda and Ramana. Skanda is the incarnation of the power of pure wisdom. He is the Self born of Self-inquiry, the inner child born of the experience of the death of the ego. This child of the innocent mind is the warrior that destroys all the demons, all of our negative conditionings, with his spear of Self-inquiry. Coming to Tiruvannamalai was an experience of that inner fire (*tejas*), which was Ramana and Skanda.

I felt Lord Skanda most keenly at the great temple of Arunachaleshwara in the nearby town of Tiruvannamalai. Initially the experience of the

temple was more important for me than the ashram. The temple of Arunachaleshwara still holds much of the vibration of Ramana, who was its child and where he stayed and practiced tapas. It has its own Divine presence as well that has nourished many sages and yogis. The Devi there functions as the mother of Ramana and Skanda and as the mother of all. I can feel her as my own spiritual mother. The great Siva linga, similarly, is like Ramana's father. The deities in the temple became alive as the parents of Lord Skanda, who was not only Ramana, but my own inner spiritual seeking. It was in the Mother temple I felt the strongest energy and unfoldment. The story of the birth of Uma, her marriage with Siva, and the birth of Lord Skanda began to unfold in my meditations as a symbol of the process of Self-realization. The myth became real compared to which our human lives are mere shadows. The realms of these deities (*Deva lokas*) emerged as states of meditation.

One day at the temple I decided to purchase a statue to take back home for my altar. There I found a small statue of Lord Skanda, that I bought and put into my nap sack. One of the Brahmin priests in the temple noted what I had done. He gestured to me and asked for the statue, which I gave to him. Then he led me through the temple and placed the statue on all the chief murtis, doing the appropriate puja. He started with the Devi and then to the Siva Linga, and then to the Skanda temple. It was as if I myself was reborn as Skanda during those pujas.

Later in the ashram while meditating the Devi appeared to me holding various ornaments and weapons, and offering them to me, a form which I later on identified as a form of Durga called Mahishasuramardini. These I came to know were different teachings and practices that she bestowed to her devotees, just as she gave them to her son Skanda. One needs plenty of such tools in order to be successful in one's meditation. There are so many obstacles for which different methods are needed. These have proved very helpful, if not crucial through time. I have learned to appreciate the abundance of such approaches. Rather than struggling mentally with any problems, I call up one of the weapons of the Goddess to deal with them.

The connection between Ramana and Skanda led me more deeply into the works of Ganapati Muni, one of Ramana's earliest and greatest

disciples, who more than anyone lauded Ramana as Skanda. Ganapati produced many beautiful Sanskrit verses connecting the two. This served as a door into Ganapati's work and his vision of Ramana. It further served to connect my Vedic work with Ramana. Ganapati connected both Skanda and Ramana with Agni, the sacred fire of the Vedas, the embodiment of Vedic wisdom. Eventually I came into contact with K. Natesan, a great disciple of Ganapati who resides at the ashram, who so kindly gave me Ganapati's unpublished works and helped explain these connections to me. This brought the influence of Ganapati as a constant inspiration. Ganapati was a great devotee of the Goddess, particularly in the form of Uma, and brings her blessings to those who honor him.

My encounter with Ramana led me to Ganapati, in whose works I found the continuation of the Vedic vision and the grace of Vedic and Tantric knowledge. I also experienced Ganapati as Ramana's brother, just as the god Ganapati (Ganesha) is the brother of Lord Skanda. One needs Ganapati (*mantra-shakti*) to pave the way for Skanda (*Atma-nishtha*). It is a family matter, one could say, meaning Siva's family.

Ramana and the Mountain

The second major point of revelation for me was Ramana and the mountain. I had grown up in mountain regions and developed a strong reverence for their spiritual power. One can still feel Ramana's presence on and around Arunachala mountain, which has considerable one could say magic about it. It is as if he still roams the mountain, which reflects the tapas he experienced on it. When I first climbed to the top of the mountain, I stopped for a few minutes to meditate on the summit. There while sitting a sadhu appeared coming up the side of the mountain taking long strides, and stopping occasionally to pick something like berries from a bush or two. He was an elderly man, wrapped in orange in the upper part of his body like a Swami. As he came near he gave the greeting of the siddhas, raising his hand. At that point infinite space opened up and my consciousness entered into it. After a short time he continued on the mountain. I sat there quietly absorbing the experience. Who this being was I do not know but it is

my feeling that he was such a Siddha of the mountain. Certainly the mountain has many such mysteries.

Ramana is indeed the mountain. Like Siva he is the Lord of the mountains. His teaching comes through nature, not through the human mind, and has all the power of the universe within it. Whenever I see mountains like Arunachala (we have one that has a similar shape nearby here in New Mexico) my mind goes to Ramana. The Aruna mountain is the mountain of the dawn before which the Atman or spiritual Sun arises in the east. It is the home of the Aruna Ketu rishis who are lauded in the Vedas (*Taittiriya Aranyaka, Aurn Prashna*) as the creators of the universe.

Ramana is not merely a person. Nor is his teaching something he invented or a one man show. Ramana is a doorway to all the wisdom of the rishis and yogis, which in turn takes us to all the powers of the universe, visible and invisible. Like the Vedas he is the fire, the water, the wind and the sun. He is the mountain that holds the world and the spirit hidden in nature, like the fire hidden in the fire sticks. He represents a teaching that integrates the vast wisdom of the ancient and eternal seers into a simple prescription for our modern ills. But this teaching, though having a simple core, is subtle and many-sided. It is not a standardized prescription for mass consumption but a way of attunement with one's individual nature.

The story continues to unfold. During my last trip to India I was fortunate to meet with Shivananda Murti, a great devotee of Bhagavan in Andhra Pradesh, who revealed to me another aspect of Ramana. Meanwhile, I was sent as a gift by the Shivananda Ashram, who knew of my reverence for Skanda, large statues of Lord Skanda and his two wives, Vali and Devasena (who represent the forces of nature and the power antra), so that Skanda also lives in my house. Yet whether it is Ramana who became Skanda, or Skanda who became Ramana, we cannot be sure! ▲



N. Subramanyan

Fifty Years of Service

A. S. KRISHNAMOORTHY &
MICHAEL HIGHBURGER

In the last issue we announced the Golden Jubilee of Appichi Maama's tenure as priest; however, for lack of space we were unable to include any biographical details or reminiscences. As one can imagine, a lot can happen in fifty years. In this issue we would like to honour the Ashram head priest with the following short biography and retrospective of half a century of service.

For devotees and regular visitors to the Ashram, Appichi Maama is a prominent figure. On any given day, one will find him somewhere about, either in Bhagavan's Samadhi hall or the Mother's shrine, performing abhishekam or archana, answering letters from devotees, helping devotees with prayer intentions, chanting mantras for the weekly Mahanasya, or at Vedaparayana. It is rare for a visitor to come and *not* find him there, carefully observing Ashram ceremonies with his customary dignity and faith, rites he learnt, he says, through observation and, no doubt, by Bhagavan's Grace.

Background

N. Subramanyan was born into a middle-class family in Koovadu village in South Arcot District. He came to Bhagavan in the early 40s to study in the Vedapatasala. At that time, the school was quite small

and informal as there was no resident teacher. Every afternoon at 3 pm an instructor came from town to tutor the boys in the Vedas and in general education. The young Subramanyan¹ found that the demands on his time made single-minded devotion to his studies difficult if not impossible. He was expected, like others, to toe the line and take up additional duties like food preparation, setting the dining hall for meals, and serving at mealtimes. This latter chore had hidden blessings as he regularly had the opportunity to serve Sri Bhagavan. In addition, twice each day the young Subramanyan together with the other students of the school chanted the Vedas in Bhagavan's presence. Eight busy years passed in this way.

Bhagavan's Mahanirvana

In the last days of Bhagavan's earthly existence, Subramanyan's long time friend, Sri Krishnamurthy (Kittu Maama), was tending Sri Bhagavan daily in what is now called the Nirvana room, bringing *naivedyam* and *tirtham* (offerings from puja). As Bhagavan's condition was delicate, few were allowed access. But Subramanyan was assisting Kittu, so he had the opportunity to be in close proximity to Bhagavan. During the critical last days, Bhagavan's physical weakness was such that he was unable to sit up in order to take *tirtham* and so asked Kittu Maama to pour it into his mouth as he lay prone. Once, as *prasadam* was brought, Bhagavan said, "As you make the offering to my Mother's shrine, so do it to me. She is unable to eat it. Now I am also unable to eat it."²

After Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, Ashram activities were curtailed. Appichi Maama took leave and began a 2-year course in Teacher Training. He studied privately, passed his ESLC examination, and worked in two schools. During this time he married and started a family, eventually being blessed with four sons, Ramana Sundaram, Sriraman, Arunachalam and Nagarajan, and one daughter, Lalita.

¹ It seems the young Subramanyan had a fondness for sweets and snacks as a boy and so the elder students of the Vedapatasala gave him the nickname 'Appichi', the Tamil word for 'sweets'. In Tamil, 'Appichi' is used like the English diminutives 'baby', 'honey' or 'sweetheart' to address children and infants. 'Maama', the Tamil word for 'uncle', is a courtesy title of respect given to those in a position of esteem and came later.

² *The Mountain Path*, October 1980, p. 232.

In 1954, while working as a headmaster, Subramanyan received a letter from the Ashram. At the time Major Chadwick was urging regular performance of the Sri Chakra puja, (the Devi puja still performed six times each month in Mother's shrine). As there was need for an additional Brahmin *pujari*, Chadwick³ had his eye on Subramanyan to fill the position. Though already securely employed, and in spite of the pittance which was all that the Ashram could offer as salary, he took the call as coming directly from Bhagavan. When he came to the Ashram that June for the summer vacation, he stayed on, leaving his position as headmaster forever.

* * *

Life in the ashram was tough in those days. There were few resources and a lot of work. All were called upon to do their share. Subramanyan found himself running many errands, making regular trips to town, working in the kitchen, doing gardening, plumbing, cleaning and even doing the electrical wiring for the then *new* Morvi Guesthouse. And all this alongside his priestly obligations! Sometimes the burden of work became too much. Once in 1961, many years after coming to live permanently at the Ashram, Appichi Maama was in despair: "I have come to be in Bhagavan's presence and to serve Bhagavan," he thought, "yet in reality I am spending all my time doing mundane tasks." Just when he decided that the time had come for him to leave, he had a vivid dream in which Bhagavan came to him. Bhagavan was returning from his walk on the hill, but arrived not behind the kitchen as usual, but instead, he came directly to where Subramanyan was standing, near Lakshmi's samadhi. Bhagavan approached him and the young priest bowed to him and, surprisingly, found the following words coming from his own mouth: "Bhagavan, I've come to work!" Bhagavan smiled, and looking straight at him said, "Yes, yes!" and with a kindly gesture gave his blessing.

Appichi Maama took his dream as inspired directly by Bhagavan; it dispelled his doubts about remaining at the Ashram. He never again

³ Chadwick became a benefactor of both Kittu and Appichi Maama, providing them with land in Ramana Nagar and financial resources to build their respective family homes.

thought of leaving and found his heart a little lighter when faced with simple chores.

Experiences with Bhagavan

The priest recounts numerous encounters with Bhagavan in the kitchen and dining hall where he and Kittu Maama served food, albeit timidly at times. Bhagavan noticed everything and the two youngsters knew their master set great store by the correct way of serving. They both once said, "Serving food with the Maharshi sitting and watching us was nerve-racking work. Everything had to be done exactly right and there he would sit, child-like, but with his eyes moving everywhere in a quiet, unobtrusive way. He watched the cooks and servers with vigilance."⁴ Bhagavan also listened to the boys' *parayana*. Morning and evening chanting took place near the well in summer and in the Jubilee Hall the rest of the time and Bhagavan was always present, listening quietly and attentively, interrupting on occasion to correct mistakes.

Other Recollections

In the mid-forties, the young Subramanyan was entrusted with setting out banana leaves and water for the meals, and serving pickle. One summer evening after Shantammal had served Bhagavan his meal and the lad was serving pickle, Bhagavan asked him for a second helping of buttermilk. This was not Bhagavan's habit – he normally took less than others and would not ask for second helpings. But this night he had commented on the green mango pickle of which he was quite fond, saying, "What the mother fails to do [i.e., get her son to have a second helping], this pickle succeeds in doing!" With that, young Subramanyan brought more buttermilk. There were two buckets of buttermilk kept in the kitchen, one sour and one sweet. Bhagavan preferred the latter. Subramanyan was unaware that the two buckets had been inadvertently interchanged and served Bhagavan from the wrong one. Bhagavan made no comment, but Chinnaswami was quite angry and the kitchen staff berated the boy. The priest recalls how he avoided Bhagavan's glance for four days, such was his embarrassment!

⁴ *The Mountain Path*, October 1980, pp. 231-32.

Subramanyan has many stories to tell of those early days and of his interactions with Bhagavan. One time, when he was serving in the dining hall, a frog came hopping along, inevitably making its way towards Bhagavan's meal. The lad stepped forward to prevent the creature from trespassing onto Bhagavan's banana leaf. But Bhagavan stopped him, saying, "Why do you that? Let him go his own way!" Since that time, Subramanyan took this as an *upadesa* regarding all other creatures in the Ashram, accepting that any of them might be *siddhas* coming to have Bhagavan's darshan. In all the years since, if a gecko (lizard) or some other creature approached Bhagavan's Samadhi, the priest never interfered, reminded of that night in his youth when the frog hopped across Bhagavan's banana leaf.

Another scene is from early morning Parayana in the 40s. It was the sacred month of Margazhi (mid-December to mid-January) so dear to the Gods with its emphasis on early morning worship. At 4:30 am prior to the 5 am Vedaparayana, Bhagavan, Ashramites, Vedapatasala students, and guests were reciting the Tamil *Pallandu*, a prayer of praise to the guru, invoking the Divine, and bidding that He "live long". Bhagavan's attendant, Sivananda, enthusiastically joined in the recitation but as his grasp of formal Tamil was limited, he made several grievous errors. At first Bhagavan was amused but finally he pulled up the attendant as the latter had inadvertently changed some of the text's verses of praise into curses. Sivananda did his best to follow Bhagavan's advice but did not improve much even after Bhagavan's numerous suggestions. In the end, the poor man felt quite mortified and ashamed of himself. However, subsequently, when the group recited verses containing Sivananda's name, Bhagavan changed them a little to give them a flattering and edifying flavour, in order to soothe the attendant's injured feelings.

Priestly Duties

Devotees have commented on the head priest's devotion to Bhagavan, noticing tears of love well up in him at times during puja. Often he sings along with those offering Tamil devotional songs before final arati. And on occasions during Sri Chakra puja, he renders the service himself.

Likewise his gift for decorating altars is known to devotees, particularly the way he bejewels and adorns Yogambal during the nine

days of Navaratri. On the sixth day, when linga puja is enacted, many visitors come to Ramanasramam as it is the only place still doing this decoration according to the local tradition. (Sri Arunachaleswarar dispensed with it some decades ago.).

Appichi Maama learned how to decorate altars by watching the school drawing master from town who used to do it regularly. But this expert never revealed the secrets of his skill, always doing his decorating behind drawn curtains. When he stopped coming, even though Kittu was head priest, the job fell to the younger priest who had a knack for it.

Appichi Maama's many years of experience are evident. On special occasions, devotees and visitors marvel at the adornments of Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam with its garlands of varying sizes and lengths, with flowers of a dozen colours. On Jayanti, Aradana or Kartigai Deepam, he proceeds patiently and painstakingly until Sri Bhagavan's Mahalingam looks as inspiring and imposing as that in the ancient Arunachaleswarar Kovil on its festival days.

Blessings over the Years

During his fifty years as Ashram priest, Appichi Maama feels that the most rewarding feature of his work has been his role as intercessor for prayers and petitions made to Bhagavan. In times of crisis, devotees write to the Ashram, beseeching Bhagavan's intervention, either through special prayers (*sankalpa*) or specific pujas. The head priest is required to respond to these requests on a daily basis as part of his priestly function, making direct prayers to Bhagavan on behalf of those in difficulty. The Ashram has received numerous letters from devotees down through the years reporting miraculous deliverances from their calamities. For Appichi Maama, seeing Bhagavan bless his devotees repeatedly over the decades has been the greatest miracle of all, bearing witness to Bhagavan's enduring presence and power, both in Sri Ramanasramam and elsewhere.

Needless to say, for Appichi Maama the memory of those early years has been a source of strength. To have been saturated by the radiance of Bhagavan on a daily basis through all the impressionable years of his adolescence was truly a great grace. No doubt this prepared him for the vital role he plays at Sri Ramanasramam. ▲

KEYWORD

KAIVALYA

Sanskrit: aloofness; aloneness; isolation.

In the context of Bhagavan's teachings this means 'solitude' or the state of Self-realisation where nothing exists apart from the Self. According to the scriptures it means complete detachment from the material world.

The Yoga Darshana defines it thus : 'When the purity of contemplation equals the purity of the individual, there is isolation.' The Sankhya Darshana sees it as an aloofness from primal Nature (*prakruti*) and all its transformations. There is no pain or pleasure in this state. The immediate cause for this absolute detachment is discriminating knowledge (*viveka*).

When the *jeeva*, (the individual soul), merges in its source, *Atman* (Absolute Unconditioned Awareness, the Self) in the Heart, and loses itself to become one with It, then **That alone exists**. This state of subtle experience is Kaivalya.¹

In the classical example of a pot existing in space, the pot-space is defined by the pot-shell. When the pot is moved, the pot-space appears to move. But is this the case? Space is all pervasive and thus exists everywhere, in and through the pot-shell also. The pot is a limited form. Therefore it can be moved from here to there. But space is everywhere. So how can space move and to where?

'The physical space perceived by the mind through the eyes exists in mental space. And where does the concept of space exist? In our absolute unlimited awareness, our Self or *Atman*,² says Bhagavan.

¹ See Preface to *Ramana Gnana Bodham*, by Sri Muruganar vol.2.

² *Atma Vidya*, verse 5.

The entire cosmos, including space, is pervaded by this *chitakasa*, our omnipresent Being and omniscient Knowing. Chidakasa is therefore called, subtler than the subtlest' and 'greater than the greatest' since nothing exists apart from it.³ Furthermore, Bhagavan describes this as 'the infinite expanse of Grace.'⁴

Bhagavan tries to describe, for our sake, what really cannot be described: 'The Sage established in the Heart does not know anything as the substratum for the entire universe except the Self. Like the screen which supports the manifestation of the images in a film show, the Self allows the appearance of manifestation and the existence of the entire universe comprising sentient beings and insentient matter in It.'⁵ Therefore, He can declare, 'I am all that exists.' He can also say that 'I am' is all alone (the state of kaivalya), since nothing exists apart from Him.

Bhagavan expresses these ideas in this verse: 'Immaculate Arunachala! The entire cosmos comprising the five elements and the manifestations of sentient beings and insentient matter is not apart from You, the *chitakasa*, (absolute unlimited awareness). Then how can 'I' exist as an individual self apart from you? When You shine as *chitakasa* in the Heart, swallowing up every thing, how can this 'I' emerge as an individual self? Make me merge into my source and thus reveal Your real nature (to me)'.⁶ When the rising wave identifies with its form it forgets its identity with the ocean. This is regained only when it dissolves back into its source, the ocean.

Confirmation of this comes from Sri Muruganar speaking of his own experience: 'Omnipresent Being and omniscient Knowing, all pervasive state of Siva, (where nothing exists apart), is alone Kaivalya. Praised be Bhagavan who bestowed this state on this undeserving person.'⁷ ▲

³ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 498.

⁴ *Eleven Stanzas*, verse 6.

⁵ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 450.

⁶ *Eleven Stanzas*, verse 7.

⁷ *Ramana Gnana Bodham*, vol.2, verse 1026.

The Hill

KATYA OSBORNE

What is it about Arunachala that attracts some people to the point of obsession? There are some who, once ensnared, find it almost impossible to leave; there are others who pass by and barely notice it. You drive along the main road in either direction and the countryside is more or less littered with hills of a similar size and configuration. Why should this pile of earth and rocks be in any way different? Yet different it most assuredly is. None of the other prominences has the power, presence, or sheer personality and exuberance of Arunachala. Even Bhagavan, if he could be said to be attached to anything, was attached to this place. On the face of it, it is an inexplicable mystery; yet it is nonetheless a fact and therefore worth trying to explain.

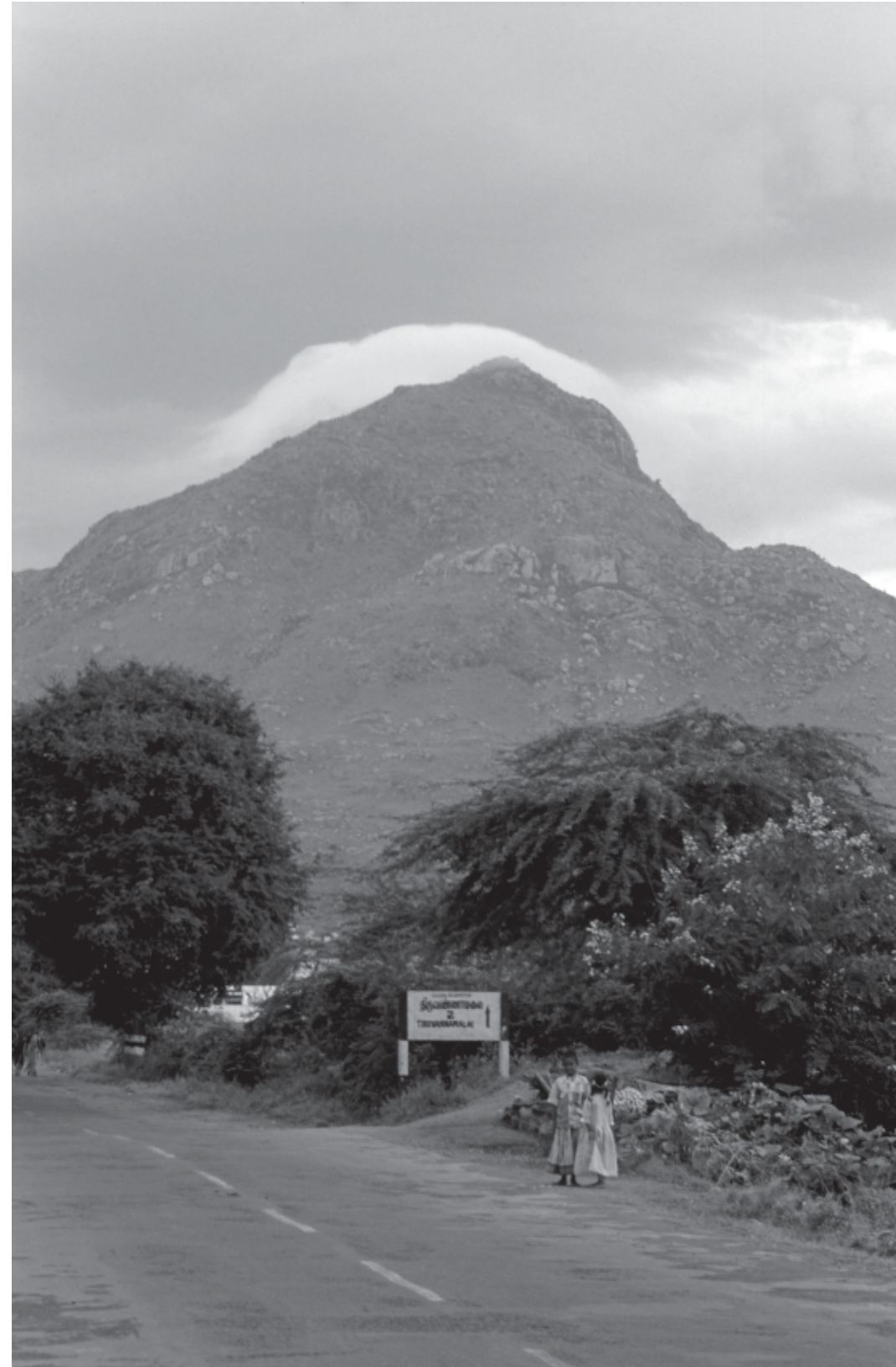
In the myths of antiquity, Arunachala was acknowledged to be the incarnation of Lord Siva on earth as the Lord of Fire. Physically it is a hill, or small mountain, some 2,668 feet above sea level, of apparently unremarkable rocks physically indistinguishable from any others in this landscape of scattered hills dotted about on the hot plains. Bhagavan treated Arunachala as a living manifestation of God, and as

THE MOUNTAIN PATH

such it is hard to describe. A person cannot be truly conjured up by a catalogue of physical details, and yet any other sort of description is even harder to arrive at. To those who are in tune with it, Arunachala is a microcosm of the world. Its signature on the landscape is so powerful that it seems to distort one's inner compass; no hill this, but an overwhelming presence that makes everything else around seem shadowy and unreal. It also acts like a prism to intensify all the senses and emotions. Colours seem brighter; the taste of food is sharper; the very act of breathing is not just the drawing in of whatever comprises the local atmosphere, rather it is an effervescent inhalation of invigorating power. Every sensation seems to be keener; love is stronger, but then so too is hate. Having heightened senses works both ways, which is why people come to Arunachala. They hope for release and enlightenment, but the corollary is that all one's negative aspects are also highlighted. They can be dealt with or given in to, according to the personal application of the individual. People who resonate with the Hill have a unique opportunity to deal with all the troublesome facets of their characters, to recognise them and try to eliminate them; they also have the possibility of elevating their least desirable qualities and this can happen so slyly that it almost goes unnoticed. Small skirmishes can become major wars and a mild interest in one's neighbours can become malicious gossip. In the same spirit, a lack of interest in personal possessions can become genuine renunciation and ordinary thoughtfulness can transmogrify into true spirituality.

It is a mistake to suppose that everything within the ambit of the Hill is benign. People have been robbed, raped, and have even died on the Hill. Others have lived there as renunciates, untroubled in a cave for years. Still others have carried on a life-long love affair with it. Whatever happens in the world at large also happens on or around the Hill...but more so.

Addicts to this sort of intense living find it hard to revert to black and white after the glories of Technicolor. These are the people who cannot keep away for long. Whatever the outside world has to offer pales into insignificance when compared to the concentrated wealth of emotion engendered by Arunachala; although this amount of sheer



cosmic power is hard to contain and can sometimes cause the mind to spin out of control, which may be the reason why some people who come to Tiruvannamalai either are, or become, unbalanced. It is dangerous to underestimate the intensity of this place.

Another attribute of the Hill is its healing powers. Known also as the 'Medicinal Hill', this can be a reference to the many therapeutic herbs to be found on it, but it can also be an allusion to total holistic healing, in fact to the immense feeling of well-being that emanates from anywhere within the aura of Arunachala. The many special attributes of this sacred place have been recognised from time immemorial. Possibly, in ancient days, when people were more attuned to natural forces, the power of Arunachala was more apparent to everyone and its manifestation was acknowledged by all. Certainly many shrines and temples, some of enormous antiquity, festoon the pradakshina road and legendary stories of the sanctity of the hill proliferate in the scriptures. It is an eloquent confirmation of the abiding authority of this place that its influence has not evaporated over the millennia; indeed it is apparently just as strong now as it ever was. Whether the source is geological, due to a concentration of magnetism in its structure, or whether it is purely spiritual due to causes we cannot understand, the fact remains that the power is there and so strong that it is almost tangible. Some interested people have gone to the trouble of measuring the distance from which the aura of the hill can be felt and they came up with a figure of a 40 km radius.¹ This may or may not be accurate, but in any case it is irrelevant. For Bhagavan the Hill was his guru and he walked around it, climbed up it and composed songs to it. Indeed, it was the Hill that drew him to Tiruvannamalai in the first place.

The solace that some people find within the radius of the hill is alluring and addictive. Historically people have looked for sacred places upon which to build their altars, temples or any other place of worship.

¹ It is recorded in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam* that the influence of Arunachala extends some 3 *yojanas*. A *yojana* is equal to approximately 8 miles or 13.5kms.

A hill was felt to be a fitting location from which to praise God. With Arunachala however, although many shrines have been built at its feet and Bhagavan himself lived in a cave on its slopes for some years, no one has ever even considered building any structure on the summit. It would seem like a desecration. At least that was the feeling of respect which Arunachala engendered until recently. Nowadays, possibly as a sign of the Kali Yuga, the summit of the hill is disfigured by shoddy shacks and there are a number of quite aggressive 'sadhus' who demand money from pilgrims. In the past this was never the spirit on the hill. It was enough that at the festival of Deepam a huge copper cauldron was hauled up to the top from the big temple. Pilgrims clustered around and thronged the pathways to the peak, each one bearing gifts of ghee to fill the container. On Deepam night, the flame is lit, not by Brahmin priests but by ancient custom, it is done by simple townspeople. For a week, the flame is kept alight while everyone honours Siva in his aspect of Lord of Fire. No one can say how old this ceremony is; certainly it goes back beyond the era when records were kept. Lost in the dim past is the origin of the feeling of awe and reverence engendered by Arunachala. But whatever its source, the hill's spontaneous attraction still exists, and is experienced by so many people, even those who first came to the Hill expecting nothing at all. It speaks eloquently of the power of Lord Siva in whatever incarnation he chooses. ▲



Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma's
Commentary

verse six

S. RAM MOHAN

The world is nothing but the (totality of the) five kinds of sense-impressions. These five are knowable through the five senses (the ear and the rest). That is, the one mind knows the world through the gateways, the five senses. That being so, can the world exist independently of the mind?

Commentary

The man who says 'I see the world' thinks that he is identified with the mind which remains 'inside' the body and which sees the world which is *outside*. Bhagavan in this verse elaborates on the true nature of seeing. The seer who has become aware of the mind, sees only the sense-impressions: sound, touch, form, taste and smell that arise in the mind. Apart from these five sensations there is no world.

A person thinks that the causes of these sensations are objects existing outside, and that their existence is known to him or her through the five windows of the mind, the sense-organs. This is only an inference of his or her mind and does not correspond to fact. The common belief of people that they *directly* see the objects of the world is not correct. The world is not directly perceived but only indirectly inferred. Therefore the burden of proving the *real* existence of objects lies with those who assert that objects are the cause of sensations. Since they believed these objects to be outside, they should first prove that there is an outside.

To say that we see the worlds' objects with our own eyes is of no value. The seeing eye is included in the body. Sight is enabled by that very eye. Hence the eye cannot be a reliable witness to prove the world's reality. According to Bhagavan's comment at the end of verse six, "Does the world exist apart from the body?" the body and the world are inseparable parts of one spectacle. Where is the evidence to prove the reality of the body apart from that of the world, or the reality of the world apart from that of the body?

Bhagavan states that what really exists cannot be something that sporadically appears, emerging at one time and then disappearing at another. The same meaning is conveyed by the next verse. These two verses, taken together show that the world is unreal. It has no inherent, independent existence.

On what grounds can the world's reality be asserted?

In this verse Bhagavan says that the world is a mental construct, a creation of the mind contained in the mind. He asks how the world that appears only when there is a mind and ceases to appear when the mind ceases, can be regarded as existing independently of the mind? He has also taught that if the world is not simply a mental creation, the mind should also appear in deep sleep which is a mind-less state and in the Supreme State. It does not do so.

It may be answered that the world disappears in deep sleep because there are no organs of perception in that state, and that though not seen the world continues to exist during that state. This is not to the point. In deep sleep the Real Self does not cease because by its nature

it always exists. This 'state' has been described as "the Eye that sees the mind, which is the eye that sees the eye". We can infer that state to be Supreme Pure Consciousness, the Infinite Eye. That is, this so-called Self is the ultimate consciousness by which the mind is conscious of itself and without which the mind would be no mind-function at all. That Consciousness is said to be eternal and exists in its own right. The Upanishads say that the Self does not need sense-organs and can see without eyes and hear without ears.

Some say that the world does appear at all times and is therefore real. Someone asked Bhagavan, "How can I say that the world does not exist while I sleep? Do not other people see the world while I am asleep? Can I not conclude from their testimony that the world continued to exist, though I slept?" Bhagavan replied, "Surely you did not see these non-sleeping persons in your sleep!"

The significance of this answer is as follows: because the world does not appear in deep sleep it is probable that the world is a mental creation. Those who are part of this world as well as their testimonies of it are therefore also the subject-matter of this dispute. So the question arises, "Are those *witnesses* real, or only mental creations?" So long as there is no answer to this riddle, how can they be accepted as competent witnesses in this enquiry?

The question arises whether a *jivanmukta* sees the world. In the experience of the Real Self the world does not appear and it cannot be definitely said that the sage sees the world. Another test of reality emerges: that alone is real which survives in the Supreme State that transcends the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep, dreamless sleep.

The truth of the world may be understood thus: the mind itself creates and projects the world-appearance and is deluded into thinking that it is real. By thinking, it creates the world, and by forgetting, it destroys the world. The mind does not know that it has this power of creation. It creates the world, not deliberately, but because of a superior power to which it is subject, namely *maya*.

That the mind can create a world and also be deluded by its own creation is seen in the dream state and in day-dreaming. In the latter

state, the mind (while awake) becomes oblivious of the outside world. The same phenomenon occurs when we watch a movie or read an exciting novel. The waking world is also a mental creation.

It may be asked, “A dream-world is found to be unreal on waking. But the world does not seem to be unreal at any time?” The answer to this conundrum is given in classical texts on Vedanta and in the *Arunachala Ashtakam* composed by Bhagavan. Just as a dream world cannot exist outside the parameters of sleep so too Ignorance serves as the foundation for the seemingly endless dream which we call the waking state.¹ It is in this sleep of Ignorance that this dream called the waking state is seen and experienced. If and when this sleep of Ignorance comes to an end by Awakening it will then be seen to be only a dream and therefore unreal.

A chapter in the *Vishnu Purana* describes the process by which the Sage Ribhu made his disciple Nidagha understand the unreality of all the differences that an ignorant person believes to be real. The disciple Nidagha had been taught many times and yet he remained subject to the illusion of duality. Ribhu went in search of him to the city where he resided in order to give him a final teaching. Nidagha had just bathed and while returning to his house, found the streets crowded, so he waited on one side for the crowds to disperse. He failed to recognise his guru, Ribhu, and who was disguised as a simple villager.

Ribhu asked Nidagha, “Why are you standing here?”

Nidagha replied, “Because of this crowd. The king of the city is passing through in this procession. I am waiting for everyone to disperse.”

Ribhu asked, “Who is the king in this procession?”

“The king is that person there who is seated on the elephant,” said Nidagha.

Ribhu asked, “But which is the elephant and which the king?”

Nidagha explained, “The king is the person above, the animal below is the elephant.”

Ribhu then asked him what he meant by ‘above’ and ‘below’.

Nidagha wondered at his ignorance and, losing his patience, jumped onto Ribhu’s shoulders and said, “You see now: I am *above* you, you are *below* me.”

Ribhu replied, “I now see the meanings of ‘above’ and ‘below’, but you said ‘I’ and ‘you’. Who is this ‘I’ and who is this ‘you?’”

By the significance of these words, Nidagha suddenly realised that it was his own holy guru Ribhu who was below him. He hastily fell at his feet, saying, “Who else but my holy guru could so graphically teach me the truth of advaita?”

Ribhu said, “This is what you must understand,” and departed.²

This shows that the Ignorance which leads to the identification to the Self with one particular body is the root from which arises the sense of duality. ▲

¹ This was explained by Sri Sankaracharya in his commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad.

² Bhagavan deals with this difference, of ‘I’ and ‘you’ in verse 14 of *Ulladu Narpadu*.



Bhagavan and Thayumanavar

Part Three

ROBERT BUTLER,
T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN &
DAVID GODMAN

In the two previous parts of this series we summarised Thayumanavar's life and gave new translations of his verses that Bhagavan had either selected or used in his replies to visitors. In this third and concluding part we give more translations of Thayumanavar's verses that were cited by Bhagavan in conversations with visitors on topics such as death, enlightenment, and the nature of the 'I' and the mind. The translators' comments are in italics.

Death and Liberation

Question: Is liberation to be achieved before the dissolution of the body or can it be had after death?

Bhagavan: Is there death for you? For whom is death? The body which dies, were you aware of it, did you have it, during sleep? The *body* was not, when you slept. But *you* existed even then. When you awoke, you got the body and even in the waking state *you* exist. You existed both in sleep and in waking. But the body did not exist in sleep and exists only in waking. That which does not exist always, but exists at one time and not at another, cannot be real. You exist always and you alone are therefore real.

Liberation is another name for you. It is always here and now with you. It has not to be won or reached hereafter or somewhere. Christ has said, 'The Kingdom of God is within you,' here and now. You have no death.¹

Bhagavan then cited some lines from Thayumanavar to illustrate his theme:

... those whose state of *nishtha* [Self-abidance] is permanent will not even entertain the thought that death exists. This is not a thing to be taught to those of little understanding. At the mere mention of it, numerous disputations will ensue. Are not the divine-natured Markandeya and Suka, and the rest of the [great] sages immortals, their minds transcended?

Divine One, to whom

Indra and all the *devas*, Brahma and all the gods, sages learned in the *Rig* and other *Vedas*, the countless leaders of the celestial hosts, the nine principal *siddhas* the Sun, the Moon and the rest of the planets, the *gandharvas*, *kinnaras* and all the rest, join their palms together in worship!

My Lord, compassion's home, who dance your dance beyond the reach of thought, in consciousness's Hall!²

Markandeya and Suka are deemed to be immortals, as are all the other sages who have permanently transcended the mind. Some of the commentators on this verse say that all the other beings who are listed after Markandeya and Suka are not immortal, and therefore have to continue to pay obeisance to forms of the divine.

¹ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 9th March 1946.

² 'Karunakarakkadavul', verse 7.

It is worth noting that Devaraja Mudaliar noted in his reminiscences³ that Bhagavan once quoted him a portion of this same verse ('This is not a thing to be taught to those of little understanding. At the mere mention of it, numerous disputations will ensue.') Mudaliar understood this to mean that Bhagavan was occasionally circumspect about giving out some aspects of his teaching to people who were not ready for them because to do so would merely provoke pointless arguments.

The real 'I' and the spurious 'I'

There was once a discussion in the hall about the true meaning of verse ten of Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham which states:

The body is like an earthen pot, inert. Because it has no consciousness of 'I', and because daily in bodiless sleep we touch our real nature, the body is not 'I'. Then who is this 'I'? Where is this 'I'? In the Heart Cave of those that question thus, there shines forth as 'I', Himself, the Lord Siva of Arunachala.⁴

Dr Srinivasa Rao asked whether [this stanza] does not teach us to affirm *soham* [repeating 'I am He' as a spiritual practice]. Bhagavan explained as follows.

It is said that the whole Vedanta can be compressed into the four words, *deham* [the body], *naham* [not I], *koham* [Who am I?], *soham* [I am He]. This stanza says the same. In the first two lines it is explained why *deham* is *naham*, i.e., why the body is not 'I' or *na aham*. The next two lines say, if one enquires *ko aham*, i.e., Who am I?, i.e., if one enquires whence this springs and realises it, then in the heart of such a one the omnipresent God Arunachala will shine as 'I', as *sa aham* or *soham*: i.e., he will know 'That I am,' i.e., 'That is "I"'.³

In this connection Bhagavan also quoted two stanzas, one from Thayumanavar and the other from Nammalvar, the gist of both of which is: 'Though I have been thinking I was a separate entity and

³ *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 91.

⁴ *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 124.

talking of “I” and “mine”, when I began to enquire about this “I”, I found *you* alone exist.’⁵

This is the Thayumanavar verse:

O Supreme of Supremes!
Searching without searching who this ‘I’ was,
soon I found You alone
standing as the heaven of bliss,
You alone, blessed Lord.⁶

The following morning⁷ Bhagavan showed Devaraja Mudaliar the written texts of both these verses, and he also added the following Thayumanavar verse which, in its middle portion, expounds the same theme:

Though you dwell as space and the other elements,
as all the worlds in their tens of millions,
as the mountains and the encircling ocean,
as the moon, and sun, and all else that is,
and as the flood of heaven’s grace;
and though, as I stand here as ‘I’,
you dwell united with myself,
still there is no cessation of this ‘I’.
And since I go blabbering ‘I’, ‘I’,
undergoing countless changes,
ignorant in spite of knowing all this,
will it be easy to overcome the power of destiny?
Is there any means of awakening one,
who even before the day has ended,
remains, feigning sleep, his eyes tightly closed?
What, then, is the way that may be taught?

Yet, this vileness is unjust, so unjust.
Who is there to whom I might plead my cause?

Supreme One, whose form is bliss,
whose unique fullness encompasses
this universe and that which lies beyond!⁸

Mauna and the thought-free state

Mr Nanavati asked Bhagavan, ‘What is the heart referred to in the verse in *Upadesa Saram* where it is said, ‘Abiding in the heart is the best karma, yoga, *bhakti* and *jnana*?’

Bhagavan: That which is the source of all, that in which all live, and that into which all finally merge, is the heart referred to.

Nanavati: How can we conceive such a heart?

Bhagavan: Why should you conceive of anything? You have only to see wherefrom the ‘I’ springs.

Nanavati: I suppose mere *mauna* in speech is no good; but we must have *mauna* of the mind.

Bhagavan: Of course. If we have real *mauna*, that state in which the mind is merged into its source and has no more separate existence, then all other kinds of *mauna* will come of their own accord, i.e., *mauna* of words, of action and of the mind or *chitta*.

*Bhagavan also quoted in this connection the following from Thayumanavar:*⁹

O Supreme of Supremes!
If the pure silence [*suddha mauna*]
arises within me,
my mind will be silence,
my actions and words, all
will be silence.¹⁰

⁵ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 23rd January, 1946.

⁶ ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 225.

⁷ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 24th January, 1946.

⁸ ‘Anandanaparam’, verse 7.

⁹ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 29th April 1946.

¹⁰ ‘Paraparakkanni’, verse 276.

In Talks Bhagavan mentions that Thayumanavar mentions mauna in many places, but only defines it in one verse. The definition, given in Talks, is that 'Mauna is said to be that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego'.¹¹

The specific verse is not given, but in the Tamil edition of Talks, Viswanatha Swami identifies it as 'Payappuli', verse 14:

The unique source [*tan*], fullness [*purnam*],
prevalled within, in my Heart
so that the 'I' which deemed itself
an independent entity
bowed its head in shame.
Conferring matchless bliss,
consuming my whole consciousness
and granting me the state of rapture,
it nurtured in me the condition of *mauna*.
This being so, what more is there to be said?

This verse, a clear expression of the state that Thayumanavar finally reached, closely parallels the idea contained in Ulladu Narpadu, verse 30, in which Bhagavan describes how the individual 'I' subsides into its source, the Heart, leaving only the perfection of the Self:

When the mind turns inwards seeking 'Who am I?' and merges in the Heart, then the 'I' hangs down his head in shame and the one 'I' appears as itself. Though it appears as 'I-I', it is not the ego. It is reality, perfection, the substance of the Self.¹²

The similarities are so marked, it should come as no surprise that Bhagavan once commented that this was his favourite Thayumanavar verse.¹³ It was included in the Tamil parayana at Ramanasramam, along with the nine verses from 'Akarabuvanam-Chidambara Rahasyam' that have already been given.

¹¹ Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 122.

¹² Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Ulladu Narpadu verse 30, tr. K. Swaminathan.

¹³ Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 122.

The subject of silence and the thought-free state came up again after Bhagavan had cited, with great approval, a passage by Gandhi in which the latter had given a description of his own experience of this state:

Sri Bhagavan referred to the following passage of Gandhiji in the *Harijan* of the 11th instant:

'How mysterious are the ways of God! This journey to Rajkot is a wonder even to me. Why am I going, whither am I going? What for? I have thought nothing about these things. And if God guides me, what should I think, why should I think? Even thought may be an obstacle in the way of His guidance.

'The fact is, it takes no effort to stop thinking. The thoughts do not come. Indeed, there is no vacuum – but I mean to say that there is no thought about the mission.'

Sri Bhagavan remarked how true the words were and emphasised each statement in the extract. Then he cited Thayumanavar in support of the state which is free from thoughts:¹⁴

The state in which you are not,
that is *nishta* [Self-abidance].
But, even in that state,
do you not remain?
You whose mouth is silent,
do not be perplexed!
Although [in that state] you are gone,
you are no longer there,
yet you did not go.
You are eternally present.
Do not suffer in vain.
Experience bliss all the time!¹⁵

¹⁴ Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 646.

¹⁵ 'Udal Poyyuravu', verse 53. The last line may also be translated as 'You can have bliss. Come!' Bhagavan mentioned two other Thayumanavar verses on this occasion ('Udal Poyyuravu', verse 52 and 'Payappuli' verse 36) but since they feature elsewhere in this article, they are not repeated here.

Two days after Bhagavan had cited Thayumanavar to illustrate Gandhi's thought-free experiences, a visitor returned to the subject:

Devotee: Is not what Gandhi describes the state in which thoughts themselves become foreign?

Bhagavan: Yes, it is only after the rise of the 'I'-thought that all other thoughts arise. The world is seen after you have felt 'I am'. The 'I'-thought and all other thoughts had vanished for him.

Devotee: Then the body sense must be absent in that state.

Bhagavan: The body sense is also a thought whereas he describes the state in which 'thoughts do not come'.

Devotee: He also says, 'It takes no effort to stop thinking'.

Bhagavan: Of course no effort is necessary to stop thoughts whereas one is necessary for bringing about thoughts.

Devotee: We are trying to stop thoughts. Gandhiji also says that thought is an obstacle to God's guidance. So it is the natural state. Though natural, yet how difficult to realise. They say that *sadhanas* are necessary and also that they are obstacles. We get confused.

Bhagavan: *Sadhanas* are needed so long as one has not realised it. They are for putting an end to obstacles. Finally there comes a stage when a person feels helpless notwithstanding the *sadhanas*. He is unable to pursue the much-cherished *sadhana* also. It is then that God's power is realised. The Self reveals itself.

Devotee: If the state is natural, why does it not overcome the unnatural phases and assert itself over the rest?

Bhagavan: Is there anything besides that? Does anyone see anything besides the Self? One is always aware of the Self. So it is always itself.¹⁶ ▲

¹⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 647.

Sri Ramana, Friend of Animals

The Hobbler



EDITED BY MICHAEL HIGHBURGER

The following selection is taken from Hobbler and the Monkeys of the Hill, the upcoming collection of colour-illustrated anecdotes on Bhagavan's life with monkeys. The present story draws principally 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 by Surya Park Young Sun.

Introduction

Around 1916, following the death of her brother-in-law, Bhagavan's mother Alamma came to live at Virupaksha with Bhagavan. Around this time, a devotee named Kandaswami undertook to construct a small structure in front of a hollow in the rock a little way up from Virupaksha, a place where Bhagavan had earlier discovered a perennial spring. Skandashram, as it was later called, would serve as Bhagavan's residence for the next six years. Joining him at the new site was an increasing number of devotees as well as his mother and also

his younger brother, who, had recently lost his wife and was left with a little son, Venkataraman, to care for on his own.

Bhagavan's monkey companions found themselves quite at home at the new residence. After long years among them, Bhagavan's camaraderie with them had grown. He made keen observations about their habits, customs, and humanlike social order. He noted how females remained with the natal group after the onset of maturity while males, competing for wives and food, often dispersed shortly after adolescence. Sometimes being forced out and compelled to join another clan or to live alone for a time, exiled males would often form all-male groups. Bhagavan saw how the competition among males of a clan engendered struggles that were often bloody, resulting at times in serious injury or even death.

The Hobbler

Once, in the days just prior to shifting from Virupaksha up to Skandashram, the big macaque king of a troop near Virupaksha attacked a smaller adolescent member of the clan, mauling his leg and abandoning him. The little one, weak and limping, made his way to Sri Ramana. Bhagavan took him into his care and gave him much attention, bandaging his injured leg everyday. In due course the injury healed, sparing the little one's life, though leaving him permanently crippled. Reflecting on their new guest, devotees of the Ashram heard the following conversation...



MOTHER: Poor creature! How very intelligent it is!

BHAGAVAN: Amma! Don't use the word "it". Say "he," instead. Since he will be compelled to limp from hereon, I am going to call him "Hobbler".¹

The little monkey growls at Bhagavan.

BHAGAVAN: What? Don't you like being called "Hobbler"?

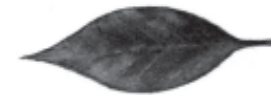
Mother brings some food on a plate and places it near the young monkey.

MOTHER: Come, little one, come and have some food. Hereafter this will be *your* plate. But you mustn't waste food. Understand?

The lame monkey empties the plate and hobbles after Bhagavan as Bhagavan goes out for a walk.

BHAGAVAN: Why should you want to come along, hobbling with such effort? Go back and take rest.

The monkey heeds Bhagavan's words and returns.



Day by day under Sri Bhagavan's loving care, the Hobbler's leg improves. In the course of the following days, the two grow fond of each other. On the fifth day, however, circumstances change when seven or eight monkeys approach the Ashram...

DEVOTEE: Bhagavan, monkeys are coming! And big ones! Please let us set the little one free.

MOTHER: They're angry with you because they think you're holding him against his will?

Sri Bhagavan comes out...

BHAGAVAN: Let them come. No need to panic.

Hobbler climbs onto Bhagavan's lap in fright. One of the monkeys goes near Bhagavan and examines the Hobbler...

¹ Nondipaiyan or "lame boy".



BHAGAVAN: What are you looking at? It is I who bandaged the leg.
Another monkey gives a friendly growl.

MOTHER: (*Addressing Bhagavan*) You'd better stay away from them. They may all pounce upon you.

BHAGAVAN: Don't worry Amma! Nothing like that will happen.
A third monkey pulls the Hobbler down from Bhagavan's lap...

BHAGAVAN: Oh! So you've all come to take the little one with you, have you? Very good! Amma, look here, didn't you say that monkeys don't have attachments to one another? (*To his young friend*) Oh, little one! Your relatives have come to get you. Now go with them like a good boy. And don't forget us when you become king!

The lame monkey goes away with the other monkeys, casting a lingering affectionate glance at Bhagavan.

DEVOTEE: (*Observantly*) All this is quite astonishing! They seem to be the little one's kinsfolk.

BHAGAVAN: Yes, the Hobbler belongs to them and so they've come to take him back. But let me tell you something about monkeys: as a rule they banish members of their group who've had contact with humans.

DEVOTEE: Why haven't they expelled the Hobbler?

BHAGAVAN: They're making an exception in the case of this Ashram. As I'm always in their midst, they treat me as one of their own. In reality everything is the Self. If we remain as the Self then all beings treat us as a part of *themselves* and thus we can easily be accepted by them.

Regular Visits of the Hobbler Clan

Hobbler's clan visits the Ashram regularly. Food is routinely set out for them. All the monkeys except Hobbler eat their food and depart in short order. The little one, on the other hand, who continues to be treated specially, likes to linger at the Ashram. Though Mother keeps a separate plate filled with food for him, he prefers to help himself from the rice on Bhagavan's leaf, which the latter doesn't seem to mind. With plate in hand, the little monkey would climb onto Sri Ramana's lap and enjoy the privilege of being hand-fed there by Bhagavan. One day the troop is eating at the ashram while the lame one keeps quiet without touching his food...

DEVOTEE: What can be the matter? He just sits there alone without eating a thing?

The Maharshi returns after a stroll on the mountain. Hobbler hobbles towards him.

BHAGAVAN: Go and eat with the others. Mother has filled your plate.

MOTHER: Haven't you accustomed him to eating on your lap? He's waiting for you!

As soon as Bhagavan is seated, Hobbler jumps onto his lap and glares up at him.



BHAGAVAN: Oh! You want me to feed you?

Mother brings the plate.

BHAGAVAN: You're grown now, aren't you? Shouldn't you feed yourself? Come, take your plate and eat on your own.

The monkey climbs down and starts eating his food alone. Food left behind by the other monkeys lies scattered about on the ground among the leaves.

BHAGAVAN: *(To Hobbler)* See how your kinsfolk have spilled and wasted so much food!

The little fellow forages around and gathers the leftover morsels. Then he begins to eat the food on his plate.

BHAGAVAN: Look how smart he is! The moment his folks have been blamed he feels hurt. He's eaten all the leftovers.

MOTHER: He's eaten with such thoroughness that his plate hardly needs washing! *(To Hobbler)* Come and have a banana, a reward for your fine table manners!



Getting Reprimanded by Hobbler

Another day devotees bring food and fruit. Mother gives plates of food to each of the four devotees there, setting aside another plate for Hobbler which she places inside the Ashram on one side where there is a frame of bars with a small window. With lunch duties over, she lies down in a corner to rest. Nearby, her five-year old grandson, Venketu,² is sitting cross-legged. Tempted by the snacks he cannot restrain himself and begins nibbling. Very suddenly the window flies open and Hobbler bursts in, charges toward the boy, slaps him on the face, and snatches the food from his hands. He then gives a growl just

² Venketu is none other than former Ashram President, T. N. Venkataraman, (Swami Ramananda), Sri Bhagavan's nephew. This account is recorded in his Tamil *Sri Bhagavan Paniyil*.

to be sure the boy has understood. The child cries out in fear...

MOTHER: Hey! Hobbler! What are you doing? He's my grandson, Venketu! You've frightened him!

Bhagavan enters. Venketu is rubbing his face

BHAGAVAN: *(With a smile)* So you got a blow, Venketu? It serves you right. That's Hobbler's plate. Don't you see that a portion is set apart for him each day? *(Smiling but gently reprimanding)* We shouldn't take what belongs to another.

VENKETU: *(Recoiling from the monkey in fear)* Grandma!

MOTHER: Don't be afraid, dear, he has only behaved like a monkey.

BHAGAVAN: It isn't like that. Was it right for your grandson to take his share?

MOTHER: Poor child! What does he know about shares, one's own or that of another?

BHAGAVAN: Hey, Venketu! No need to be frightened!

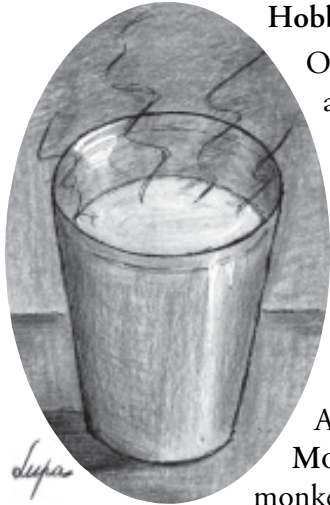


Bhagavan pats the child affectionately.

VENKETU: I don't even want to look at that monkey.

BHAGAVAN: Don't worry! Hobbler is a nice fellow. You took his food so he slapped you as repayment. Look how very gentle he is with me and grandma.

Venketu holds on to his grandma who hugs him affectionately.



Hobblor Comes for Milk

One time Sri Ramana is serving the Hobblor a cup of milk but as the milk is quite hot, Sri Bhagavan blows on it to cool it. Hobblor lunges forward and strikes him on the forehead...

DEVOTEE: My God!

MOTHER: What is it?

DEVOTEE: This monkey struck Bhagavan!

BHAGAVAN: Nothing to worry about, Amma, just a mild blow.

MOTHER: Why should he hit you? See, the monkey instinct is coming out!

BHAGAVAN: It's not like that. As the milk was hot, I blew on it. He imagined I was going to drink it myself and so hit me in retaliation.

MOTHER: *(Noticing him nearby, approaching)* He's coming. He might attack you again.

BHAGAVAN: No, no, he's only coming to apologize. *(To Hobblor)* Hey! Why do you stand here before me with such a long face? *(Good humouredly)* Did you hit me for the care with which I was trying to cool your milk so your mouth would not be scalded?

The monkey comes near with an apologetic look.

MOTHER: Poor fellow, he's come back in repentance!

Banishment

Another time, the Hobblor comes to eat but after eating a little, throws away the remainder...

BHAGAVAN: Hey! Why are you wasting food like that?

The monkey rushes toward Bhagavan and smacks him on the cheek. As Bhagavan rubs his face at the injured spot, a devotee prepares to beat the monkey.

BHAGAVAN: No! Don't hit him.

MOTHER: Hey Ram! Again? From now on I am not giving him any more food! *(To the monkey)* Get out...Don't come again, you!

Hobblor stands by trying to ascertain the situation...

BHAGAVAN: *(Feigning resentment)* Why are you standing there? Why should you be angry if I ask you not to waste food? Hereafter you are not allowed on my lap...Now go!

While speaking Bhagavan assumes a look of anger. The monkey leaves. The next day he returns only to be denied yet again.

BHAGAVAN: Why have you come back?

MOTHER: Yes, you no longer have your own plate — only a leaf. There in that corner is your food. Eat and go. If you waste it again that will be the end! So take care!

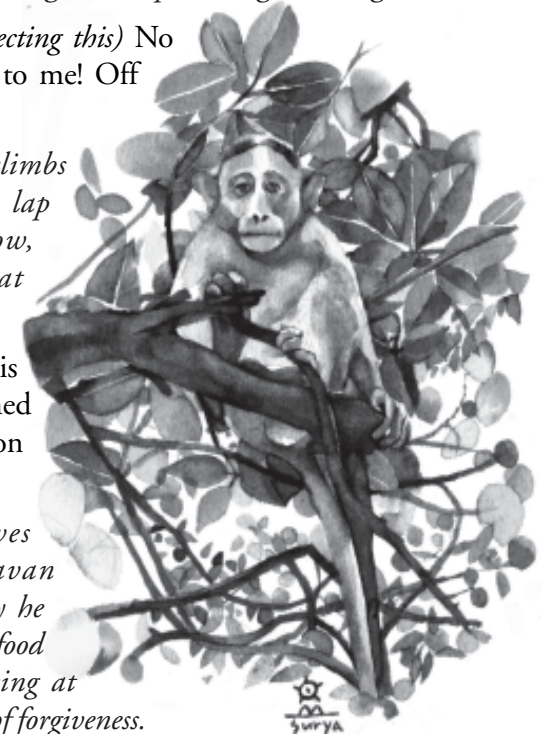
The Hobblor eats all the food kept on the leaf not dropping a morsel and then jumps up onto Bhagavan's lap and begins to hug him.

BHAGAVAN: *(Not expecting this)* No you don't! Don't come to me! Off you go!

The lame monkey climbs down from Bhagavan's lap and stoops down low, grovelling humbly at Bhagavan's feet.

BHAGAVAN: What's this cowering? You're punished this week. You can't sit on my lap...Now go!

The Hobblor leaves looking at Bhagavan dejectedly. The next day he returns yet again, eats his food quietly and leaves looking at Bhagavan for some sign of forgiveness.



Restoration

The afternoon of the next day, Sri Bhagavan and a party of some thirty devotees leave to go around the hill. The persistent monkey comes and falls at his master's feet...

BHAGAVAN: It's not been one week yet, has it? So why do you keep coming?

But Hobbler is not dissuaded and follows the group out for pradakshina. He stays with them the whole way giving no trouble but remaining ever quiet and well-behaved. After completing giri valam³ and returning to Skandashram, the Hobbler stands quietly nearby, looking at Bhagavan imploringly.

BHAGAVAN: Alright Hobbler! Come and have a banana! It's your reward for going around the hill.

The Hobbler politely declines.

BHAGAVAN: Oh, I see! You want to sit on my lap? Alright, come!

Bhagavan beckons to him and Hobbler graciously resumes his former privileged place on the throne of Bhagavan's lap, and like the king he will soon become, relishes Bhagavan's prasad.



³The Tamil name for *parikrama*, the circuit of Arunachala hill.

Hobbler Becomes King



Some years later at Skandashram Sri Ramana and devotees go for giri pradhakshina, leaving two or three ashramites behind to keep an eye on things. While away, Hobbler and his clan come and go on a rampage, destroying plants and creepers, and breaking the branches of surrounding trees. Upon their return, Bhagavan sees the destruction and is puzzled as to why the monkeys would behave that way. The following day when the monkey and his clan return, Hobbler ascends the branch of the highest tree, begins shaking its branches, and crying out. He comes down, sits in Bhagavan's lap and embraces him. He seems to be chuckling while evidently saying something to Bhagavan. There are nearly a hundred monkeys assembled and in their joy and excitement they too climb the trees and jump about making all kinds of racket. While Bhagavan strokes Hobbler's head, a monkey approaches submissively and kneels before them. Bhagavan explains this curious sequence of events to the bewildered devotees.

BHAGAVAN: Don't you see? Hobbler has won the throne! This confirms it. This is Hobbler's predecessor in office. He's coming to pay homage to Hobbler. *(Then indicating the monkeys gathered nearby)* You see these monkeys sitting on the wall, that one's the queen, the first lady of the kingdom. Over there are the second and third, the junior queens. *(Then indicating another)* That's the chief of his army sitting there and those are his soldiers!

Hobbler's face beams with pride

BHAGAVAN: *(Gazing affectionately towards him)* The lame boy has become a king today and has come to announce his victory. Give him some food! This is cause for celebration!

Devotees prepare a leaf of iddies leftover from breakfast and put it before the Hobbler in honour of his kingship. But even though Bhagavan tries to coax him, Hobbler will not touch the food. Instead he leads the devotee offering the food to the three females. Bhagavan interprets these actions for the devotees...

BHAGAVAN: These three females were the queens of the former monkey-king, the one who lost the title to Hobbler. According to their custom, they are now Hobbler's queens and should sit and eat with him.

Hobbler sits and shares food with his wives while Bhagavan explains to devotees the meaning of the events of the preceding day...

BHAGAVAN: While we were on *giri pradhakshina* Hobbler came with his retinue to have his coronation ceremony in my presence. He was disappointed when he found that we were not here and directed his anger at the plants and trees. *(Then looking towards the Hobbler)* See this little one! Once he was rejected and left for dead, unable even to walk. Now he has grown up to be the sovereign Lord of his clan!* ▲



* Hobbler later sired six offspring, two by each of his three queens.

Veda Parayanam

EDUARDO LINDER

The Vedas are considered the highest revelation and authority in Hinduism. Orthodox philosophical systems and religious authorities in India acknowledge their absolute truth and validity for all time, and revere them as the ultimate authority in any controversy. No human source can be attributed to them and they are considered to be of divine origin, revealed to the *rishis* of ancient times. The Vedas were a strictly oral tradition and among pundits today it is Brahma Rishi Vyasa who is considered to be the 'compiler' of the four extant texts (*Rig, Yajur, Sama* and *Atharvana*). For thousands of years the four were chanted solely without being written down. The term *sruti* (meaning 'what is heard') is used to refer to these holy texts which ultimately communicate the nature of Absolute Truth in the metaphysical sphere. Sound emanates as 'the Word' (*nama*) and can be said to precede *rupa* (form). The beginning of the Gospel of St. John states this truth in a similar manner.

Eduardo Linder has been a resident of Ramanasramam for 14 years and is a devoted listener of Vedic chanting.

The vibration which is generated by the holy sounds is spiritual in nature and counters the dark forces of inert matter in an effort to uplift creation. The universal mantra AUM, now known throughout the world, is the essential spiritual vibration of the universe. Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas, is said to have been revealed and it is claimed that the sounds that form its 50 letters and perfect grammar are unique. Even Western philologists study it as a great revelation in the course of human history.

There is a school of research today which refutes the notion that Sanskrit originated in Central Asia or the Caucasus and was transported to India during the 'Aryan invasion'. This idea was propounded in the late nineteenth century by Western philologists, some of whom had never visited India. It is currently argued that Sanskrit was indigenous and that its texts go back several thousand years. European languages quite possibly developed from Sanskrit and not the reverse.

A great many hymns, ceremonies and philosophical matters are contained in the Vedas, the principal sections of each Veda being *Samhita* (hymns), *Brahmanas* (ceremonies), and *Aranyakas* (philosophical treatises). The Upanishads are usually contained in the last section, known as 'forest dialogues,' since they were imparted by rishis mostly living in forest ashrams.

The highest philosophical thought in India is revealed in the Upanishads of which 108 are extant today. Of these 10 major Upanishads are widely studied and known. Sri Sankara's commentaries on these texts from the eight century A.D. are available to scholars and are considered one of the pillars of the last school of philosophy to emerge, i.e. Advaita Vedanta. The portion of the Vedas referring to 'knowledge' is called *jnana kanda*, while the portion that deals with rituals and sacrifices is termed *karma kanda*. It is generally agreed that a spiritual seeker must first purify himself through a selfless process of karma, according to his dharma and that he can only then pass on to *jnana kanda*.

Today the Rig and Yajur Vedas are the most commonly known and chanted, followed by the Sama Veda. The Atharvana Veda is slowly disappearing. The Rig Veda is the 'root' Veda and contains many hymns

to various gods of the Hindu pantheon including Indra, Rudra, Saraswati, Vishnu, etc. The other Vedas contain many mantras from the Rig Veda.

The Yajur Veda has two well-known derivatives that are chanted today, the Shukla and the Krishna (White and Black), dealing mostly with rituals. At all Siva temples where Vedic ritual is performed, parts of the Veda known as *chamakam*, *namakam*, *rudram*, etc. are used in pujas. Participants often know these sections by heart. The Krishna Yajur Veda consists of 44 *prashna* (chapters) which in turn are divided into 7 *kandas* (major divisions) in the *Samhita*, 28 in the *Brahmana*, divided into 3 *ashtakas* (including 3 *prashnas* called *katakam*) and 10 in the *Aranyaka*. In this last section the final 4 chapters are Upanishads.

The chanting style of the Sama Veda is very melodious and is reminiscent of the Gregorian chant in the Christian monastic tradition.

To this day the Vedas are passed down from generation to generation, from a Brahmin teacher to a male Brahmin student in a continuous lineage from its originators, the great Brahma Rishis. In fact a young boy when initiated during the *upayanam* or 'thread' ceremony is given his *gotra*, or lineage, which links him to the great ancient sages like Vashista and Viswamitra. The Gayatri mantra is imparted at this time and should be repeated 108 times daily during the *sandya* (junctures of the day)— sunrise, noon and sunset. This mantra appears in all four Vedas and was considered to be very secret. In fact, traditionally the Vedas were not to be heard by non-Brahmins. Formerly this was strictly observed and the purity of the tradition was maintained but during the twentieth century, especially after independence from Britain, when Hindu social laws and customs changed considerably, secrecy was no longer maintained to such an extent.

The school where a young boy is sent, the Veda Patasala, is run even today on the ancient system of *gurukula*, where the boy is given over to the guru by his parents for all further study. It is a rigorous course of training, where 7 year old boys (some may start younger) start their lessons at 5 a.m., with chanting lasting for at least 8 hours a day. No doubt a prodigious memory is required. Some outstanding students can memorize an entire page within two or three readings.

The course takes around 7 to 8 years for a normal student, but some take much longer and some drop out mid-way and take up other work, or practice as priests in small temples.

On completion of his studies a student is qualified to be called a Veda-Vit, or Yajur-Vedi. No other subjects are usually taught at this stage, since a great deal of attention is required for accurately memorizing and correctly chanting the Vedas. The prescribed religious observances are carried on by all students together with their course work in the school day.

Teaching techniques differ according to the tradition of the teacher. The following remarks will shed some light on the process. First, of course, the alphabet must be learned and here there is a difference between South and North India. In the South *grantha* script is used, while in the North, it is the *devanagari*, the usual Sanskrit alphabet. The Brahmanas are usually learned first since these mantras are simpler and easier for the student to grasp. The teacher recites one *vakya* (line) and the student repeats it twice. For a normal student 10 to 30 lines may be given, but for an outstanding student up to 500 lines. This will continue for 9 days, during which a student is expected to repeat the lesson at least 100 times per day. Once the Samhitas are taken up, they are taught 50 *padas* (words) at a time. This is called a *panchashati*. There are 2195 *panchashatis* in the 7 *kandas* of the Samhita of the Krishna Yajur Veda. There is no doubt that very strong samskaras play an important part concerning the innate ability of the student. At the level of *ghanam* (the most advanced chant form), one can almost be assured that samskaras from a previous life are at work, since this very exacting mode of chanting cannot be taken up by most students.

At Ramanasramam the Krishna Yajur Veda was chanted twice a day when Bhagavan was in the body. This tradition is carried on at his Samadhi to this day. Before the Veda Patasala was founded at Ramanasramam, pundits from town would come to chant in front of Bhagavan and all accounts of his life mention that at the 5 p.m. session of the Veda Parayanam Bhagavan would often sit rock-like and the silence and grace that were present would be apparent to even casual visitors. He commented that listening to the Vedas had a calming

effect on the mind, which is a pre-condition for any meditation practice, as well as *atma-vichara*, his most well-known method.

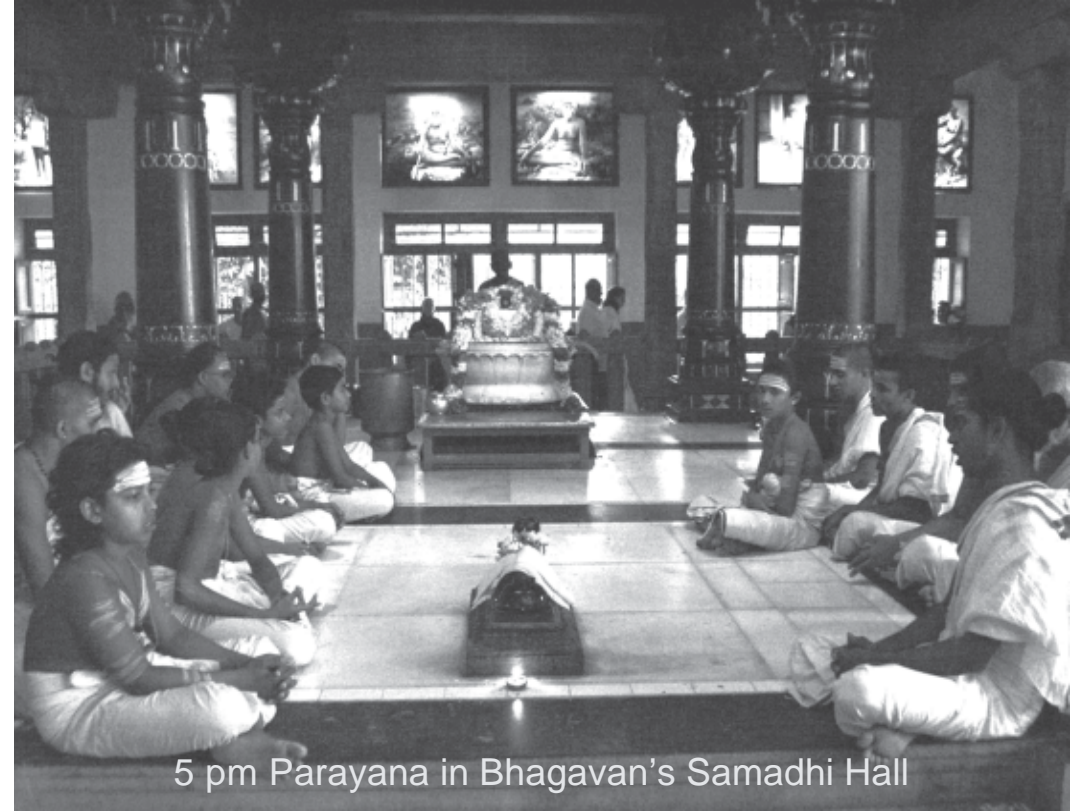
Today at Ramanasramam, the Veda Patasala has around 20 students and slowly the 'career' of being a pundit is regaining its former respect and status. About a hundred years ago, due to the economic conditions of the times, Brahmins had to abandon their dharma as pundits and priests and engage in worldly pursuits, usually in posts as civil servants with the British administration. They could not make a living from the traditional way of life and slowly the tradition degenerated and fewer boys were brought into a formal study of the Vedas. The situation has currently reversed and today pundits can earn a very reasonable income, as they are invited to all types of ceremonies throughout the country, including household rituals and marriage functions. Of course, many Brahmins have now totally abandoned their links with the Vedas as a modern education in English is the standard of success in modern Indian society. Many boys are not taught the basic texts and have no knowledge of Sanskrit or religious duties, but one still sees a few modern young men in western dress chanting happily in front of Bhagavan's Samadhi, no doubt due to the influence of their parents in fostering a more 'religious' and traditional way of life.

When fully qualified, a student will either continue studying rituals and become a priest, or follow further study and eventually become a pundit. This latter tradition involves chanting in more complicated modes and each additional level may take two or three years longer, depending on the ability of the student. Pundits are usually invited to special religious events at large temples or to important feasts and festivals. In Tiruvannamalai at *Arunachaleswarar Kovil*, the main Siva temple, Veda Parayanam in the *kramam* mode of the Krishna Yajur Veda is chanted for 9 days by 25 pundits during the 10 day Kartigai Deepam festival. Sama and Rig Vedas are also chanted by smaller groups. In 1995 the entire Samhita in the *ghanam* mode was chanted in Ramanasramam (New Hall) by an eminent Vedic scholar, lasting 32 days, eight hours per day. In recent years, groups of 4 to 6 pundits are occasionally invited for special parayanam, usually lasting 4 to 6 days, with some sessions lasting 2 to 3 hours, for a total of 6 hours per day.

After the normal chanting called *padam* and *moolam*, the next level is termed *kramam*, which is still not too complicated and most good students master it. The last two modes called *jattai* and *ghanam* are particularly difficult. The last mode is achieved by very few pundits. They are called *ghanapatins*. The rules for the more complex types of chanting are given in two texts not within the Vedas, called *Pratasakra* and *Uyasa Siksha*. A more detailed explanation of a mantra in different modes will be given later.

A fully qualified *ghanapatin* may continue to study *Vedanga*, i.e. the limbs of the Veda. This includes the following six disciplines: *Siksa* (Phonetics); *Nirukta* (Lexicon and Etymology); *Kalpa* (Rituals); *Lakshanam* (Grammar); *Jyothisha* (Astrology and Astronomy); and *Chandas* (Prosody or versification). There are different levels and specializations in all these disciplines, and major Mutts, such as Sringeri and Kanchipuram, carry out tests and give certification that a certain level of knowledge and proficiency has been achieved. Eventually a highly trained and qualified pundit becomes a well-known teacher in his own right and is recognized throughout India for his erudition.

To give an idea of the level that may be reached, one can point to Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni, Bhagavan's foremost disciple in the Vedic tradition. At the age of about eight, Ganapati Muni started uttering Sanskrit poetry spontaneously and eventually was given the title of *Kavyakanta*, which means 'one who has poetry flowing from his throat', i.e. an extempore poet. He was also a *chaturvedi* meaning he knew all four Vedas and it was later remarked by Bhagavan that Ganapati Muni's memory was such that he had almost 'total recall' of all events that had occurred in the Ashram. Even at this level of erudition, Ganapati Muni recognized that Bhagavan was not only a Rishi, but a 'great Rishi', i.e. a Maharshi and changed his name to 'Ramana Maharshi' (he was previously known as Brahmana Swami). Bhagavan had never studied Sanskrit, yet he could utter perfect poetic compositions, with such deep and terse meaning that they were considered by Kavyakanta to be comparable to the Upanishads. Throughout the rest of his life Bhagavan was consulted by great pundits from all over India, who went away convinced that Bhagavan was indeed a Maha Rishi.



5 pm Parayana in Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall

Pundits who pass their entire lives chanting the Vedas are going through a process of purification and some of them report that even in their sleep the holy utterances carry on. The audiences and sponsors of the *yagnas* and other parayanams are also being purified and accumulate merit, but one can also say that the chanting benefits the entire world. One interesting fact worth mentioning is that in the *purnahuti* at the end of a *homa*, the pundit symbolically surrenders his ego into the sacred fire.

In Sri Adi Sankara's *Vivekachudamani* it is stated that it is difficult to obtain a human birth, more difficult to be born a Brahmin, more difficult still to walk the path of Vaidika Dharma in which the Vedas are chanted, but still more difficult to become a perfect scholar. Yet it is pointed out that all of this is still not enough 'to attain wisdom born of

experience of the Self', which is what Bhagavan intimately knew and for which it is not necessary to follow the path described above.

One comment worth quoting with respect to the reason for the more complex types of chanting was made by the late Shankaracharya of Kancheepuram Mutt, Sri Chandrashekara Saraswati, who was recognized throughout India as a saint and sage:

“Our forefathers devised a number of methods to preserve the unwritten Vedas in their original form, to safeguard their tonal and verbal purity. They laid down rules to make sure that not a syllable was changed in chanting...[and] they insured that the full benefits were derived from intoning the mantras.

“When we listen to the ghanapatin chant the ghanam we notice he intones a few words of the mantra in different ways, back and forth. It is most delightful to the ear. Similiarly, in other methods of chanting like *krama*, *jata*, *moola*, and so on, the intonation is nothing less than stately, indeed divine.”¹

As a small example of the various modes of chanting, a simple mantra is transliterated below, giving the principal forms that are taught and chanted:

Nama somaya cha (*moolam*)

Nama somaya somaya cha (*kramam*)

Nama somaya somaya namo, nama somaya (*jattai*)

Nama somaya somaya namo, nama somaya cha-cha somaya namo, nama somaya cha (*ghanam*)

In *jattai* two words are joined in the chanting and each word is repeated six times, while in *ghanam* three words are joined together and each word is repeated thirteen times. A rough guide to the sequence in which *ghanam* is chanted is given below:

1-2-2- 1-1-2-3-3-2-1-1-2-3-2-3-3-2-2-3-4-4-3-2-2-3-4-3-4-4-3-3-4-5-5-4-3-3-4-5.

There are, of course, different tones, lengths of syllables chanted, emphasis of particular sounds and volumes uttered, ranging from faint whispers to great bellowing sounds which literally “shake the walls.” When the chanting alternates between two groups, it is termed *charchai*. Ghanam can only be chanted for the Samhita portion of the Vedas. A very interesting and advanced technique of chanting is called *varna kramam* known only to highly qualified *ghanapatins*. Even though it sounds rather simple, it is very difficult as each word in the Vedas is slowly analysed for its deeper significance, starting from where in the body the sound originates, how it travels up through the throat and finally how the tongue is positioned to utter the holy sound. The purpose is to maintain the purity of the chanting and it is possible to ascertain very precisely whether a pundit is chanting a specific pada correctly or not. Some eminent pundits know *varna kramam* for every single word in the Vedas.

This description does not of course communicate the experience of listening intently to the Vedas chanted directly, where often a state of immense peace is felt by the listener, highlighting the divine origin of these great ancient texts. Bhagavan stated that merely listening to the Vedas, even without understanding them, was sufficient to purify listeners and to alter their state of consciousness to a deeper level within themselves. ▲

¹ *Hindu Dharma*, p. 156, Published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.



Closing a Circle in Time

Mouni Sadhu,
My Path to Bhagavan

ANDREW BUKRABA

*Nothing happens by mere chance.
Nothing happens that is meaningless.*

After running away from a Poland afflicted by Communism, I spent two years in England. Finally I was allowed to settle in the free world. My choice was Australia, but everything there was so different; the mentality, the food, climate and style of life. In the beginning communication was also a problem as I had never studied English in depth. All my skills in this language were developed by attending a one month course in London and then one month in Melbourne.

But a few words of promise from a small and mysterious book, *Man's Past, Present and Future* given me by my aunt, still echoed in

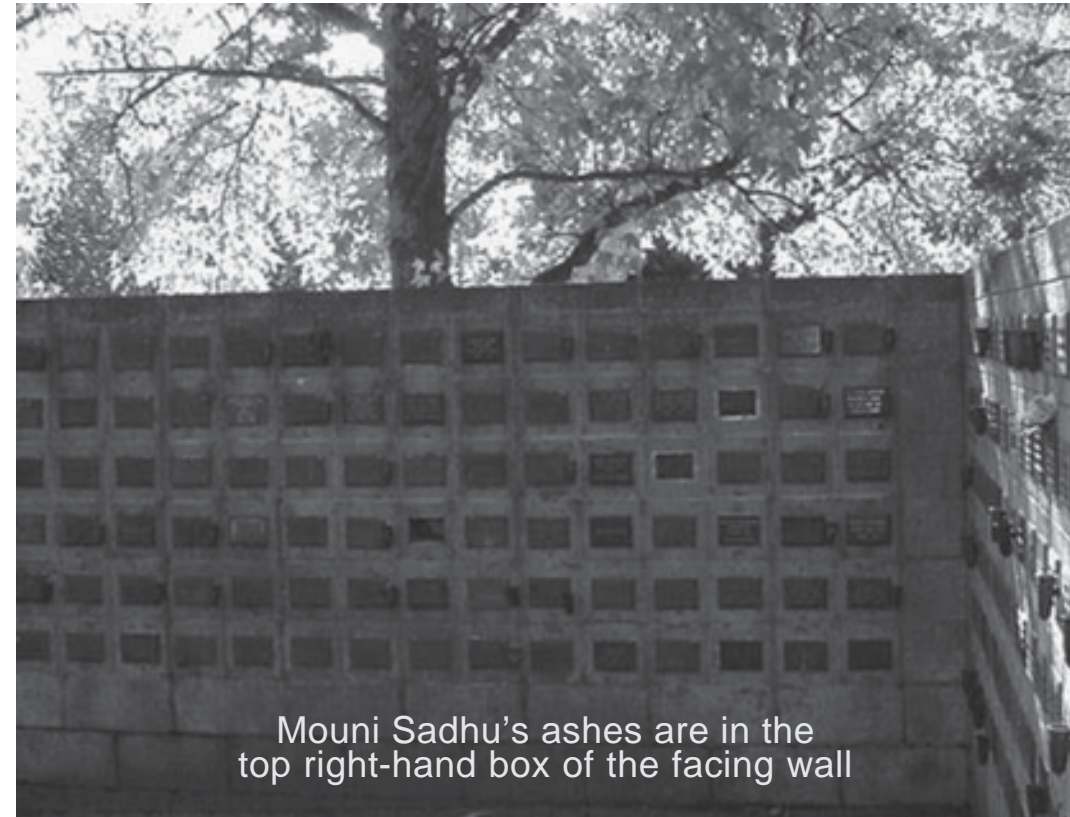
Andrew Bukraba was born in Lithuania. After higher studies in Poland he fled communist Eastern Europe and eventually arrived in Australia where as a householder he studied Advaita Vedanta with Ramakrishna and Chinmaya Missions. He spent seven years at the ashram of Mata Amritanandamayi before settling at Arunachala in 2001.

my consciousness: *Those who sincerely desire to grow in spirit will be found at the right time, called and guided.....No single soul will be left unnoticed....* I wanted nothing else! That was why I had left my country, and a promising career. I wanted only to find the 'secret of secrets', the source of unending happiness. Now I had no country of my own, no permanent dwelling. I become Mr. Nobody, a tiny particle of dust on the road to Freedom. But strangely I felt that the entire Universe had become my home! Wasn't I a child of The Oneness? Still I was patiently awaiting that call, feeling all the while the guiding protection of an unknown Master.

My time was filled with struggling to make a living in this new and somewhat hostile world of Western business. One Saturday afternoon when driving home from work I passed a sign that said, 'Garage Sale'. During the past I'd seen signs like this now and then, however this time some irresistible power persuaded me to stop and see what was on sale. A middle-aged, typical Australian 'mate' from the hippie generation of the 60's, was selling his humble bachelor's belongings intending to try his luck in prospecting for gold in the wilderness of the vast Australian continent. Finding nothing of any use to me I started to search through a few cartons of books spread all over the lawn. Despite the fact that until then I'd never read a whole book in English, for some reason I bought three books which drew my attention: *Initiations* by Paul Sédir (translated by Mouni Sadhu), *Concentration*, and *In Days of Great Peace* both by Mouni Sadhu himself.

And it happened! With the help of a dictionary, I read the entire text of *Initiations* word by word, sentence by sentence. This book made such an impact on my mind, that thereafter I felt as if I was living in a dream. So...great Masters *did exist*!! They are not just an illusion created by exuberant imaginations! *They are* and what is more they are watching the whole of humanity, ever ready to pick up ripe souls and to guide them to Freedom and Immortality.

I immediately realized that the first step towards conquering my restless mind was to develop concentration. So, the next book by Mouni Sadhu, *Concentration: A Guide to Mental Mastery* I started with great interest and determination. Then I came to his statement: 'If you, dear



Mouni Sadhu's ashes are in the top right-hand box of the facing wall

reader, have any habits like drinking or smoking and can't control them then reading this book further is of no use as you are a slave of your habits and can't even dream about controlling your mind. So please close it now and pass it on to your best friend!' This was my fortieth birthday and I was a chain smoker. Without much deliberation I decided to give up this harmful habit immediately, although I had been a smoker for over twenty years. I wanted to read this book to its end, sensing that in it was a key to The Path. I was determined that no obstacle would stop me. The desire to be master of myself was so strong that giving up cigarettes in one day from 80 to zero came effortlessly without any of those side-effects of which my doctor had warned me.

I started practising the prescribed exercises wondering where I would find a living link to The Path. Then I discovered that Mouni Sadhu in

his *Preface to Initiations* stated that the translation was made in Melbourne, Australia. I thought there might be a chance that he was still around and started a systematic investigation.

Unfortunately I had missed Mouni Sadhu by eleven years. But in my search I discovered his grave in Springvale cemetery. This cemetery is as beautiful as any world class botanical garden. The vast area is organized in sectors of different faiths, and all sorts of decorative trees and shrubs grow on the banks of artificially made creeks and waterfalls. A common 'economy' section has stone walls two metres high, with 4 - 5 rows of niches for the ashes of cremated people. Mouni Sadhu was cremated in 1970.

It was here that I came upon a bronze plate that had inscribed on it: 'Mouni Sadhu greatly missed by all his friends', along with his age, and the exact date of his samadhi (which I do not remember now). Checking with the Cemetery Administration I found that here too he was registered under the name of Mouni Sadhu. The address of his last residence also did not provided any link to his original name.

It was probably Mr. Gangopadhyaya, the president of the Ramakrishna Mission, Australia, who directed me to Ms. Vera Rundus, a Czech, well known as a *hatha yoga* teacher from a suburb of Melbourne called Brighton. I was directed to her as she had once been associated with Mouni Sadhu. So on a rainy afternoon we met in her school of yoga. One more person knowing the departed Sadhu was also there. He was an old, retired high school teacher. Our meeting formally scheduled for half an hour turned into a *satsang* that lasted over four hours.

We talked about The Path. What did I find out?

I learned that Mouni Sadhu was a Russian. This is also supported by the number of books in Russian, which he quotes in the bibliographies of his books. Mouni Sadhu completed his education in France. There he learned about Sri Ramana Maharshi from Paul Brunton's *Search in Secret India*, given to him in a park by a stranger. Later as an engineer, a specialist in building power stations and high voltage lines, Mouni Sadhu worked in Brazil where he formed a group of seekers following the Maharshi's teachings. There he also wrote a

small book *The Direct Path* which was translated into Portuguese, printed and which he later personally offered at the Feet of Bhagavan. On perusing it page by page, Bhagavan noticed a quotation from Adi Sankara's *Vivekachudamani*, and asked Mouni through the translator to add a footnote regarding this source, in the next edition. It was at some point after World War II that Mouni Sadhu migrated to Australia and settled in Melbourne, from where he made his only trip to the abode of the Great Rishi. Everyone who was associated with Mouni Sadhu believed that during this short visit, being a ripe soul, he successfully completed his life long sadhana in Bhagavan's Presence.

Ms. Vera Rundus also informed me that in Melbourne Mouni Sadhu formed a group of Ramana Maharshi's devotees called the 'Arunachala Group'. It was located in the suburb of Burwood. This information is also found in a small printed note in one of the books (*Theurgy* by Mouni Sadhu) which I bought on a later occasion. While living in Melbourne and continuing to work with the Electricity Commission of Victoria, Mouni Sadhu also helped by conducting classes on meditation and spiritual unfolding in a few yoga schools.

Both Ms. Vera and the old teacher told me that between Mouni Sadhu and Paul Brunton there developed some dissonance. Near the end of his life Paul Brunton emphasised to his students that they practice *guru bhava* towards him. This led to some confusion in the minds of his readers and was met with strong disapproval from Mouni Sadhu. There was in fact a brief written correspondence between the two regarding this matter, after which Mouni Sadhu scrupulously refrained from making any further comments about the former.

Failing health made the last years a bit of a struggle for Mouni Sadhu. He retired and committed himself to putting together his vast notes about The Path and the methods of *sadhana*. I was told that he passed away at the toilet. His personal attendant, a Russian nurse named Natasha, upon hearing a sudden sound, tried to enter the toilet but Mouni Sadhu said firmly, *No need to help! It's time for me to go*. At the time of his sudden death, probably from cardiac arrest, all his notes together with the almost finished manuscript of a book about the 'influence of diet and health on a Quest', were with his attendant,

Natasha. In spite of persistent attempts I was not able to locate her, as over ten years had passed since his *samadhi*.

Vera Rundus also told me that after Bhagavan's *maha samadhi* devotees from Brazil frequently visited Mouni Sadhu, as he was for them a guide and living link with their Guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi. On one occasion Mouni Sadhu crashed his VW van while driving back from the local shop where he had gone to get something that had been forgotten for a picnic with the Brazilians. The van rolling down the serpentine road on the slopes of the Dandenongs in the East neighbourhood of Melbourne, hit a eucalyptus tree. The impact threw Mouni Sadhu out of the cabin. A doctor present during this accident declared him dead. The test with a mirror held close to his mouth did not show even the slightest sign of breathing. His heart beat had stopped. Twenty minutes passed. The fellow Brazilians started to chant some Sanskrit *slokas*. Suddenly Mouni Sadhu sat up and as if nothing had happened said: "The van is OK. It is driveable. Let us move on...."

A few years later I was in a crash myself. Around the curve of a suburban street I met another driver cutting the bend too sharply. We crashed head on as he was driving as fast and as carelessly as I was. The impact was tremendous. Our individual speeds of 70 km/h added up to 140. My huge Toyota Crown Station Wagon flew into the air landing on its side some seven metres further on. Wrenched off the car, its right guard propelled away making a terrifying humming sound. Fortunately, no people were around to be decapitated. After the sounds and movements of the collided vehicles had stopped, I found myself in a state of shock kneeling on the asphalt and sweeping the glass and metal debris from the road with my bare hands. Suddenly someone with a very gentle voice said from behind me: "Nothing really bad happened! We both are still alive. There is no need to worry." Then he touched my back..... and a charge of lightning passed through my body. I was stunned. Turning back I saw an old Greek man looking at me with a friendly smile. "Who are you?" I asked. For some time he kept smiling, looking at me with his warm and soft eyes. After a while he answered: "It doesn't matter who I am. You better try to find out who *you* are!!!"



'Ramana Maharshi's *atma vichara* !!!' were the magic words that flashed in my mind. I wondered if I had been dreaming. But no, he had just appeared on The Path as a sign on my 'Road'. Much later, I was to write to this man and I found out that he was a disciple of Mouni Sadhu! I also learnt that just to make a living, he had been running a fish-and-chips shop in Huntingdale twice a week. After the accident we never talked or met. A year or so later I noticed his shop nicely renovated and hanging on the window was the sign: 'For Sale'. So he too had merged in Ramana-Arunachala.

I continued with my business alongside my sadhana on The Path. For all the sixteen years of my stay in Australia I went at least once a week to 'Necropolis' to meditate at Mouni Sadhu's grave. At every Easter, Christmas, Guru Purnima or Onam I burned incense and offered him my prayers. He was guiding me. This was always evident. In

times of difficulty and confusion he even entered my dreams and supported me with his advice. With time my sadhana intensified to the point where disillusionment with mundane life drove me into leaving Australia. Renouncing worldly life, I became an inmate of a well known Math in Kerala and dedicated myself to work in their newly started charitable hospital in Cochin. Impelled by circumstances, I took my first long break and left for a twenty-one day retreat to Tiruvannamalai. Is it not strange? So many years of dreaming about it, such long diversions... and now I am bathing in The Presence, listening attentively to His words of wisdom and truth emerging from a thundering silence. Finally my unforgettable teacher Mouni Sadhu led me to The Master! So lucky am I!

I soon learnt that the Ashram was aware of the fact that Mouni Sadhu's real name was M. Sudonski. But it is perhaps widely and wrongly believed that he was Polish. This error regarding his nationality is understandable since Polish and Russian names have strong similarities. In Russian (Cyrillic) his name would be spelt as *Cygoickèé*, which is usually transliterated into English as Sudonsky (or Sudonski). The initial 'M' is quite probably (Michail) *Mèòàèè*, which is the Russian equivalent of Michael.

I hear some people say that there is no living Guru at Ramanasramam. They are very, very wrong! Bhagavan Sri Ramana is now unlimitedly alive and even more alive than ever! (I may briefly mention here that, Ramana Maharishi told me this Himself in a vivid dream). Now that Bhagavan has drawn me to Arunachala, I experience His palpable Presence with every cell of my body, with every breath.

Is all of this mere coincidence? The first inmate of Sri Ramanasramam, with whom I spoke, on seeing me borrowing from the ashram library a copy of Mouni Sadhu's translation of Sédir's *Initiations*, asked me if I happened to know anything about the name and life of this most mysterious disciple of Ramana Maharshi. Such was the beginning of this article.

The huge circle in time is closing now! ▲

Sri Maharshi: The Master Storyteller

M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

Saints and sages are fond of telling stories. One could call the tales story-shaped spirituality. Many reasons can be cited for this tendency to tell stories. The basic one is to avoid abstractions, or rather to make abstract ideas concrete. By giving an important teaching flesh and blood, through characters and incidents, the idea becomes humanized though not in the sense humanists use it, but in the sense that the 'lessons' are given human contexts. The aspirant [of whatever path] thus empathizes and may draw the necessary lesson.

For children "Once upon a time . . ." is enough to make them forget all time. Most of us are children in the field of inner quest, Perhaps children who, having lost their innocence, want to recapture and relive it. Hence the sages' strategy of telling stories.

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Ramana Maharshi is very much one of these superb entrancing storytellers. His own life is a story: almost incredible in its beginnings, marvellous in its unobtrusive manifestation and awe-inspiring in its temporal close. His uniquely creative mind intoxicated everyone with his narratives.

Stories are usually a blending of fact and fiction. But when an Incarnate Divine Being tells them, the telling is different. The tenets embodied in such stories are truths; neither mere facts nor vacuous fantasies they reflect and almost always evoke deep emotions. While ordinary narrators *tell*, sages *show*; registering the essence of their stories in their own consciousness. Maharshi could not, we have been told, tell his stories without himself getting deeply moved. For instance, Bhagavan has been depicted thus : “Describing Gautama’s joy at Goddess Parvati’s coming to his Ashram, it is said he could not go on, for tears filled his eyes and emotion choked his voice.”¹

Bhagavan understood the oddity of an imperturbable *jnani* such as himself becoming emotional. He explained: “I don’t know how people who perform *Hari katha* and explain such passages to audiences manage to do it without breaking down before starting their work.”² Telling stories without the teller breaking down! The situation seems odd; especially when a person like Bhagavan himself is subject to emotions.

Here is the difference, perhaps, between Bhagavan telling a story and a *Bhagavathar* telling it. When Suri Nagamma said that telling the story of *Tara Vilasam* he “appears to have transformed himself into Tara,” Bhagavan was said to have remarked, “What to do? I identify myself with whosoever is before me, I have no separate identity. I am universal.”³ In short, the ego is left intact in an ordinary narrator; of course, it responds but impersonally, with an ephemeral emotion evoked by the story. Once the context is removed, the emotion dries up. In a *jnani* the sensibility of emotion needs neither context nor pretext. That susceptibility is, simply, consciousness that is all pervasive and free from the slightest taint of ego.

¹ *Spiritual Stories as Told by Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam, 1986, p.1.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

This leads us to uncover another dimension of this fascinating subject of sages telling stories. Only sages can tell a story with total emotional engagement yet remain detached. That is, the sage remains insulated from the temporal nature in which all stories are formed. A *jnani* is detached but delightedly so, his/her detachment comes from delight in the fact that in the cosmic system all our responses (emotional or cerebral) are responses to the *drama* of life, to the *lila*, the play of the Lord or Nature (whichever one prefers). *Sympathetic uninvolvement* would, perhaps, describe this.

There are many contexts in Bhagavan’s own story, which illustrate this glorious detachment, superhuman, as it appears to us, in its endurance. Take the most significant: the ‘last’ phase of Maharshi’s life. The narrative of this phase harrows us with fear and wonder. How could or why should Bhagavan suffer? With his adamant *samkalpa*, it is, we believe, possible to put an end to suffering in no time. *Prarabdha* he does not have; in his life there is nothing to explain why he should suffer as he did. Why did he go through this? On the physical level, Bhagavan’s experience of suffering is, for us, even in imagination, intolerable to contemplate. Tears well up, the heart is, as it were, rent asunder and we inwardly cry in anguish: ‘We can’t bear to tolerate this! How can this kind of thing befall one like Bhagavan?’

Thus, we take a leap from the truths of the stories he tells (even now, and even in English, *his narrating voice* come through!) to *his own story* which is the Truth sustaining all those truths. If his own life-story is read as a narrative, then it is as a parallel to the delight we get from the other stories he told which we quite often forget, extensions, live centres of consciousness, of his own life-story.

He told a story as — using today’s jargon — an *intertext*, the text being his life. Quite often we miss *this* text. Thus, our responses to *his* suffering can be exquisitely moving, deeply felt. Yet, in this case, there is hardly any line we can draw between the devotees who knew the essential Bhagavan and the medical doctors who tried all methods to cure his body. That is, the overpowering emotion of the devotees, at seeing Bhagavan suffer, required the further thrust that could transmute their suffering into *jnana*.

The stories Bhagavan told and the stories abounding in his own life are a testing ground for awareness in all its complexity. For instance, take the seemingly simple story of Bhagavan gently correcting an attendant who sought to prevent an American lady from stretching out her stiff legs towards him since doing so was ‘disrespectful to Bhagavan’. “It is disrespectful, is it?” said Bhagavan, “Then it is equally disrespectful for me to stretch my legs towards them. What you say applies to me as well,” said Bhagavan and promptly sat cross-legged in spite of rheumatism causing him considerable pain.⁴

The devotee did not see beyond the etiquette of how to sit in the presence of a sage. But Bhagavan linked the incident to the classic story of Avvaiyar who, when asked to, correctly responded: “Tell me on which side *Isvara* is not present. Shall I turn this side?”⁵ This story happened in the presence of Siva who thus taught Parvati that He is present everywhere. So too Bhagavan transfigured time and space declaring: “It is similar to that when people are asked not to stretch their legs towards *Swami*. Where is He not present?” Yes, indeed: where is Bhagavan not present? *In* the story, *outside* the story. In his story and the stories of all of us. But to link *his* story with *ours* is the greatest truth evident in the stories he told. And if all of us are potential *jnanis*, our stories can be viewed as negatives waiting to be processed into positives, in which their full potential will be manifested. Bhagavan is, in this sense, while gentle, explosively persuasive and, above all, irresistible—because *so* positive. ▲

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

Dreams That Changed My Life

SHOSHI SHOPHRONY

I was born in Hungary into a warm loving family. At the age of sixteen I lost my parents and my only sister in the Holocaust. I got married very young and in 1949 we immigrated to Israel. My husband and I built a new life, a new family.

I began my yoga training in 1968 with Swami Venkatesananda. I learned *hatha-yoga* (physical yogic exercise) and *raja-yoga*, the spiritual and philosophical part with meditation. I loved my teacher very much and he inspired me to become a yoga teacher myself. Indeed, I continue to teach yoga to this very day. In the course of time I left behind the physical part and I now teach only the spiritual yogic approach to life with meditation and self-enquiry in voluntary work.

On a beautiful afternoon of the summer of 1972 things began to happen: the very first dream, unexpected and surprising. I was lying on the hot sand at the seashore, near Tel Aviv, with my husband and our two sons. I fell asleep and dreamt that I was an Indian boy walking down the street with my Indian mother. I asked her to send me to school, but she explained that we were poor and we had no money for

⁴ *Spiritual Stories as Told by Ramana Maharshi*, p.102.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.103.

school. Suddenly my mother stopped and pointed at an old man walking in the opposite direction. She said to me: “Run my son, run to him, because he can teach you far more than you could ever learn in any school!” And so I did, I ran after the old man. Hearing my heavy breathing, the old man stopped, looked at me with a warm, loving glance and put his hand on my head.

That was it! I woke up to find myself with my family beside the sea. Everything seemed extremely strange, but as life’s rhythm is very fast, the swimming, going home, preparing and eating lunch, talking — all this caused the unusual dream to fade somewhat.

After lunch I had a siesta and immediately feel asleep. The whole dream appeared before me again, exactly as the first time, as if seeing the same film twice. Now I became tremendously impressed, but hardly understood what the dream was to reveal. That was the beginning.

From that day on I continued to dream about the loving old man without any idea who he might be, and so I referred to him as my old uncle. The man, my old uncle, came to my dreams teaching, advising, sometimes reassuring or protecting me.

He appeared and reappeared even more often around the days of the Yom-Kippur War (the October War in 1973 in Middle East), at which time our elder son, Reuven, served in the army. He had been in great danger together with others, and we worried very much about the fate of all. The news on the radio was often exciting and many times terrifying, but in my dreams my old uncle came comforting and consoling me lovingly. I felt that he protected not only me, but also our son, who was in danger. Indeed, how grateful we felt later on, on hearing the story of his escape ‘by chance’ from death.

Another prominent dream about my old uncle concerned my younger son, Rafy, who was 16 years old at that time. Rafy had asked for our permission to buy a small motorcycle — he had worked during the summer and earned the money for it. We didn’t approve, explaining how dangerous the roads were that is due to crazy drivers. We asked him to wait two more years, by which time, he would be old enough, by Israeli law, to drive our car. But Rafy has a very strong will, when his heart is set on something, he does not give up easily. We, the parents,

had a serious conflict with him. On the one hand, we knew very well how risky a motorcycle could be for a young boy, but on the other hand, we felt that forcing our veto on him was too great an interference. It was his life and not ours.

Once again my old uncle appeared in my dreams: the three of us, my uncle, Rafy – holding a motorcycle – and I stood in the middle of a very busy street in Tel-Aviv. My uncle asked me to wait at the side, while both of them rode the bike in the heavy traffic. They began driving awfully fast and dangerously; I watched them breathlessly, quite frightened. After a while they returned with some broad smiles and my loving uncle said to me: “I took your son into some very difficult situations. He is clever, skilful and cautious so you should allow him to buy the bike. Trust him and don’t worry.”

As I woke up the next morning I felt so happy and relieved of this difficult problem. I immediately turned to my husband, and said: “I approve, I approve of the bike”. He was the only one I told about my dreams. My enthusiasm convinced him to also give his blessing concerning the motorcycle. I sincerely believe the dream helped me to remain calm and quiet each time Rafy came home late. Thank God, he never had any accident.

Nearly two years had past since my first dream on the seashore. Then one day I visited a library in a yoga centre. I stood in front of a bookshelf and randomly pulled out a book. I opened it – and nearly fainted! My loving uncle’s beautiful face with a brilliant warm glance looked at me from a picture on the first page. The name at the bottom said ‘Sri Ramana Maharshi’. The book’s name was *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, by Arthur Osborne. I began to read it and discovered that the ‘uncle’ of my dreams is one of the greatest spiritual masters of the century!

I cannot express my feelings at the moment of this revelation. Suddenly a veil was lifted from my eyes and a new kind of perception opened up in me. I felt an enormous thirst to learn every word spoken by Bhagavan, to live through his teaching and to let it be made a part of me. Fortunately I never had any doubts, as I began to study the Direct Path; I knew inside my heart that I had found my way, the

purpose of my life. I became very grateful to Ramana Maharshi and to my fate.

Since then, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi has walked with me hand in hand in my day-to-day life showing the way to Self-realisation. His teaching is complete and perfect. His answers to devotees' questions are the most direct and effective, clearing away every doubt or misunderstanding. There is never an unnecessary word, nor is there ever a missing one.

I must confess that since I found my master and his teaching in many wonderful books, he has appeared very rarely in my dreams, but from the very first dream I was irresistibly drawn to him, feeling a magnetic love for Bhagavan. This is something beyond logic, how dreams, books and the radiant visage of my master, could so greatly enrich my soul. I have never experienced anything so enlightening; and my devotion to Bhagavan is the most important happening in my inner life. I love my family very deeply and I am grateful for my good fortune in having them with me. Even so, no one can compare this sort of love to the ties which bind me to Bhagavan. That love exists as if on another sphere, as if I live a double life, resonating deep inside me, as a constant background music. So deep inside that there is no distance and can never be any distance between Bhagavan and me. He is in my soul.

It seems to me that it is not correct to say that I came to Ramana Maharshi, but rather that he came to me, first my dreams as an old uncle, revealing himself to me only after two years.

What have I received from Him? Inner peace, even during the turmoil of life, and infinite love. What have I learned? A new angle of vision, understanding the truth of the underlying oneness and unity of existence and to know the Self, the core of Being of the whole universe.

I owe you all this, Bhagavan, thank you. ▲

What I Am is Not What I Think

STUART ROSE

If there are answers, there are two that can be given to the question 'What am I?' and these few words explore them as they relate to the spiritual path. The word 'what' is used as the impersonal and neuter of the word 'who'. Both words are likely to be equally inappropriate because what is referred to is beyond any form of identification.

The answers to the question 'What am I?' are that I am Brahman and I am a man, the latter being the sheath superimposing itself on the former – in so doing, a separation is thought to be created. The objective of my spiritual aspirations is to completely remove this sheath.

How can I do this as 'a man'? It is self-annihilation at which the mind balks vehemently. The Brahman that I am is unsullied by this conflict: the mind trying to escape from the engagement while

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irrevocably caught up in the fracas. There is no escape. In reality, there is no desire to escape because there is nowhere to escape to. Why should I escape? Why do I struggle?

What I am is an iota of beingness, awareness and blissfulness, inseparable from an unending sea of the same, and – although inseparable – it is particularly this blissfulness which I ardently desire to exist fully with; to experience it as a human person. How can I experience the bliss of Brahman? As a human person, I can only experience the dualities of happiness and sadness and the rest. Is there some way in which I can merge into Brahman while being a ‘man’? It seems possible that this could be the case because as a human person I am also Brahman. There must be a way to dissolve the sheath of ignorance in which I hide the fact of what I am in reality. The scriptures provide several routes. Bhagavan Ramana is my light and path here.

I feel strongly that the way by which I can achieve this clarity through the heart, is through love in all its guises, which I see as relative forms of the bliss of Brahman. I feel that by concentrating on this love I will reveal the fullness of bliss and I will reveal the obscured Brahman that I am. There seems to be no other way. This is not said in resignation, wishing there was another way, for the way of love leading to bliss is most joyous. It resolves all difficulties and guides me through all difficulties. It is the one constant that I can experience, live, and be aware of. Love is the heart of all activity, the heart of all things. Love is everywhere and always available.

What I am as a human being is limited to this body on this planet. What I am as Brahman is not limited to any physicality. It contains all physicalities. There is no restriction. It is a happiness which seems to be beyond the bounds of normal experience as a man or woman. This is why a spiritual practice is needed to help transcend the ‘man’ while being a ‘man’. Although this sounds impossible, at those exceptional times when the mind is completely silent, the sheath evaporates immediately. And there, enveloping all, the freedom of total bliss can be ‘seen’. So I do have the capacity of being a ‘man’ and being Brahman, the capacity of being the limited self and the unlimited Self, even with my eyes open and wide awake. The beingness is common to both.

Through detachment of the senses, through relinquishing all thought, love arises. Through unwrapping, unpacking and undoing the limited, the unlimited is realized.

Why is it then that I am not happy as a human being? Why do I find that being a ‘man’ is insufficiently satisfying, lacking in meaning? The Buddha had an answer: he said that all life is suffering. Human life is suffering even though there is relatively great joy during the experience – the senses, emotions and feelings. But all this is insufficient. In my heart I was sure that there was more to being human, although I did not know what it was for certain until I found beloved Ramana.

What is it that wants more than human life? Is it the human me, or something else? What could that something be? I have no wish to live forever as a human person but what is the experience of the existence that I call Brahman? It is described as Being-Consciousness-Bliss, the most perfect state, without beginning and without end. So I cannot *become* Brahman, I can only *be* Brahman. I *am* Brahman but I am ignorant of the fact. The wanting to become Brahman is evidence of my ignorance. How to shed this ignorance? How to become what I already am? Only by stopping activity of the mind and quietening it.

I am a human being, but all I do is not done *by* me but by Brahman which lives *in* me. Consciousness I have (although it is not especially mine). Existence I have and bliss I sometimes glimpse but I cannot yet shed the superimposition of being a ‘man’ in order to hold it fully. Can Brahman be found while I am a ‘man’? Can the sheath slip off while there is mind? It sounds contradictory. The body sheath *is* the mind. Again, Ramana is the beacon.

Why am I so dissatisfied with being a human person? As a ‘man’, I have scaled some of the heights of what being a ‘man’ entails, in achievements, through feelings and emotions, and found some of the lows, too. More is just a repeat of the same with variations. I want no more repetition. I want no more transience. I want no more changeability. I want permanence.

Am I like a spoiled child who cannot have what he wants? The scriptures and sages tell me that what I desire is attainable and that there are various rigours through which I can obtain the desired end.

These rigours are of no consequence compared to the rewards of the goal. Above all these rigours are nothing because Brahman *is* also the rigours. *Is* never absent. Never at a distance. Never in the future.

What holds me back? Is it fear of losing 'being a man'? The sheath of the mind is a tight net, illusory, seemingly impenetrable yet only a smoke-screen. I cannot understand why this smoke-screen exists. This non-understanding is mine, of a 'man', not of Brahman. If I am to understand, I must 'think' as Brahman, although I realize Brahman has no mind and so does not think. The problems of being a 'man' do not exist in Brahman, only in the sheath of 'being a man'. The problems exist *only* in the obscuring clouds. *Only* in the midst of confusion.

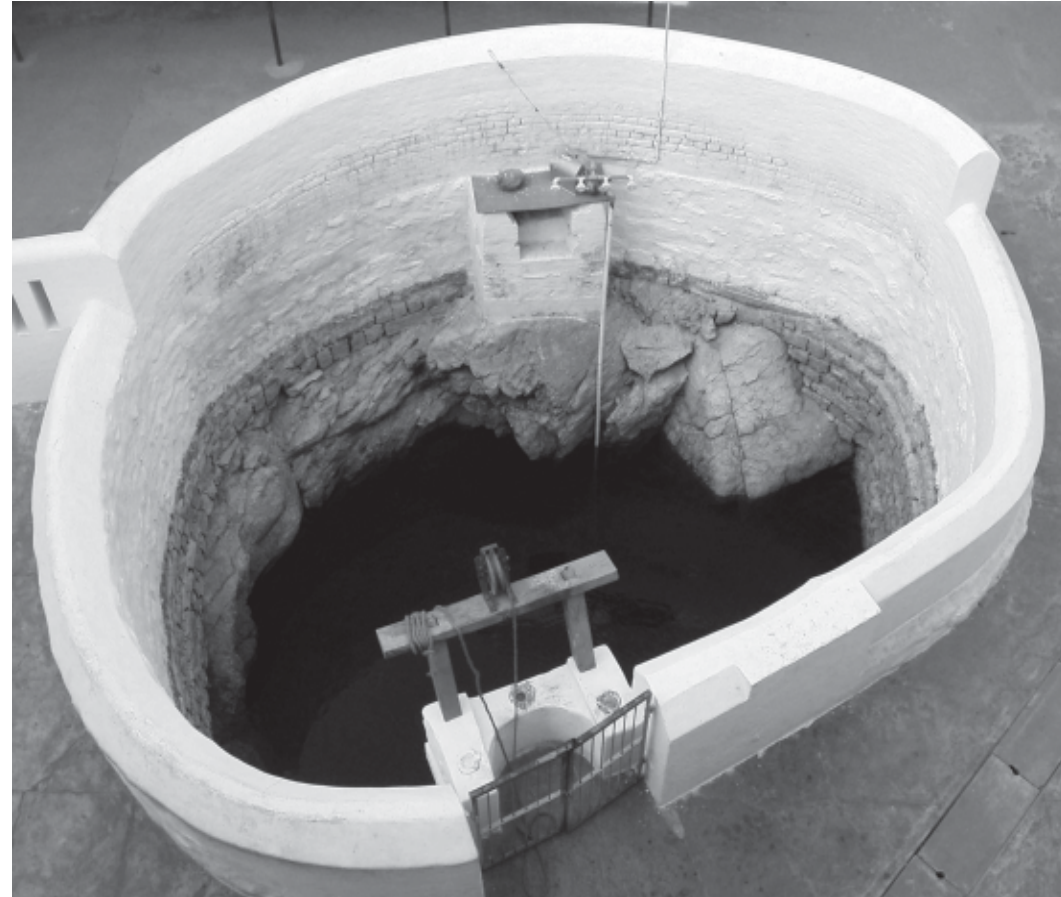
Give me a list of the things I need to give up in order to become Brahman and I will complete that list. But there is no list. I am already Brahman. The list is Brahman. The completion of the list is Brahman. The list is already completed. It is my ignorance which tells me, falsely, that the list is not yet completed.

O joy of being. O joy of awareness of being.

Perhaps the way to become the Brahman that I already am is to commit mental suicide, to enact the annihilation of the mind, ending the I. The only way to reveal Brahman is to remove I-ness completely, to mentally die as a 'man'. This suicide is drastic, courageous and extremely desperate. But why am I desperate to become the Brahman I already am? Because desperate measures are needed in order to find this new being which is not a new being, but the original being, the sheathless being. A beingness completely free and blissful.

I talk of suicide but I do not mean suicide of the body. Far from it. The body needs to run its natural course. I am only talking of suicide of the mind: annihilation of the *thought* of 'me'. Is that possible? What I am aiming for is not mindlessness but I-lessness. A state in which both the mind and the body live as normal but without I-attachment. There is individual life – or perception – only from the experiencer's point of view. There is no other point of view. Brahman has no point of view.

The existence that *I am* existed before I was born and will exist unchanged after I am gone. The fact that I lived makes no difference



to the existence that I am. There is nothing I can do that will change this. There is no change in Brahman whether this person exists or not, which means that even on death I will not return to Brahman because there is no object that returns and no object to return to. Nothing changes. All remains existence, consciousness, bliss absolute. This is the fundamental truth.

I am not lost because there is nowhere to be lost. If I feel I am lost it is only because I am lost in the delusion of mind. But the mind can be forgotten and bliss remains. Such bliss. Such freedom.

This does not mean that I can do whatever I like without regard for anything else although, in absolute terms, what I think I do makes

no difference. I need to follow the creed of being a good person by being peaceful, giving, helpful and accepting of help. There is nothing more that can be done if these are done. I am not greedy, full of hatred, or jealous and if I am any of these I attend to it. At a deep level, I am very content. Everything will be left behind when I die.

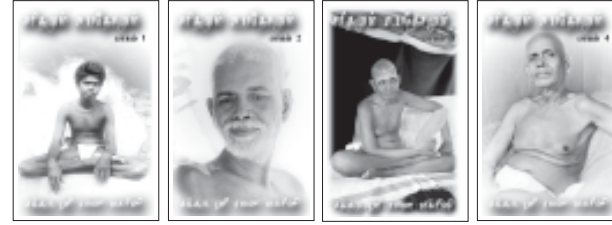
Is this life a bubble on the ocean, forming at my birth and bursting on my death? I can think like a 'person', be like a 'person', but this is just appearance, not the reality. The ocean has no size, it has no depth, it is all and everything.

Every person is the same ocean. There is no escape. Only the mind thinks it escapes but it does not. It just exists for a while before the bubble bursts. But in reality, there is no mind, no bubble, no ocean. There is only existence. It is aware and it is bliss. There is nothing more to say. Nothing more need be thought.

I exist before this mind and body existed and *I exist* after they have gone. This mind is the body and the universe and all it contains because without perception the universe does not exist. The universe, mind and body are inextricably linked, coming into existence and going out of existence together while Brahman remains unchanged.

When I lose my I-ness, the *thought of me*, all that is left is Brahman. Brahman alone exists. ▲

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ADVAITA PRIMER

The Heart of Vedanta

JOHN GRIMES

The heart of Vedanta is the nature of Brahman. The *Brahmasutras*, which string together the central concepts of the Upanishads, begin: *'Athato brahma jijnasa'*, 'Now, therefore, the enquiry into Brahman.'¹ This enquiry is not only intellectual, but is also practical. The trend of Advaitic thought revolves around the theme, 'Atman is Brahman'.²

Its approach is self-enquiry. Its concern is for individuals, here and now. Its goal is that which is eternally present, immediate, and accessible.

To reveal the Self is the ultimate quest of Advaita. This experience, Advaita claims, is within universal reach although the same method does not suit everyone. Thus it is not really theory that Advaita advocates, as much as experience. As S. Mayeda has said, 'Philosophy is not his (Sankara's) aim but is rather a vital weapon with which to

¹ *Brahmasutras* 1.1.1. Every sutra of the *Brahmasutras* is based upon an Upanishadic passage. The Upanishadic verse (*visayavakya*) upon which BS 1.1.1 is based comes from the *Brh. Up.* wherein Yajnavalkya tells Maitreyi "The Self ought to be known".

² *Mand Up.* 2.7. *Ayam atma brahma.*

fulfill this aim, which is to rescue people out of their transmigratory existence.³ Advaita means the truth of ‘non-duality’. The prefix ‘a’ equates with ‘non’ and applies not only to duality but also to ‘isms’ and ‘systems of thought’. The goal of Advaita is not so much to ‘know about’ the Self, as it is to ‘personally experience’ the Self.

Literally Advaita Vedanta means: ‘Non-duality (*a-dvaita*) is the end/essence/*anta* of wisdom (*veda*)’. Succinctly put, ‘The Absolute is Real; the world is non-real; the individual human being and the Absolute are not different’.⁴ (See v. 20 *brahma satyam, jagan mithya*). This insight is simple to state but devastating in its implications. What-is is ‘I am That’ or, to put it another way, ‘There is nothing which exists which is not That’.

The distinguishing features of Advaita Vedanta are:

i. The non-divergence of the individual human being (Atman) from the Absolute (Brahman); ii. The distinction between the absolute (*paramarthika*) and relative (*vyavaharika*) standpoints; iii. The doctrine of ignorance (*mayalavidya*); iv. The conception of liberation here and now (*jivanmukti*).

The quintessence of Advaita is its doctrine that the individual human being is not different from the Absolute. This essential identity is expressed in the four great sayings (*mahavakya*)⁵ of the Upanishads: ‘The Absolute is Consciousness,’⁶ ‘The Self is the Absolute,’⁷ ‘That thou art,’⁸ and ‘I am the Absolute,’⁹. The implications of this are, not that nothing exists (as some aver) but that ‘All this, whatsoever, existing

in whatever way, is only Atman/Brahman’ (*ekam eva advitiam*). In other words: That in which there is no question of either form or formlessness, which is beyond name and attributes and which transcends even the beyond, *That* alone I am.

The essence of Advaita is simple to state, ‘You are That, here and now.’ To the person who objects: ‘But is not my search proof of my having become lost?’ The reply is, ‘No, it only shows that you believe you are lost. For, what are you in search of? How can you find that which you already are?’ Or, to put it another way, ‘Any seeking is a denial of the presence of that which is sought.’ To paraphrase Sankara, “Why are you looking for the Self or God in city after city, temple after temple? God dwells in the heart within. Why look in the east and in the west? Don’t look for God, look for the Guru. God dwells within you, in truth, you are God. You don’t need to find God, you need to find a Guru who will guide you to yourself.”

Throughout history, individuals have found themselves tossed between the banks of pleasure and pain, gain and loss. They are seemingly alienated from themselves, alienated from others, and alienated from the Absolute. From such a perspective it makes sense to ask how it is possible for a finite, relative, mortal human being to be identical with an infinite, immortal Absolute?

Each of the mahavakyas imparts a three-fold knowledge which Advaita seizes upon as the key to self-realization.

First, they remove a person’s deep-seated misconception that they are a limited, imperfect mortal being, and conversely, they reveal that the true Self of each individual is infinite, ever-free, ever-perfect, immortal.

Second, they remove the deep-rooted misconception that the supreme Reality is remote, hidden and unattainable, and declare that It is immediate, direct, the innermost Self of all.

Third, they reveal that individuals are not separate from the Absolute and yet that each individual is somehow part of the whole. They declare, unequivocally that, here and now, ‘You are That’, without an iota of difference. In other words, Advaita rejects the three types of difference: “There is nothing similar to Brahman;

³ *A Thousand Teachings: Upadesahasri*, S. Mayeda, pp. 11-12.

⁴ *brahma satyam, jagan mithya jivo brahmaivanaparab*.

⁵ According to Advaita, a mahavakya is an identity-statement, that is, a statement which directly declares the essential identity between the individual and the Absolute. Any other type of statement is, at best, an indirect account (e.g. to say that Brahman is great does not directly reveal one’s own identity with Brahman). The mahavakya is the essence of the Upanishads precisely because of its unique purport.

⁶ *Ait. Up.* 3.1.3 of *prajnam brahma*.

⁷ *Mand. Up.* 2.7 of Athravana Veda, *ayam atma brahma*.

⁸ *Chan. Up.* 6.8.7 of *tat tvam asi*.

⁹ *Brh. Up.* 1.4. of Yajur Veda, *aham brahmasmi*.

there is nothing dissimilar to Brahman; and there is no internal variety.”¹⁰

While individuals mistakenly superimpose various qualities (eg. mortal, imperfect, male/female, intelligent/stupid, and so on) upon themselves and the opposite qualities (e.g. immortal, perfect, omniscient, far away) upon the Absolute, the Advaita teaching resorts to a series of negations (*neti-neti*) to correct this misunderstanding. Sankara, commenting on this says, “The Absolute can never be properly denoted by any words, including the word ‘Absolute’ (Atman/Brahman).”¹¹

Thus, in the Advaita tradition, though there are passages like “Everything is Brahman”, “Brahman is Existence-absolute, Knowledge-absolute, Infinitude-absolute”,¹² “The Self is all this,”¹³ “The world is an unbroken series of perceptions of Brahman and hence nothing else but Brahman”, until one’s ignorance is destroyed, such statements will not be correctly understood. Thus, for spiritual aspirants, Advaita emphasizes ‘not-this, not-this’, which is not so much to say that appearances are not applicable to the Absolute, as to indicate the impossibility of attributing any conceptualization to It. Brahman is too great for words to adequately describe, or for the finite mind to fathom. Reality is called ‘a-dvaita’ to point to the fact that there is nothing with which it can be compared to.

It is the thesis of Advaita that the Self is ever-present and yet, one does not realize it. The problem for each individual can be reduced to the simple question of ‘knowing’ or ‘not-knowing’. With Vedanta there is actually nothing to be done; it is only a matter of understanding, but that understanding has to be very accurate and refined.

The purpose of Advaita, of the mahavakyas, of the Guru, of spiritual disciplines, is to kindle an awakening to this ever-present, already established Self. This it does by utilizing the knowledge that appearances cannot manifest independent of a reality which enables their manifestation. ▲

¹⁰ *Pancadasi* 2.20. *sajatiya vijatiya svagata bhedara hitam.*

¹¹ *Brh. Up. Bh.* 2.3.6. There is no other and more appropriate description than this ‘not-this’.

¹² *Taitt. Up.* 2.1, *satyam, jnanam anantam brahman.*

¹³ *Chan. Up.* 7.25.2.

BHAGAVAN’S HANDWRITING

Arunachala Pancharatna Vartikam

In 1917 Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi composed five cryptic Sanskrit slokas in Arya metre entitled *Arunachalapancharatnam*. These verses, the quintessence of upanishadic teachings, he later translated into Tamil and they are chanted by devotees at the end of the Tamil parayanam.

Sri K. Lakshmana Sharma (WHO) wrote a Sanskrit commentary on these slokas entitled *Laghu Vritti* (Short Commentary) and this he submitted to Sri Bhagavan, who, on perusal of the text, corrected the title to *vartikam*. Vartikam is defined as a supplement which elucidates that which is said, that which is left unsaid, or that which is imperfectly said and needs clarification. There is a historical precedent in Sri Sureswaracharia, a direct disciple of Adi Sankara, who was known as *Vartikakara* because he had written a Vartikam on Sri Sankara’s *bhashya* (commentary) on *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and *Dhakshinamoorthy stotra* among others. Since Bhagavan corrected Sri Sarma’s title to Vartikam, he also named him Vartikakara.

In the facsimile given here we see Sharma's handwriting with Bhagavan's Sanskrit correction of 'laghu' to 'vartikam'.

ॐ नमो भगवते श्रीरमणाय
 ARUNACHALA PANCHARATNAM
 VARTIKAM
 अणुचलपञ्चरत्न-
 लघुवृत्ति-
 वार्तिकम्
 (K. L. Sarma)

SAN 11

A second note book containing Bhagavan's corrections was submitted to Bhagavan who confirmed his original corrections and added some more verses. The original commentary of 79 slokas was increased to 108 slokas.

The corrections made by Bhagavan with English and Tamil translations of this Vartikam was again rewritten in a pocket size note book by Bhagavan himself, and this book is maintained in the Ashram Archives.

We have a rare example here of Bhagavan's handwriting in three languages, namely Sanskrit, Tamil and English. This is one of the few instances of his written English; for reasons of its rarity we decided to print here only the English translation of some verses. In the next issue, Advent 2005, we will publish examples of Bhagavan's handwriting in all three languages together for specific verses.

We have slightly magnified the writing. Any discrepancies in size are due to the varying sizes Bhagavan used to accommodate the verses in the limited space available in the notebook.

Editor

Commentary
 on the
 Arunachala Pancharatnam
 (Translation)

Homage all the time to the Holy
 Ramana, the Inner Self and Lord,
 whose Nature is the True Consciousness,
 and who is the Giver of Happiness
 to all.

- 1 -

A hymn in praise of His own Reality,
 named Arunachala, was composed
 by Him in five verses. A brief
 exposition of its meaning is
 here made.

- 2 -

In this hymn the Truth of the Self known as the Turiya (the Fourth State), which is worldless, is explained as set out in the Mandukya Upanishad.

- 3 -

This Teaching is authoritative to the well-intentioned, because the Master here gives out the Truth of Himself as experienced by Himself all the time - that Truth which is blissful and free from evil.

- 4 -

Let people think that the words of a Master are authoritative as being in agreement with the ancient Revelation. But we consider the ancient Revelation as authoritative, because it is in agreement with the Master's words.

- 5 -

He is the Master who is firmly established in His own True Nature, known as the Turiya, and whatever He teaches is the highest Upanishad.

- 6 -

Because the words of the Master are (fully) authoritative, only the conclusions are set out briefly, leaving out controversies more or less.

- 7 -

(Paraphrased Rendering)

O Sea of the Nectar of Grace, Arunachala, Sun of Pure Consciousness, swallowing up (like darkness) all the worlds by His Light of Consciousness, make Thou the Heart blossom by Thy Light and thus destroy the inner darkness.

- 8 -

In the first verse His blessed Grace is prayed for, for the blossoming of the Heart, so that His devotees might attain Identity with Him. Here it is also shown that the Supreme Being is worldless.

- 9 -

What is known as the world is threefold, as the Soul, God and objects of sense and of thought. All these are imposed by Ignorance on the Substance, namely the Supreme Being (the Real Self).

- 25 -

The world as it really is (that is apart from the false appearance), is just the Sole Reality, the Real Self. Therefore He alone needs to be sought and found, renouncing the world (as being a mere appearance having no independent existence).

- 26 -

By this discrimination (of the Truth from its appearance) one should resolve the world into the True Self; for it is by the resolution of the appearance into the Real, thus seeing the world not as such, but as the Real, that the mind becomes able to seek the Self. [The core of the whole teaching being the Quest, all else is only subsidiary to the Quest and has no purpose except to make the Quest possible].

- 36 -

To make the seeker give up the outwardness of the mind, it is said that the Self is in the Heart. For one can proceed on the Quest - the means of getting Experience - only by turning the mind inward (away from the world).

- 49 -

Awareness of the Self, deathlessness, Silence and Fearlessness. The wise call this state, which is the Fourth and Highest (beyond the three, namely waking, dream and sleep), by various names.

-63-

But the Self does not become an object of knowledge, and there is no knower of objects in the Supreme State; the Self is the Sole Reality, without objects of knowledge and without anyone else who could become His knower.

-64-

The extinction of the thought that what is nonself is the Self is the true meaning of the expression 'knowing the Self'. The Real Self is the only one that exists, and has neither knowledge nor ignorance.

-65-

There is neither speaker nor thinker in that state; so that Transcendental state is called Silence.

-71-

The giving up of all one's attributes (Dharmas) enjoined in the Gita, is just the renunciation of the attributes of doership and so on preceded by (and as the effect of) the renunciation of individuality.

-80-

By the saying that 'the God-lover excels, it is meant that he is superior to the Yogi (who has been described before). Therefore, if one has no inclination to the path of the Quest (Vichara), he should strive to win God through love.

-109-

By Vichara one becomes the Flood of God in the Heart.* The Seeker (the Vichari) knowing this and (still) seeking the Self, is (therefore) the greatest of all devotees.

* 'Becoming the Flood of God' is just a poetic description of the loss of the ego as the result of the Quest.

-116-

The perfect surrender of oneself to God is possible by Vichara alone, since by becoming the Flood of God, he is no more separate from Him.

-117-

Homage to the Supreme Being in human form, the author of the Five Gems (Pancharatnam) who is threefold as, God, Guru and the Self.

-118-

Sattvic Feeling

ROLF SKARNITZL

The influence of *sattva* in sadhana is essential, because *sattva* opens the path to enlightenment. For that reason, a sadhak strives persistently for *sattva* to dominate in his or her mind.

The strength of each *guna*'s expression in an individual is directly dependent on how often it can manifest itself. The *guna rajas* operates most often since a typical feature of tendencies is extroversion, i.e. the turning of the mind outwards and a fascination for external things. Such a mind feasts on the objects presented by the senses. *Rajas* thus tends to be the most developed *guna* in most people.

The tendencies are the cause of the unrest of the mind. They also veil the ability to discriminate. If a sadhak is to free himself of their tyranny, he has to deliberately pay close attention to *sattva* and use it to 'brighten up' his personality. He has to wage a heroic fight against a hydra-headed dragon (the tendencies) which emits the paralyzing poison of *tamas*.

The success of a sadhak depends on how he or she eliminates the influence of *tamas* and weakens the influence of the tendencies. He or she will become keenly sensitive to *tamas*, once having felt its veiling character. One must not allow *tamas* any space to expand.

It is difficult to weaken the influence of tendencies so that more space is given to sattva. To achieve this weakening, the mind, which is usually focused on external things must be concentrated inside. There are two methods for this: meditation and sattvic feeling.

The mind cannot be permanently introverted without the regular practice of meditation which requires an intense effort of will. When a sadhak focuses on his inner world, he turns the attention of the mind inside. If meditation is pursued often and long enough, the mind becomes introverted.

All sadhanas agree, though, that if a sadhak is to be successful on the path, he or she has to make unceasing effort. It is not enough to have 'office hours' set for sadhana, and leave the rest of the time to self-indulgence. The tendencies, with their natural interest in external things will extrovert the mind.

It is useful to apply the second method — sattvic intellect — to encourage the mind's introversion. The sword of discrimination is applied to the wide variety of tamasic tendencies. Detachment is also necessary. We should not grant these forces any importance by remembering their passing character and their non-I element.

The positive application of sattvic intellect consists in paying deliberate attention to sattvic thoughts and sattvic feeling. This provides space for the growth of sattva, and allows for the gradual harmonization of motivating factors by sattva. One has to be very alert and control the activity of motivating factors which externalise the mind. Whenever possible one must immediately switch on positive sattvic thoughts and sattvic feelings. If the mind is repeatedly introverted the tendencies will fail to get satisfied and will weaken. This occurs after persistent practice. But the sadhak should be warned that the tendencies can retreat into the deeper layers of the mind and wait there for their opportunity. The sadhak may believe that they have been weakened and mastered. But when discipline is relaxed a sadhak tends to be surprised by the suddenness and intensity of their explosion.

Sattvic feeling is characterized by a sense of overall lightness, high spirits, inner brightness, calm and harmonious peace, subtle understanding, tenderness, and refined emotions.

Sattvic feeling manifests when we encounter the beauties of nature, be it the tender gracefulness of flowers or the fascinating wonder of landscapes. Sattvic feeling arises at the sight of the star-spangled vault of heaven. It comes when we watch the tender feeding of nestlings by their parents. It rings out when we stand in front of an artistic work of immense beauty or when we listen to beautiful music. It arises when we experience positive harmonious relations with other people, especially devoted help pursued unselfishly and inconspicuously. Sattvic feeling also appears when we come across a wise expression of truth, when hidden aspects of truth and justice are revealed to us. It arises most intensively at the sight of the face of a sattvic being and in such a person's presence.

A strong sattvic stimulus is evoked when we concentrate intellectually on a noble topic and contemplate it, when we study spiritual literature or the lives of sages and saints, since all these are expressions of sattvic beings. Prayer is a very good way to introduce sattvic feeling. Sattva grows in the company of advanced sadhaks and even more so in the presence of saints and sages.

A sadhak is recommended to open him/herself consciously to situations which evoke sattvic feeling. It is beneficial to let such a situation act on oneself and then store them in the memory so they can be evoked as often as possible because of their refreshing nature. With practice it becomes easier to evoke sattvic feeling and it will start to dominate the sadhak's mind and heart. This is a sign of maturity.

The systematic training of emotional habits is of paramount importance. In practice, this means that a sadhak will support those habits which do not disturb sattva. The more the mind is pervaded by sattvic influence, the more it is able to respond to more subtle impulses and the less interested it is in reacting to the vibrations of ordinary rajasic life. The more a sadhak develops respect, affection, devotedness, compassion, and desire to serve his fellow human beings, the more subtle the personality becomes and the more detached he or she will be from the raw impulses of rajasic life. The aim is to retain sattvic feeling without interruption. The sadhak is advised to be sharply alert and to notice what causes the decline or interruption of sattvic feeling. When that happens, one should trace one's mind and behaviour back to the point

where the sattvic feeling was intact. One should recognise the deviation, the point of error. One should resolve to ensure the continuity of sattvic feeling when similar situations arise in the future. But he or she should not brood over the mistake and thereby reactivate the loss of sattva.

It is important to constantly remind oneself of the nature of one's true 'I'. The habit of reminding oneself is not achieved by a mere decision, but is the result of persistent effort. It is not possible to free oneself of the obstacles created by one's tendencies until the sadhak has matured. The best method by which permanent awareness of the supreme 'I' is gained is Ramana Maharshi's self-enquiry method.

If a sadhak persistently seeks to develop sattva he creates a sattvic orientation in his mind, and thus consciously contributes to the sattvic transformation of his personality in whatever activity he performs. He knows that pursuing this aim is not an end in itself because sattvic feeling is not his ultimate objective. But a sattvicly influenced mind is much better prepared for meditation and self-observation, than an ordinary mind left to its own devices. Sattvic feeling thus contributes to the sadhak's understanding of Reality, which is the objective of every sadhak's life. A permanent undertone of sattvic feeling in the mind is the sign of an advanced sadhak.

When we move about in the world and do not want to hurt anyone, sattvic feeling is a simple and excellent guide to correct behaviour. It replaces the volumes of books which teach us in confusing detail how to act in various kinds of situations. If our mind is in tune with sattvic feeling, then what we are doing is in harmony with the situation we are in.

Practically, it means that the sadhak retains sattvic feeling within him/herself, at least as an undertone, through the introversion of mind. The other part of the mind remains outside, relating to the world and responding to its demands. Such emotional balance fills the personality with feelings of harmony and peace. ▲

BOOK EXCERPT

Yoga: Develop Your Latent Power

Sri Ramana Maharshi

SRI ANANDA

Sri Ananda belonged to a distinguished family from Uttar Pradesh and had been interested in Yoga since childhood. He received formal training under Swami Kunalayananda of the Institute of Yoga Research at Lonavala near Mumbai. He eventually moved to Paris in the 1950s where he established a Yoga Centre. He has written several books including Yoga: Harmonie du Corpe et de L'espirit. The excerpt below comes from his Yoga: Develop your Latent Power, published by Vision Books, New Delhi. He attained samadhi in 2003.

The name 'Arunachala'—hill of the holy beacon or the sacred red mountain as it is generally called—had always exercised an attraction for me. (In Sanskrit, aruna means 'light' and achala 'mountain', which becomes 'symbol of light'.) Whenever I heard this name, a thrill ran through my body. Impelled by an irresistible urge, I undertook a long journey to meet the great sage Sri Ramana Maharshi

there. I had heard that he had been living on the top of the mountain for roughly forty years and had always refused to leave it.¹ Even when surrounded by his devotees, he remained aloof from the world.

On entering the courtyard of the Maharshi's hermitage, I saw one or two of his disciples and decided to approach them. When I explained that I had come such a long way to see the Maharshi, the expression on their faces changed immediately, and they all offered me a very warm welcome. Then one of them bade me follow him. Before entering the hall, I paused on the verandah and removed my sandals.

As soon as I passed through the doorway of the long hall, I saw several men sitting cross-legged, and having glanced around the room, my attention was suddenly drawn to a figure seated upon a long white divan. It was the Maharshi. The disciple who had accompanied me approached him and prostrated himself before him, while I kneeled down touching my forehead to the floor in homage. Then I sat down and looked at him with the greatest respect and all my devotion. The divan was covered with white cushions and the Maharshi's magnificent figure rested against them.

A profound silence reigned throughout the hall. The Maharshi remained absolutely motionless. I concentrated very hard, and continued to look at him in the hope of catching his glance. He betrayed no hint or sign that he had seen me, and I wondered if he was aware of my presence at all. Impassive as a statue, his eyes never once met mine; they seemed to gaze constantly into remote space—and how infinitely remote it appeared to be!

A whole hour passed like this, yet no one in the hall seemed to stir. Nobody appeared to dare speak to him or ask anything. I realized that he was in a trance-like condition, and his radiant presence seemed to hypnotize me, so that I could not take my eyes off him. My bewilderment and perplexity at being totally ignored slowly faded away as this strange, fascinating silence began to grip me more and more.

¹The author was misinformed. Bhagavan lived on the lower slopes of Arunachala in various caves facing the town for some twenty three years. Periodically he came down from Arunachala and did giri pradakshina. Editor

The questions I had wanted to ask were now completely forgotten; they had ceased to be important. I felt a river of quietness flow around me, so that a great peace penetrated my whole being, as if I were bathed in an ocean which I knew emanated from the Maharshi.

After a while, I perceived with sudden clarity that all questions create their own problems and often result in torment. Then suddenly the spell was broken. The visitors and disciples began to get up and move about. Only now did the dark brown eyes of the Maharshi flicker once or twice.

Everyone moved out of the hall, and I was left alone with him. An astonishing light shined from his eyes. A strange sensation began to creep over me, for he seemed to be penetrating my thoughts, emotions and desires: I was convinced that he knew everything about my past, present and future.

For some time he remained motionless like this, and I felt that a telepathic current was running between us, for I realized that he was linking his mind to mine. During this extraordinary moment, I was filled with a great peace, lightness and sense of exaltation. Time was standing still. My heart had been relieved of its burden of desires afflicting me. This beautiful, entranced silence completely flooded my mind. No word passed from him to me, until suddenly I knew that it was time to leave. I respectfully bowed and he nodded to me.

On leaving the hall, I wandered away to a quiet spot in the jungle surrounding the hermitage. One side was a thickly clustered garden and the other hedgerows of shrub and cactus.

It was a secluded spot, far from the city noises, and a fitting place for profound meditation.

I thought back to the brilliant lustre of the Maharshi's eyes, and was once again filled with calm. I have never since met a sage who was able to project such a divine power through his gaze alone.

After lunch, I re-entered the monastery and sat down among the other disciples. One of them lit an incense stick. The Maharshi was sitting in the lotus position, with his hands resting on his knees. He gazed at me attentively but remained silent. At that moment I wanted to ask him if one may find one's true being while living in the material

world, but I could not utter a word, for something was holding me back. Suddenly the Maharshi's eyes became more glazed, his body became still, and he had evidently re-entered a state of trance.

I closed my eyes and fixed my mind upon his. All of a sudden, the answer to my question became clear to me: if one meditates correctly every day, the control of the mind thus induced will continue even into the midst of one's activities. This will change one's attitude towards people, objects and events of the world. The personal selfishness that binds men to this world should be surrendered, along with the false self. True renunciation of desires, passions and attachments should be the guiding principle. A person who adopts such an attitude, even if he remains in society, will find himself uninfluenced by the world.

I then realized that a mysterious change was taking place within me; my intellectual agitation seemed to disappear with incredible speed. An attendant approached and lit another incense stick. I bowed very humbly, rose and left the hall.

The next day, as I came and sat at the feet of the Maharshi, he looked at me deep in the eyes the moment I focused my attention on him. This time, I felt my ego-sense and vanity crumble. I had come thinking I knew everything about Yoga, for I had read many books on the subject, visited almost every holy place in India, and had met so many sages and questioned them that I thought there was nothing more to know.

After a short silence, I asked myself why I always spoke in terms of 'I', "I have done this, 'I' have done that," without ever stopping to wonder who this 'I' might be. Then I realized that the 'I' which I repeated so often was nothing more than my body, and therefore not my true self. At that moment I heard a voice inside me saying, "Know first this 'I', then you will know the whole truth."

My first reaction was to wonder how.

The voice continued, "Only through deep reflection and constant meditation on the nature of your own self can this true self be found." I was convinced that it was the Maharshi guiding my thoughts.

Everyone in the hall was plunged into deep silence. Roughly half an hour passed like this. Then someone quietly rose and left the hall,

followed by another, then another, until I was left alone with the Maharshi.

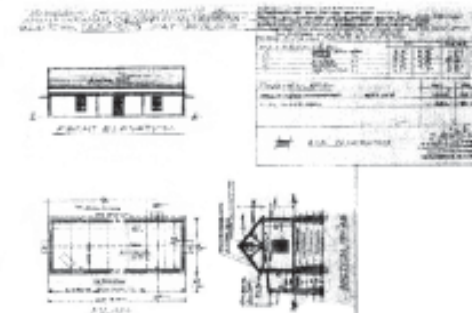
As I gazed at him, I observed that there was a tremendous increase in the intense gleam shining from his eyes, now almost closed. I shut mine, and after a little while my body became weightless and my consciousness merged into infinite space.

Now I clearly understood how one may lose the feeling of one's own personality and that of the personal ego. The sense of 'I' pertains to the body and mind. When one is able to merge like this with the Universal Consciousness, which is infinite, Divine and eternal, then all illusions vanish, and nothing matters any more.

Whenever I approached the Maharshi, I was filled with joy. Living in his presence, I enjoyed spiritual experiences of unimaginable wealth and perfection. I was so deeply affected that whenever I think of him, a peculiar sensation pierces me, causing my heart to fill with inner peace. I seem always to see before me his inspired gaze, penetrating and guiding me. ▲

Ramana Retreat Centre USA

Longtime devotees and founders of Inner Directions Matt and Joan Greenblatt are hoping to establish a permanent retreat centre in Carlsbad, California in order to provide a meditative



Blueprint of the Old Hall at Sri Ramanasramam, in South India, where Ramana Maharshi lived for over twenty-seven years. We plan to create a replica of this building to serve as a meditation hall.

environment for those wishing to embrace the way of self-inquiry. A community-oriented non-profit enterprise, the centre hopes to erect a replica of Bhagavan's Old Hall to serve as the community meditation hall.

Ozhivil Odukkam

Eternal Repose Upon Annulment

(Withdrawal as Eternal Being)

four

KANNUDAYA VALLALAAR

TRANSLATION & COMMENTARY BY J.JAYARAMAN

33. The five universal functions of Siva are the five states that constantly whirl you like a fire-brand, and [worse] make a sport of deluding you into believing a falsity to be true [there being no *circle* of fire at all, merely a lighted stick!] [So too, there is really no circular succession of mental states like day-dreaming and dreaming and sleep within the falsely presumed reality of the waking world. Really, there is, if at all, only the sleep of ignorance of true self]. You are like the uncoloured crystal [the untaintable Self] that [seemingly] takes on the five colours kept behind it.

Notes

i) In the Self, a false taint of transient being arises as a subject who surveys the objective transience of the world. This dubious being interprets the field of five sensations and reacts to them. This is all

sustained merely by past habits of thought. Thus, the milieu of non-enquiry into oneself projects an 'abiding taint of the crystal' — the Self is represented as if tainted, that is, bound by a 'body here' and surrounded by a 'world out there'.

ii) Gaudapaada *Kaarikaa* uses the same simile of the appearance of a false ring of fire superimposing a rotating fire-brand.

34. This illusion of maya working like drunkenness, is also unending. Can it be got over by you unless you desist from identifying yourself with the part you play? Be undeluded like the player involved in a masquerade, and realize! [The actor 'becomes' the role and is yet aware of the higher truth about himself, and so his inner being remains naturally disconnected. He is seriously involved with the play, only because he seriously courts the thrill, the *ananda*, of delivering a pristine performance].

35. The fear of a rope mistaken for a snake having once left us (upon our discovering that the snake was falsely seen in place of the rope), can that same fear reappear *within* us, even on (our) passionately re-enacting the whole scene (of looking at the rope), taking care to ensure the re-enactment of all its (outer) effects (of gasp, arrested breath, trembling of body, perspiration and so on)?

So also, to the Siva Yogi (who is) beyond doership, (united in mauna), this maya [as suggested fundamentally in the duality of a guru-sishya transmission] does not stir [to life] even if (its previous tyranny were) recalled and passionately invited by him!

Note

Jnaneshwar Maharaj's father Vithoba was convinced about the need to practise nirvikalpa samadhi in seclusion away from the city, and wondered how mere jnana vichara could, in the absence of any undisturbed practise of asana, pranayama and samadhi, achieve permanent conquest of the grief-causing sense-objects and establish one effortlessly in the supreme Self. Maharaj advised his father thus, "Why fear the sense-objects and samsaric life? When even a living cow

cannot kill a tiger, where is the question of a dead cow being a source of threat to a tiger!” The sense-objects are reflections cast and observed by mind, all by itself. When this is itself seen, the power of sense-objects is voided, just as the substantiality of water is voided in a mirage even though a ‘wateriness’ continues to suggest itself. When even real water cannot wet the Sun, how can mirage-water do it?

To the Jivanmukta, immersed in the bliss of non-dual presence, it is a tall order to recall a duality in the non-dual presence and then to bestir himself to desire or avoid the imagined object. Echoing Allama Prabhu, Ramana Maharshi says during his talks: It is as difficult for the jnani to experience the thought “I am this body” as it is for the ajnani to experience “I am not this body”! (also see Sri Ramana’s Tamil translation of Sri Allama’s reply in Kanada to the great Gorakhnath sung through his great *Prabhulinga Lilai*, for which, see the Maharshi’s *Forty Verses Supplement*, v.20).

36. As the eye (of a worker) watches the peeling away of the layered sheaths of the soft (stem of a tender) banana tree [and continues to watch, even after nothing of the stem is left over to see], and yet [the eye] cannot see itself [though one can see this seeing], so also self-knowledge falls short of knowing oneself. (This is further clarified):

Though the self is told repeatedly “know your Self” — (there are no two here) — it (the duality implied) is a verbal limitation. The Self is not (another object) to be confronted by the [enquiring] self. Just as (our) tongue, [which announces the names of all objects before us], might announce, “Tongue!” [in order to draw another’s attention to the object ‘tongue’] and, to be able to do so, it need not appear [as another tongue] in front of itself!

Notes

i) The Self is self-sufficient. It is *not* an object that can be known by a subject. It does not need to *become* two, the illusion of duality, for its existence to be confirmed. Verse 33 of *Forty Verses* echoes this.

ii) The question then arises for the aspirant, the mumukshu: “how

then am I to take any step at all? How to leap without leaving?” This practical problem is tackled in the verses 37 and 38 below (and 39 to 42 of the sequel appearing in the next issue).

37. Having said this, that whatever is cognised as a known [object in our field of experience] is [by that same token] *not* us, is *it* [namely, us, the true self] not [instantaneously] intuited as stillness? When beheaded [with the unexpected swirl of an enemy sword], the mouth opens in urgent communication, but only to drop in whimpering limp. Will it, [can it?] announce [a severed head]? [Must it?].
Intuit this! Yourself!

Notes

(i) ‘*the object of our experience is, by the same token, not us*’: meaning that, whatever it is that is experienced as an object ‘out there’, can never be felt in the same way as we feel ourselves as the subject ‘in here’ of experience, and further that, if the object should begin to be felt as the subject, then it must lose something of its form which had distinguished its form thus far as an object. And that the ‘environment’ could at its diabolical best be a temporary ambiguity, and at its worst be a mirage, whose persistence even upon intuiting its vacuous nature, is no longer an existential problem.

(ii) Verses 12, 21 and 30 of *Forty Verses* convey the same, minus the simile.

(iii) This work might seem to be a string of disconnected similes. It is reasonable to assume, and is certainly found to be quite instructive, to treat the verses as if connected by themes. The previous few verses detailed the complete absence of certain ‘flavours’ or vasanās of knowledge by which one is accustomed to recognise reality in one’s daily experience. It was not possible to apply these modes of acquisition of knowledge, during the investigation into these very same modes and their existence. Such an investigation of their validity must necessarily precede the ‘leap into’ Self-knowledge.

The following verse ‘takes off’ as it were from the earlier ones (verses 32 to 36). It would seem that Vallalaar, anticipating the rising

up of a certain doubt, hastens to counter that doubt. The doubt would seem to be: What if self as this stillness, in the same manner, makes way for another self as knower, and so on.....?!

38. Each of the thirty-six tattvas knows but without knowing itself [as in a subject-object hierarchy, where the eye knows colour or the ear knows sound and yet, it is something 'higher', let's call it 'mind', that must know that the eye cannot hear and that the ear cannot capture colour]. That being so, is it final wisdom or is it regressive confusion to know the never unaware [ever non-dual] Self? [It is the former certainly!] For [even if viewed through the process of a subject-object relationship] it is awareness which is aware of awareness [naturally!]. [There is no regression in mauna, where subject and object coalesce].

Note

(i) '*naturally*': by virtue of its nature. The perfect isolation of one sense field from the field of another cannot be disputed. That which reports the isolation of senses must span the senses and if this itself should turn out to be just another kind of sense, it cannot be disputed that it must still be one which supervises the other senses, just as a general, himself a soldier, supervises his soldiers.

(ii) '*where subject and object coalesce*': Light and eye must both be directed to an object if the eye is to experience the visual object. To experience (visual light), it is enough if the eye is directed to it. Another (visual light) is not necessary. ▲

BOOK REVIEWS

VEDANTIC MEDITATION: Lighting the Flame of Awareness by David Frawley. 2002. Pub. Full Circle, Delhi 110 095, Rs195.

David Frawley, the only Westerner to be recognized as a *Vedâchârya*, has written more than twenty books on Vedic tradition and education.

In this book, Frawley clarifies that Vedanta revolves around one premise: to become self-realized through the practice of Self-enquiry. The author emphasizes the practical side of Vedanta as a way of meditation. The book is divided into four sections:

- 1) The first section examines the background of Vedanta and its main method of Self-enquiry;
- 2) The second deals with prime issues and concerns of the contemporary spiritual path;
- 3) The third contains short discussions about issues and methods of meditation practice; and
- 4) The fourth section presents the teachings of Ramana Maharshi, the famous Self-realized sage of modern India.

Vedanta is the oldest spiritual teaching in India. Some scholars see Buddhism as a modification of Vedanta. Vedanta is the yoga of knowledge or path of meditation. But it does not prescribe any particular form of meditation.

The Self is the only reality ultimately. Only Self-enquiry reveals the Self. To trace back thoughts to their root is its basis.

Our thoughts consist of two components: the first one is a subjective factor — ‘I’, me or mine. The second is an objective factor — a state, condition or object with which ‘I’ is involved. The subjective factor, upon enquiry, turns into a cleansing and then, ideally, revelation. Self-enquiry has no real stages. The easiest way to determine one’s progress is by one’s detachment, peace, and equanimity of mind.

The author outlines the essence of instruction given by Sri Ramana in two chapters toward the end. *Atma vichara* is the meditation of Vedanta, concludes the author.

Dr. T.N. Pranathârthi Haran

JAPJI: Srî Guru Nanak: Japji in Gurumukhi, Devanagari and Roman Script with English Translation and Commentary by Dr. G. S. Chauhan. 2001. Pub: Hemkunt Pub., A-78 Naraina Phase-1, ND 110028 <hemkunt@ndf.vsnl.net.in> pp208, Rs150.

Numerous translations have been made of the Japji Sahib, the morning prayer of the Sikhs. This unique composition sums up the essential beliefs of the Sikhs and is read as a daily morning prayer. However, as it was written in the language of the time of the Guru, many Sikhs today find it difficult to understand its language and concepts.

Verbatim translations often do not help in understanding the progression of a writer’s thoughts. Dr. Chauhan has overcome this by not only giving word explanations, but also providing the numerated sentence translations that sum up the full meaning of each sentence. In addition, his explanations of each verse and its connection to the previous verses helps one to understand the flow of thought of the guru. This is useful in understanding the various stages through which the seeker must pass in order to become one with the Lord.

The translation, given in Gurumukhi, Devanagari and Roman scripts, addresses a wider audience. This is has practical value it comes at a price being at times a little confusing. Otherwise the text is readable.

Hari Radha



RAMANA KID’S CORNER



Hello all you Fellow Kids of Bhagavan, ages 99 years and under!

This is the new *Ramana Kids Corner!*

Isn’t it awesome — an entire section for us! This is the first time in the history of *The Mountain Path* that there has been a section just for us Ramana Kids throughout the world! When the brown envelope containing *The Mountain Path* comes from Sri Ramanashramam to your home every few months, you’ve seen your parents get super-excited. But now you can get excited, too! Why? Because this section is especially made for you to read and share with them.

As we all know, Bhagavan loved kids. In fact he played with them a lot! And there are several children who realized the Self at young ages. Our very own Bhagavan Sri Ramana realized the Self at just 16 years of age! Jnanasambandar realized the Self when he was three years old by drinking milk given by Goddess Parvati!

Now, let us think of what we could have in *Ramana Kids Corner*. Well..... ANYTHING UNDER THE STARS TO HELP US LOVE BHAGAVAN MORE!! Some examples might be:

**Stories, pictures, mazes, comics, crosswords, trivia,
find-the-word, connect-the-dots, jokes, etc.**

Let us all join together and offer our contributions with lots of love and devotion to Bhagavan. And send in your suggestions as to what you would like to see in the next issue of *Ramana Kids Corner!*

Here is where to send your ideas and contributions:

By Email: ramanakids@yahoo.com
By Mail: **Ramana Kids**
3901 Bay Hill Ct.
Fairfax, VA 22033, U.S.A

Oh, one more thing, I forgot to introduce myself!



I am Arunachala Patti!

I am only 99 years old! I love Bhagavan and I love children. I am as excited as you are about *Ramana Kids Corner!* I can't wait to hear from you all. Send me a note telling me, *How you like to remember Bhagavan?* We can pray, chant, sing, read, draw, write, meditate...oh, so many ways to remember our wonderful Bhagavan. Please write me at:

ramanakids@yahoo.com

And now for something fun...

Find-The-Word Puzzle

Here is a puzzle containing words that tell a most touching story about Bhagavan. Find the 13 words/clues, tell the story, and remember our divine Bhagavan:

A K S H A R A M A N A M A L A I
P R Z X P H O T O G R A P H E R
R A R U N A C H A L A T E A R S
I M X Z S H O O T I N G S T A R
L A Z D E V O T E E S X 1 9 5 0
1 N I R V A N A X S A M A D H I
4 A R A D H A N A Z T U M O U R

Hint: Bhagavan's Maha-Nirvana
Read "The Last Days and Maha-Nirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana"



Dhanurmasam

When Arjuna asked Krishna where he could find Krishna's manifestation, Krishna said, "Of all the lights, I am the Sun, of all the months, I am *Margazhi*."

Margazhi month (*Dhanurmasam*) begins in mid-December and is said to be auspicious for sadhana and devotion. Bhagavan once said that it was in the month of Margazhi, in Arudra constellation, that Lord Siva took the form of Arunachala.¹ According to tradition, this is the month of early worship hence the 30 days of 4:30 am puja at the Ashram. Manikkavachakar's *Tiruvembavai*, composed on Lord Siva by the poet-saint in Adiannamalai, is sung each morning at Bhagavan's puja, after which Vishnusahasranamam is recited.

For the Devas, the whole of Margazhi is *brahma mahurta*, (the hour of God), the early pre-dawn hours of the Deva's 'day'. For the Devas, this pre-dawn part of their 'day', i.e., the human year, ends with 'sunrise' at Pongal, (January 14th).²

The spirit of the recitations of the early hours during Dhanurmasam is 'waking up the Gods' (*Tirupalliezhuchi*). Once during Margazhi month Bhagavan received devotees who came to the hall at 3:30 am. As per tradition, they began reciting a litany of prayers including supplications to Bhagavan that he 'wake up'. Bhagavan, who had been up for some time, had bathed and was dressed, was sitting up and listening to the recitation. So when they begged him to wake up, he interrupted them saying, "Who are you waking up? I am already awake!"

Mandalabhishekam

The concluding rites of the Ashram Kumbhabhishekam took place on the first day of Margazhi, the 16th of December, after some 42 days of daily Laghu Mahanasya pujas. Visiting Vedic pundits performed Ghana parayana in the morning hours while Ashram priests chanted the Rudram and Mahanasya mantras. Visiting Ghanapatigals performed homam in the New Hall. Special puja followed.

¹Devotees need not be reminded that this is the same month and constellation of Sri Bhagavan's birth (at 1 am in the morning on the night of Arudra, in the early morning of Punarvasu in Margazhi month, 1879).

²Astronomically the winter solstice occurs on December 21st-22nd.



Naveena Arjuna Award

On December 27th, the day prior to Bhagavan's 125th Jayanti celebration, Sri Ramanasramam President V. S. Ramanan and Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning President A. R. Natarajan presented former Ashram President T. N. Venkataraman (Swami Ramanananda) with the *Naveena Arjuna* ('Modern Arjuna') Award in honour of his long years of service to Bhagavan and the Ashram.

This nephew of Bhagavan who had the privilege of visiting Bhagavan in the early days at Skandashram, has devoted the whole of his life to Bhagavan. He assumed the role of Ashram President in 1953 at the time of the death of his father, Bhagavan's younger brother, Swami Niranananda (Chinnaswami). T. N. Venkataraman led the Ashram through difficult years after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, bringing stability and giving vision during a time of transition. Devotees are grateful to Swamiji for making the Ashram what it is today.

125th Jayanti Celebrations of Sri Bhagavan

The Ashram celebrated Bhagavan's 125th Jayanti on Tuesday, December 28th. Dhanurmasa puja began at 4:30 am with Deeparadhana at 5. Recitation of Vishnusahasranamam was followed by verses from Sri Muruganar's *Sannidhi Murai* and Saturday Tamil parayana. Flower decorations were withheld as a way of expressing solidarity with those suffering in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami which hit Southeast Asia and coastal Tamil Nadu two days earlier. The Pondicherry Ratha Yatra vehicle made its debut appearance at the Ashram. The evening brought special abhishekam beginning at 3:30 pm with evening music by Smt. Sakkubai Srinivasan of Bangalore. Music on the previous evening was by Ramananjali led by Smt Sulochana Natarajan.

Jayanti Celebrations Ramana Kendra Trust, Madras

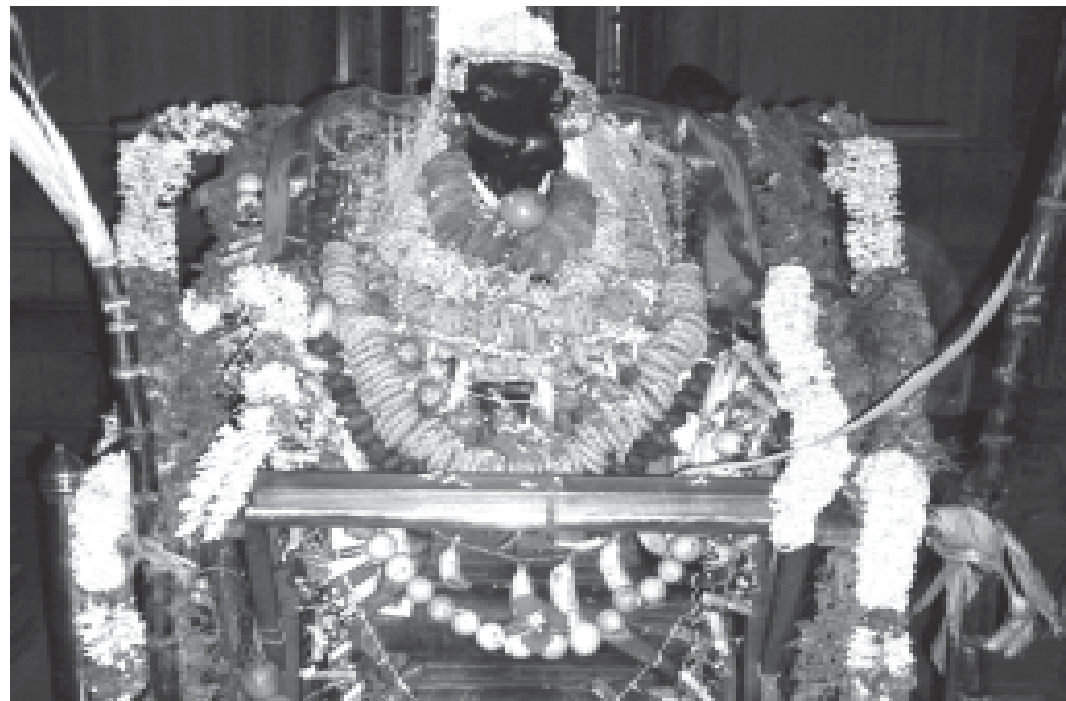
The 125th Jayanti celebrations in Mylapore began on December 25th with evening spiritual talks for three consecutive days and an all day programme the 28th. Jayanti Day brought Mahanasya puja, group chanting of Aksaramanamalai, and bhajans in the evening.

Jayanti Celebrations in the New Ramana Kendras

Jayanti celebrations took place in the newly established Ramana Kendra of Salem on December 25th with the Ashram President in attendance. The recently founded Ramana Mandiram at Palani celebrated on the 29th.

Ramana Vidya Peetam Tiruchuli celebrated on December 28th where devotees processed through town chanting *Aksaramanamalai*. Ramana Keshtra had their festivities on the 30th, Jayanti day according to the Gregorian calendar. Tirukoilur also celebrated on December 28th. Dignitaries and devotees arranged a procession carrying a big portrait of Sri Bhagavan through the streets of the city beginning at Arakandanallur temple and ending with deeparadhana at Kellur temple. Subsequently a prayer service was offered at the home of Uma Sundaram on behalf of tsunami victims.

Devotees at Oddan Chatram, a small village near Dindigul where Bhagavan once studied (1891), were grateful to receive invitations to attend Jayanti celebrations at various Ramana Kendras. But as the date approached, it occurred to them that Bhagavan was verily there in Oddan Chatram itself, so why not celebrate his Jayanti there? Arrangements were made and on the 30th devotees assembled at Arut Jyoti Arangam and chanted *Aksaramanamalai*. Just when it was discovered that prasadam was left over, some 150 devotees en route to Palani by foot passed through and were grateful to receive Bhagavan's prasadam.



Pongal

Thursday January 13th was Bogi, the last day of Margazhi. Friday morning, January 14th, was *Sankranti* (Pongal), the harvest festival and liturgically the first day of the sun's transit into the Northern Hemisphere. Mother's Shrine and the Ashram's main gate were colourfully decorated with the rice flour designs (*rangoli*) that adorn thresholds in Tamil Nadu. *Mattu Pongal*, the festival of cows, followed on Saturday, January 15th. Several varieties of sweetmeats were prepared as were garlands made of sweetmeats, murukku, and fresh fruit.

At the Ashram, special puja was performed to Nandi in Mother's Shrine. At the goshala, Lakshmi, a likely descendant of Cow Lakshmi, was selected to be honoured at puja. She was beautifully adorned with garlands of edibles such as sugarcane, coconut kernels, apples and murukku. The gosala got a remake — plantain trees were tied to pillars, festoons hung, and ornamental kolam designs drawn at the entrance. All the cows were bathed and adorned with tilakam (vermilion marks) on their foreheads and garlands around their necks. Finally puja was performed to the chanting of mantras and feeding the cows sweet rice pongal.



Sri Vidya Homam

On Monday, January 17th, special rites were performed at the Ashram, sanctifying and rededicating the Meru-Chakra. The Sri Chakra consecrated by Bhagavan's touch represents the entire universe, the various powers operating both in the macrocosm and the microcosm, and the indivisible Siva-Sakti at its core. The proceedings began at 8 am with *Kalasasthapana*. Homa and recitation of various prayers such as Lalita Sahasranamam were performed from 12:30 until 4 pm ending with *poornahuthi* at 4:30 pm, a procession, breaking of coconuts, puja, and aradhana at 5 pm. Sri Chakra puja was performed in the Mother's Shrine the following morning.

Tiruoodal Festival

There is a proverb in Tamil: *Tiruoodal Kandaarkku, Maruudal illai!* ("The one who witnesses Tiruoodal is free from further births!"). On the evening of Mattu Pongal, the Tiruoodal festival took place near the big Temple in the street of the same name where a domestic dispute between Siva and Parvati was enacted. The following day, Arunachaleswarar processional deity came to the Ashram at 6:30 am before proceeding around the Hill.

Mahasivaratri

On March 8th Mahasivaratri was observed at the Ashram. Devotees participated in pujas performed every couple of hours throughout the night in Bhagavan's Shrine. Sri Rudram was chanted continuously from midnight until 2 am and devotees went for giri valam in between.

The *Siva Purana* tells the story of the origins of this special night. There was a quarrel between Brahma and Vishnu as to which of them was the greater. Lord Siva appeared as an endless column of light and said: "Whichever of you two is able to find either the top or bottom of this column of light is the greater." Brahma took the form of a swan and soared up to find the top and Vishnu, taking the form of a boar, searched at the foot. After a some time both returned unsuccessful, having discovered that they are only instruments existing and functioning by Lord Siva's Grace. At their request Lord Siva took the benevolent form of Arunachala so that all could have his *darshan* and worship him by circumambulation. The day on which Vishnu and the other *devas* began to praise Lord Siva manifested from that column of Light was on the fourteenth day (*chaturdasi*) of the dark-foirnight in the month of *Masi* (*Magha*, February-March).³ Lord Siva said: "By doing puja to Me on this holiest day, one gets the same results as puja done for a whole year."

Smt. M. S. Subbulakshmi

Forty years ago, New Year's Day 1965, *Sangita Kalanidhi* Srimati M. S. Subbulakshmi gave her first concert at the Ashram. She was accompanied on the violin by Sri Subramaniam and on the *mridangam* by Sri Tanjavur Murthy. The concert consisted of devotional songs in Tamil, Sanskrit and Hindi and lasted for three and a half hours. Devotees were especially grateful as this was the first in a series of benefit performances which this great musician had graciously consented to give in aid of the building fund needed to erect Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi hall. A few years later in February 1972 she came to the



³ *Mountain Path*, Vol. 9, No 2, 1972, "The Holy Night: Sivaratri".

THE MOUNTAIN PATH

aid of Ramana Kendra, Delhi, by giving a benefit concert to support the building fund of the Kendra. There the celebrated singer gave renderings of Sanskrit *slokas* by and on Sri Bhagavan and sang Tamil verses by Sri Muruganar and Sadhu Om. In October 1974 she was again in Tiruvannamalai to give a benefit performance for the renovation of Arunachaleswara temple and came to Ramanasramam. Following her visit, she remarked how Bhagavan consistently blessed her during her visits.



For six decades, M. S., as she was affectionately called by friends, mesmerized packed audiences the world over with her consummate mastery of Carnatic music. Born in Madurai, she had already established herself musically by the age of 13. She went from strength to strength and soon became known all over India through her acclaimed performance in the film *Meera*. She dedicated her entire life to the cause of music and was known for her generosity. Her voice and depth of devotion were praised by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The latter, when Prime Minister of India, remarked: “She is the Queen of Music; I am only a Prime Minister!” Devotees mourn the loss of this great devotee.

Rajib Mansfield Keeni

We are sad to announce the loss of Rajib Mansfield Keeni, fourth son of Sushila and the late Devdas Keeni. Rajib would never miss a chance to go around Arunachala and be immersed in Arunachala’s peace and bliss. All who knew him will remember him with warmth and love. ▲

Errata: Due to a typographical error in the Jayanti 2005 issue the name of the founder of Hyderabad Ramana Kendra was misspelled. The text should have read “Sri K. Subramanian”. Additionally, the caption below the photo of H. Cartier-Bresson on p. 67 of the same issue erroneously identified the second photographer pictured as T. N. Krishnaswamy. The photographer pictured is yet to be identified.