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Ramana Ashtottaram

61. ओं सत्यदृशे नमः

om satyadr̥ṣe namaḥ

Prostration to the Seer of Truth, one who sees what is.

He sees the permanent element in this changing universe. When a child scans a printed page, it recognizes the letters but misses the meaning. The mother grasps the meaning at a glance and takes no notice of the individual letters, or notices them for the sake of the child. The letters are there, they are true, they have some *satya*. But they are not *satyasya satya*, the meaning, the spirit behind the letters. Bhagavan saw the reality behind appearances. But like the loving mother he also noticed the appearances, the *satya* which half conceals and half reveals the *Sat*.

In the Virupaksha cave period, Bhagavan read the scriptures, talked to people at their level, and recognized the need for letters to convey meaning, and so sees not only *sat*, the total truth, but *satya*, its actual, sensory, mental, intellectual aspects that others have grasped. Thus, like a good mother teaching her child the art of reading, he leads people step by step to higher levels of awareness, teaches them how to grow from *satya* to fuller *satya* within *sat*.

Samadrk (the one with equal vision) and *satyadrk* (the one who sees the truth everywhere) are mutually complementary terms. Every *satya* is a complete manifestation of the one *sat*. Bhagavan saw every *satya* in this light and hence did not choose between one *satya* and another. He saw all things as whole manifestations of the whole Reality. ▲

EDITORIAL

Surrender

Many people, both today and during Bhagavan's lifetime, have found Self-enquiry too subtle and difficult to practise and he was often asked if there was some alternative that would achieve the same result. He said that surrender would. "If one surrenders oneself, there will be no one to ask questions, or to be thought of. Either the thoughts are eliminated by holding on to the root thought 'I', or one surrenders oneself unconditionally to the higher power. These are the only two ways for realisation."¹

First we should define surrender. The concept is ambiguous and conjures up many meanings; it arouses divergent responses according to people's temperament and upbringing. In some cultures, especially today, surrender is equated with failure and defeat because we have been conditioned to strive for 'success'. To conquer is viewed as good; therefore to surrender is to be a 'loser'. All this is about our ego-image. The individual 'I' is the winner or loser and either way, thriving on attention, it grows. It is a struggle, or can be, if we do not establish what is truly important and non-negotiable in our lives.

¹ M.Venkataramiah (comp), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1978. §321, p.285.

One's definition of surrender is, more often an abandonment of all volition. But how can one function in the world if one is not allowed to make a decision? If a doctor or an air traffic controller gave up making decisions the results would be calamitous. There is a pervasive tendency to confuse two states of mind. The recognition 'I am not the body' is a sublime result of enlightenment. But as long as one identifies oneself with one's suffering from a cold or a broken leg, that precept is not applicable. Surrender in its true spiritual sense entails giving up or surrendering one's *identification* with the body/mind. As in Bhagavan's example of an actor in a play, the part must be acted out, the lines must be said, but the actor must remember that he or she is not the character being played. Everything that should be done is done correctly but without attachment to the self as the doer. This is a way of achieving liberation. One surrenders one's attachment to the idea of a 'self'.

How does one surrender to the will of a higher power when we have no idea what that divine intention may be? One begins by recognising that to surrender is to open up to the unknown. It is the catalyst that helps us transcend our limitations. If we surrender to Bhagavan what then is His will? To presume that Bhagavan has an individual will is a misunderstanding. If there is no sense of separateness where is the desire to fulfil a personal need? Bhagavan had no will of his own — there was nothing he wanted exclusively for himself. Yes, the body required food and rest to sustain itself. It is also our responsibility to keep both the body and mind clean and safe but not to become identified with them to the point that we assume that that is all there is. We should not fall into the trap of the materialist, mechanical view of life in which all values and motives are judged according to the condition of our physical body. We may have added more years to our lives because of modern medicine but does quantity equate with the precious sense of aliveness? It does not; it may only mean 'more' of 'something' — more objects to possess, more experiences to accumulate, more time to spend foolishly.

Bhagavan was free on all levels. He lived in the moment and did not accept responsibility for any of the so-called miracles which

spontaneously occurred around him; rather he explained them as 'automatic Divine action.' When we 'surrender' to Bhagavan it is not for his personal whim but is an affirmation, a commitment to see things as they are and not as we want them to be. If Bhagavan had an individual will, his intention would be for us to recognise and share the joy of *jnana*.

We must understand that surrender is not an abrogation of responsibility. It is the transcendence of our individual will and is essential if we are to grow in wisdom. There comes a crucial point in our lives when we realise that our individual efforts will never be enough, that we need help. That is why we start our search for a guru, and if we are lucky or blessed, we are brought to a genuine guru like Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

We all have been satisfied to some extent by the fulfilment of physical needs but the sense of dissatisfaction always lurks in a corner of our minds. At some level we realise that we are not strong enough to make things happen as we wish or aware enough to realise the actual nature of things we clutch as if our lives depended on it. We also come to realise that the state of constant awareness is possible.

The nature of the mind is movement. Each moment, no matter how miniscule, expresses change. Nothing remains the same. An instant is over the moment it happens and all we have to show for it are memories. We yearn to be fully conscious, we yearn to be truly alive and to understand what is happening around us. It is our nature to register sensation and thought. The conundrum is *how to let go* and yet be confident that all is well. It is a question of trust and surrender to a Higher Power or the Dharma or whatever term one wishes to describe Reality.

When we believe that everything happens for a purpose, then we see an opportunity to comfortably let go of wanting events to be tailored to our expectations. How often have we had a series of events that did not go our way and yet, with patience and lack of self-pity, something fortuitous occurred, which would otherwise have been impossible on the fixed tracks of our *vasanas*, our habitual tendencies. When we flow with events, we may unexpectedly meet an old friend who proves

to be a stepping-stone on the path. The reverse is also true, when we refuse to flow with circumstances, and learn later that we missed an opportunity. The experiences we all have had in this respect are endless. This tells us something vital. Life is always teaching us if we would but pay attention. Life is not an inert block on which we play our tune; it is a 'livingness' which interacts with us. We miss out on so much of life because we refuse to surrender to the moment, listen and learn.

There is a Jewish Hasidic story:

"When Rabbi Shmelke and his brother visited the maggid [great spiritual master] of Mezritch, they asked him about the following: 'Our sages said certain words which leave us no peace because we do not understand them. They are that men should praise and thank God for suffering just as much as for well-being, and receive it with the same joy. Will you tell us how we are to understand this, rabbi?'

The maggid replied: 'Go to the House of Study. There you will find Zusya smoking his pipe. He will give you the explanation.' They went to the House of Study and put their question to Rabbi Zusya. He laughed. 'You certainly have come to the right man! Better go to someone else rather than me, for I have never experienced suffering.' But the two knew that, from the day he was born to this day, Rabbi Zusya's life had been a web of need and anguish. Then they knew what it was: to accept suffering with love."²

It is a question of attitude. Surrender is a stance of openness to *both* the joys and inevitable sorrows life bestows. Resistance to change inhibits our understanding. Resistance is the knot which binds us to the past and makes us suffer. In yoga these knots are called *granthis*: they create tension in the body and neurosis in the mind. How can we be fresh and alert if our minds are tied to preconceptions of how things should be or what they were? Do we gracefully accept reality with the attitude of surrender or do we indulge our illusions and hopes?

Many of the ills of the modern world are due to the lack of meaning in our lives. What is our purpose? Our receptivity to life and willingness

² Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, The Early Masters, 1956. Thames and Hudson, p.237-8.

to surrender our will and to flow harmoniously with events hinges on our answer to this question. We can see loving surrender to the demands of others in mothers who continually give up their own desires for the well-being of their children. They do it willingly because they feel the joy of their children's development. Though it is frustrating at times, there is never any question of neglecting their responsibility. They give freely with love. The reward is in the giving. To paraphrase Bhagavan, the giver gives to him or her Self. In spiritual surrender the giving is final and complete for one gives oneself.

If we understand that surrender means not imposing our desire on circumstances, we learn to remain in the present and act appropriately. We exercise discrimination and do nothing which may harm us or others. We behave respectfully. We learn our lines and play our part. As we seek to be humble, we leave no mark, like the movement of an active hand through air.

One of the fundamentals of the Sanatana Dharma is sacrifice (*yagna*). Sacrifice is the central act prescribed in the Vedas. It does not mean denial but offering up, letting go. It is not a chore but a joy if one's attitude is in concord with a higher purpose. Harmony exists when there is a still centre that allows an openness of mind and heart. This is not weakness, but strength.

We practice all kinds of spiritual disciplines to create that still centre. Who has not experienced a divine moment when the mind is miraculously still and alert? There are those in history we admire who gave up everything in order to rediscover and deepen that glorious all-embracing consciousness.

Meditation is the act of recollecting our central axis of stillness. The knowledge we derive from enquiring into *who* is thinking or experiencing; the understanding we gain from surrendering to the moment — these cannot be weighed or judged by conventional standards of success. It is a subtle, sustained and positive process. We cannot imitate inner surrender — we can only practise it, much like the child who valiantly tries to walk, and then suddenly after repeated struggles, walks with joy and élan. ▲



A Devotee's Journey

Muruganar's *Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam*

ROBERT BUTLER

Muruganar's work, *Sri Ramana Anubhuti, Part I*, later renamed *Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam*, was written in the last period of Sri Bhagavan's life when his health was failing, to such an extent that the majority of it was never shown to him, although it seems that he did see some of the verses. With hindsight, it does seem, when reading this work, that Muruganar was acutely aware that the sojourn of his beloved master on this earth was nearing its end, and was moved to express his profound gratitude and love in a lyrical outpouring of praise rarely equalled elsewhere in his writings.

Robert Butler lived for some years in Tiruvannamalai studying Tamil at Sri Ramanasramam. He now visits every year and has dedicated his life to understanding and translating Tamil spiritual texts.

In spite of this, as indicated by its original title, *Sri Ramana Anubhuti*, this work is not simply a work of praise to a beloved guru; its aim also is to express the ways in which the realisation, *anubhuti*, conveyed to Muruganar by Bhagavan's grace, transformed and indeed subsumed his entire existence. Despite its relatively loose structure and the fact that it is pre-eminently a work of praise and devotion, the work also eloquently evokes the experience of the devotee who embarks on the journey to discover his true nature. The following short article attempts to illustrate this aspect of the work.

As with the vast majority of spiritual seekers, Muruganar's journey begins with a sense of dissatisfaction with his orientation towards worldly goals and ideals:

I was a learned fool. My flawed mind knew nothing until I came to dwell with him whose glance filled my heart with the light of awareness. Dwelling in that gracious state of peace whose nature is *mauna*, so hard to gain and know, I entered into union with the deathless state of the knowledge of reality. (v.58.)

Indeed, as Muruganar was to discover, spiritual knowledge is as much, or more, a question of un-learning than it is of learning:

...Learned though I was, that unique nature wherein I appeared an untutored simpleton who uses a mark to sign his name, became my own. (v.387.)

Lest anyone should assume that spiritual knowledge is a free good, dispensed at will by the guru, Muruganar makes it clear that the disciple too must play his part in this process. One may argue that realisation is not possible without a teacher, but there can be little doubt that the grace of even an enlightened guru cannot benefit one who is incapable or unwilling to apply himself or herself to the task:

I nurtured the crop of divine love by enriching the field of my heart with the manure of firm resolution and ploughing it well, plucking out the weeds of false ideas as they arose, watering

it with grace and erecting the fence of unflagging Self-enquiry. Thus I came to taste the bliss of Lord Siva. (v.500.)

With spiritual practice come insights, and in this work Muruganar gives vivid expression to a number of these. Here he explains how the mind, when left to its own devices, operates as a self-serving mechanism that will propagate its own existence by identifying itself with the objects that it encounters through the senses:

The nature of *vasanas* [inherited dispositions] is such that we take them to be ourselves. This propensity of the mind [to identify with the objects of habit and desire] is like that of bees that instinctively rise up and rush towards nectar the moment they see it. (v.561.)

To explain why this should occur, Muruganar introduces the reader to the concept of *pramada*, the act of forgetting one's true nature, or put another way, the identification with the body-mind that is the result of that act of forgetting the Self:

Those who through the mental error of *pramada* – the forgetting of one's true nature – go about taking that which is other than consciousness to be the 'I', will go mad and meet their ruin. Locked in the prison of birth engendered by their deeds, their existence will be a sad and weary one. (v.479.)

Clearly then the mind is not to be trusted:

To realise through investigation that the nature [of reality] is beyond the reach of thought, and to slough off that treacherous mental imagination, making the heart our permanent place of abode — that indeed is the pellucid state of supreme *jnana*. (v.563.)

However, a question remains as to how this 'treacherous mental imagination' is to be eliminated, if the mind cannot be trusted. In the section entitled, *The Enquiry that Leads to True Jnana*, Muruganar speaks of how this might be achieved, employing the method of *atma vichara* (investigation of the source of the 'I' sense), as advocated by Bhagavan himself.

The network of thoughts that fills the mind branches out from the perception 'I am the body'. The proper course of action is to ask the question, "What is the place in which this 'I am the body' idea has its source?", and thus reach and become established within the heart. (v.551.)

This section, containing many finely crafted and insightful verses, was published in its entirety in a previous edition of the *Mountain Path* (Vol. 45, No.2, 2008), to which the reader is referred for further reading.

In Bhagavan's radiant presence, however, Muruganar had no need of any such tools to accomplish the task of controlling the mind and senses, as evidenced by the large number of verses that give us some idea of what it must have been like simply to be in that presence:

He who nurtures all things within his own Self through the power of his consciousness eclipsed my own self's firefly glimmer with the blazing sun of his grace. The illusory world of the senses, created by the lustful mind's teeming desires, disappeared completely and as I came to dwell at my spiritual centre, a state of equanimity reigned within my heart. (v.116.)

Muruganar's evocations of Bhagavan as the living exemplar of the Supreme Reality — That which alone is — are lavish in their praise:

Through the joyous power of the true love that took as its goal the feet of my guru, a life lived in the vast space of the Self that shines fearlessly within the heart burgeoned forth within me, as the unfailing awareness that is *mauna* grew stronger and stronger. Birth's suffering was abolished and my eye became fearless as I obtained the vision of grace. (v.5.)

He entered my heart, imparting the state of supreme bliss upon which it is delightful to dwell. Grace flowed sweetly from him as he filled me with the richness of *mauna*, the beautiful life of Sivam that is the experience of the knowledge of the Self. My

eyes' jewel, he stood granting me the vision of the Real that was sweet to my sight. (v.6.)

He is fond of casting himself in the role of the faithful wife, with *Ramana-Siva* as her husband, echoing the conventions of classical Tamil love poetry:

I cannot remain separate from my Lord! When his transcendent reality pursues me far and stands revealed as my own nature, how can I leave and be separated from my lover, the Self, the consciousness that shines in the heart? (v.33.)

These verses, though, are not evidence of a blind devotion which absolves the devotee of any responsibility for his own salvation. In Muruganar there is no question of a conflict between the paths of *bhakti*, devotion, and *jnana*, enquiry. *Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam* shows them to be entirely convergent and interchangeable, as evidenced by the following:

I show my deep gratitude to him who brought about his victorious rule within my heart by maintaining self-attention without a break. There is no other way than this. Benedictions upon the glorious Self that shines alone within the Heart through the non-dual truth of its Self-nature! (v.409.)

Thus Muruganar shows us how, through a combination of intense devotion and enquiry, the antics of the mind will finally come to an end:

If the nature of the mind is closely investigated, the mind will be resolved into consciousness, and give way to the *mauna* of final liberation in the unalloyed clarity of the Self. (v.558.)

This however is a process that has a final twist. It is the person making the journey that must end, not the journey itself:

I saw him as the wise One with the power to destroy the effects of my deeds; little did I realise then that he would destroy me as

well! With a love greater even than that of a mother, he put an end to me, deeming it most beneficial for me. (v.462.)

The loss of the ego-self is a terrifying prospect indeed for the unenlightened devotee. Srimati T. R. Kanakamma records in her Tamil biography of Muruganar how, on the occasion of two of his early visits to the Ashram, he felt compelled to flee the presence of Bhagavan due the intense fear he felt, as Bhagavan's physical form became incandescent with light and the world around Muruganar and his own sense of identity melted away. To step into the seeming void beyond the mind and senses requires a leap of faith:

Know that those glorious feet which lie beyond the realm of thought are perceived differently according to the minds that reflect upon them. To those who affirm their reality, they are the light of the eternal, and to those who deny it, they are the dark void of nothingness. (v.595.)

Such Muruganar tells us, is the paradox of the devotee's arduous journey:

They are the feet that cannot be gained without the loss of the very self that set out to attain them in the first place through its own efforts. (v.852.)

Muruganar's verses show us how, having prepared himself through the assiduous application of Self-enquiry, he was able, through the power of love and devotion, to make that final leap of faith, and allow the knot of the mind that bound him to his physical body to be finally and irrevocably severed:

The Noble Lord, who dwells in the auspicious *mauna* that shines as the life of transcendent grace, took my very heart for his temple. As he cut through the knot [*chit-jada-granthi*] that heart grew and grew, expanding and blossoming to become the pure expanse [of the Self]. (v.110.)

Translator's note: In late 1992, I was approached by the late A.R. Natarajan to translate into English the long out-of-print Tamil text of *Sri Ramana Anubuti, Part I*. This was eventually published in 1998 under the title *Non-Dual Consciousness, The Flood Tide of Bliss, Sri Ramana Anubuti*. Meanwhile, in 2004, Sri Ramanasramam republished the Tamil text in the revised format established by Muruganar himself with the help of Sadhu Om, now retitled *Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam*; this revision was unpublished and unknown to me at the time of the original English translation. In 2006, therefore, I undertook the task of retranslating the work in its new format, an undertaking which enabled me to remedy many of the shortcomings of the original translation, and to bring to the work the fruits of what knowledge and experience of Tamil and of the works of Sri Bhagavan and Muruganar I had gained in the intervening years. This task is now complete and I am proud to be able to offer to devotees this glowing portrait of Sri Bhagavan and his teachings as seen through the eyes of his most renowned devotee, Mukavai Kanna Muruganar.¹ ▲

¹ The Indian edition is on sale in the Sri Ramanasramam bookstore at a cost of Rs. 150 per copy. For devotees outside India, copies can be purchased through Lulu, an online self-publishing company, either as a downloadable e-book or in printed form. The link is: <http://www.lulu.com/content/1077675#>.



Alexander Shivalov

The Mandukya Upanisad

An Introduction

PAUL LOKE

According to tradition, the *Mandukya Upanisad*¹— a great work expounding the quintessence of *Advaitic* thought — was revealed to Varuna² who was said to have assumed the form of a frog (*Manduka*) to felicitate Lord *Narayana*. Indeed, its inclusion as one of the principal *Upanisads* is a testament to its significance. Furthermore, not only has this short work of twelve cryptic *mantras* been commented on by eminent teachers,³ such as Sankara,

¹ One of the *Upanisads* of the *Atharvanaveda*.

² *Varuna* is the deity who presides over water.

³ *Upanisad-brahma-yogin* who wrote commentaries on 108 *Upanisads*, described the *Mandukya Upanisad* as ‘the essence of all the *Upanisads*’ (*sarva-Vedanta-saristha*).

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Madhva, etc., but its importance for the realization of the highest truth is eulogized in the *Muktika-Upanisad*, where it is declared that ‘The *Mandukya* alone is sufficient for the final release of those who seek liberation....’⁴

In his commentary on the *Upanisad* (as part of the *Mandukya-karika*, a gloss by *Gaudapada*), Sankara points out, before commencing on the commentary proper, that the benefit to be derived by the study of the *Mandukya Upanisad* is the direct experience (*anubhava*) of non-duality. In other words, what is gained is *advaita-bhava*, which in essence is nothing but the falsification of that phenomenal existence characterized by the matrix of pluralistic relations. In the words of the *Upanisad*, this negation of the world of names and forms is called *prapanca-upasamam*.⁵ With all the adventitious attributes⁶ (*adhyarupa*), such as the three bodies⁷ sublated (*apavada*), the ultimate ground of pure consciousness (*svarupa-caitanya*), bereft of all illusory superimpositions, shines forth in its full effulgence. This change in vision, from the many (a distinct feature of empirical life or *vyavaharika*) to the one (absolute or *paramarthika*) can only be realized through the knowledge of Brahman revealed in the sacred texts of the *Upanisads*.

It is similar to the restoration to health of a sick person through the administration of appropriate medication. The holy scripture is likened to the medication which relieves the person of the affliction. And in the spiritual context, the affliction is *avidya* or ignorance, with the only difference is that through knowledge of the *Upanisads* the relief is permanent. With ignorance removed, the reality falsely imputed to the world is abrogated and the person

⁴ *Muktika Upanisad* 1, 26-29.

⁵ See *mantra* 7.

⁶ Provisionally accepted as real from the standpoint of relativity.

⁷ These are the gross body (*sthula-sarira*), the subtle body (*sukhma-sarira*) and the causal body (*karana-sarira*). They are in turn made from five interdependent sheaths (*kosas*), namely, the physical sheath (*annamaya-kosa*), the vital-air sheath (*pranamaya-kosa*), the mental sheath (*manomaya-kosa*), the intellectual sheath (*vijnanamaya-kosa*) and the blissful sheath (*anandamaya-kosa*).

is restored to his original nature; regaining the oneness with the Self which was never really lost. As will be seen, the role of the *Mandukya Upanisad* in this regard is unique compared to the other scriptural texts.

The twelve *mantras* of the *Mandukya Upanisad* are strung together to breathe life into the most sublime and timeless truth enunciated by the *rsis* of yore. The *Upanisad* can be broadly looked at as having two sections. The first seven *mantras* provide a comprehensive examination of the totality of human experience. It is the undeniable experience of every person that temporal life is characterized by the ever-changing states of waking, dream and deep sleep. However, someone who is more sensitive becomes alert to the presence of an underlying principle which enables the cognition of change not only within the waking state (the flux of thoughts and events), but also change from one state to another. And to enable this awareness of moving from the waking state to that of sleep and then drifting into the dream state or emerging from sleep to wakefulness, there must necessarily be a sentient principle that is ever present and that permeates all these states. It could well have been such empirical observations that prompted the *rsis* to develop a framework closely reflecting the conditions of human life, integrating the varied experiences on the phenomenal plane with the unitary reality subsisting in them.

The result was a theory positing four *padas* (quarters or aspects) of the Self (*Atma*).⁸ Just as the illusory snake which makes its appearance

⁸ It is worth noting that some semblance of a four-*pada* theory of the Self was already in currency at the time of the *Rg-veda*. In the tenth *mandala*, it is stated, “Thus is his greatness. But *Purusa Purusa* (synonymous with the Self) is even greater. All things are one-fourth of him; the immortals in heaven are the three quarter.” And in the *Maitri Upanisad*, one finds a further development of this doctrine but not in the sophisticated form so clearly and cogently expounded in the *Mandukya Upanisad*. The text found in the final verse (7.11) of the *Maitri Upanisad* reads, “He who sees with the eye (i.e. the Self in the waking state), who moves in dream (i.e. the Self in the dream state), who is in deep sleep (i.e. the Self in the state of deep sleep), and he who is beyond deep sleep (i.e. *Turiya* or the Fourth), these are a person’s four distinct conditions. Of these, the Fourth is greater than the rest.”

when the *asraya* (substratum) of the rope is not known, the *padas* are in fact errors in perception arising when the ultimate ground of one's being is not realized. Therefore, with the removal of the spurious names and forms which condition and differentiate the world into categories,⁹ such as the macro (the total environment), the micro (the individual), the gross (the waking state), the subtle (the dream state) and the causal (the deep sleep-state), all that remains is the unconditioned Self alone, *Turiya* or the Fourth (state) in the words of the *Upanisad*. What comes and goes cannot be real. Truth or Reality, on the other hand, can never be conditioned or negated. And the message of the *Mandukya* is clear: go beyond the ephemeral and abide in the ever-existent *Atma* and everything will be known, since the Self is verily Brahman (*Ayam Atma Brahma*).¹⁰ All it takes is a change in vision. But this change is much more than just a superficial endorsement or a mere intellectual understanding of the *Upanisadic* truth. To see unity in the manifoldness entails a fundamental overhaul of all the cherished values and beliefs of the person, acquired not only in the present life, but from countless previous births. Indeed, it goes far beyond the intellect. Hence, for ignorance (*avidya*) to be annihilated, knowledge (*vidya*) has to be internalized, becoming one's very nature.

The second section, like the seven *mantras* of the first, also addresses the same subject — realization of the Self, the highest goal (*purusartha*) of human beings — but from a different perspective. Here the sacred symbol of *Om*¹¹ is introduced and examined. The significance of *Om*, as the basis of all sounds/words and therefore all objects, was pointed out in the first *mantra* of the *Upanisad*. '*Aum iti Brahma* (*Aum* is Brahman), *Aum itidamsarvam* (*'Aum* is this all' i.e. the universe)',¹² declares the *Taittiriya Upanisad* dwelling upon

⁹ All these are mere notions having no substantiality of their own. Their relative existence is 'borrowed' from the ultimate ground from which they appear.

¹⁰ *Mandukya Upanisad mantra 2*. One of the major texts of the *Upanisads* (*mahavakyas*).

¹¹ *Om* first occurs in the *Taittiriya Samhita* of the *Krishna Yajur Veda*, 111.2.9.6 where it is called *Pranava*.

¹² *Taittiriya Upanisad* 1.8.1.

the contemplation of the *Pranava*. And given the affirmation of the non-difference of *Atma* and Brahman as expounded in the second *mantra*, *Om* verily is *Atma* too. Once this *Atma-Brahman* equation has been established, the remaining *mantras*, particularly the eighth to the eleventh, take the *sadhaka* on a different path. It is recognized that not everyone will take to the discriminative enquiry of the first section.

Indeed, for those who have pure minds and keen intellects, the first seven *mantras* are sufficient in themselves to bring about realization of the highest truth. It is, however, important to point out here that in order to gain the knowledge taught by the *Upanisads*, which is indirect and inferential in nature, and enable it to do its work of eradicating ignorance and bringing about the direct and immediate experience of Brahman, the seeker must be equipped with *sadhana-catustaya*. These are the four prerequisites for successful practice: i) discrimination between the real (or eternal) and the unreal (or transient) (*nityanityavastuviveka*); ii) detachment (*ihamutrarthabhoga viraga*); iii) a group of six disciplines (*samadisampat*) comprising a) control of the senses, b) renunciation, etc.; and iv) the intense desire for liberation (*mumuksutva*).

Indeed, the study of scripture is but one of two wings. The *sadhana-catustaya*, which produce a pure, focussed and discerning mind, is the other wing. And in the absence of either, the flight to liberty, freed of the shackles of ignorance, which keep one mired in worldly life, can never take off.

For those who do not have the required mental purity or penchant for philosophical reflection, the meditation on *Om* (*Om-kara-upasana*) is presented as an alternative. A person who is not accustomed to an introspective life would find the provision of a fixed locus in the symbol of *Om*, on which the mind can direct its thoughts, more amenable and easier to handle. But even with this approach, the *Upanisad* has made provision for knowledge-based enquiry, since knowledge (*jnana*) is ultimately the only antidote to ignorance.

This point, that the meditation on the symbol *Om* as Brahman cannot vouchsafe the direct experience of Brahman, is reiterated by

Sankara in his commentary on the *Brahma-sutra*, where the attainment gained from *Omkara* meditation is seen as only one stage in a longer journey towards final release.¹³ In the *Mandukya Upanisad*, *Omkara* is presented as suitable for both meditation (*upasana*) as well as knowledge-based enquiry (*jnana*). In the former, the sound components (*matras*) of *Om* ('*akara*', '*ukara*' and '*makara*') are meditated upon as identical with the aspects (*padas*) of the Self (*Vaisvanara*, *Taijasa* and *Prajna*).¹⁴ In the ninth *mantra* (the first of three *mantras* given to the exposition of *Omkara-upasana*) for instance, the *sadhaka* is asked to meditate on the '*akara*' component of the *Om* upon which is superimposed *Vaisvanara*, the Self in the waking state. In other words, the *sadhaka* visualises the entire gross world while maintaining one's thoughts on the locus of '*akara*'. The rationale for equating the *matra* with the *pada* is based on certain common features. '*Akara*' is the first *matra* of *Om* and *Vaisvanara* is the first *pada* of the Self. The two terms therefore share the trait of being first as well as being all-pervasive.

Notwithstanding, the first primary benefits of any meditation is the attainment of worldly gains, it is envisioned by the *Upanisad* that over time the practice brings about a positive change in the individual. The practitioner is weaned from extrovertedness and the *sadhaka* is rendered fit, in terms of mental purity and discriminative power for taking up the higher endeavour of contemplating the soundless *Om* (*amatra*), wherein all the *matras* (and the states of

¹³ Sankara's text reads, 'The result vouchsafed for one meditating on Brahman with the help of *Om*, as constituted by three letters Aum, is the attainment of the world of Brahman, and the emergence subsequently of complete realization by stages. In this way this is meant for leading to emancipation by stages, so that there is nothing faulty' (*Brahma-sutra* 1.3.13). The 'world of Brahman' belongs to the realm of the conditioned, i.e. to the Lower Brahman. In relation to this, the pure unconditioned Brahman is termed the Higher Brahman.

¹⁴ *Vaisvanara* is the Self in the waking state subsisting in all the gross bodies. *Vaisvanara* can be said to be the 'collective' waker. And at the micro level, *Visva* is the Self subsisting in the individual waker. Similarly, the Self in the dream state and causal state is known as *Taijasa* and *Prajna* respectively..

consciousness, namely waking, dream and deep sleep) have been resolved. Here there is no constant cogitation on a single notion superimposed on the given locus. Instead, the mind is made to abide in the silence which is clearly understood to be the substratum supporting and permeating the entire illusory phenomenal existence. Therefore, unlike effort-based meditation, what is recommended in the twelfth and final *mantra* of the *Upanisad* is the natural abidance¹⁵ in the pure underlying consciousness, an abidance which comes with knowledge and understanding. This contemplation on one's true nature is what is meant by *nididhyasana*.¹⁶

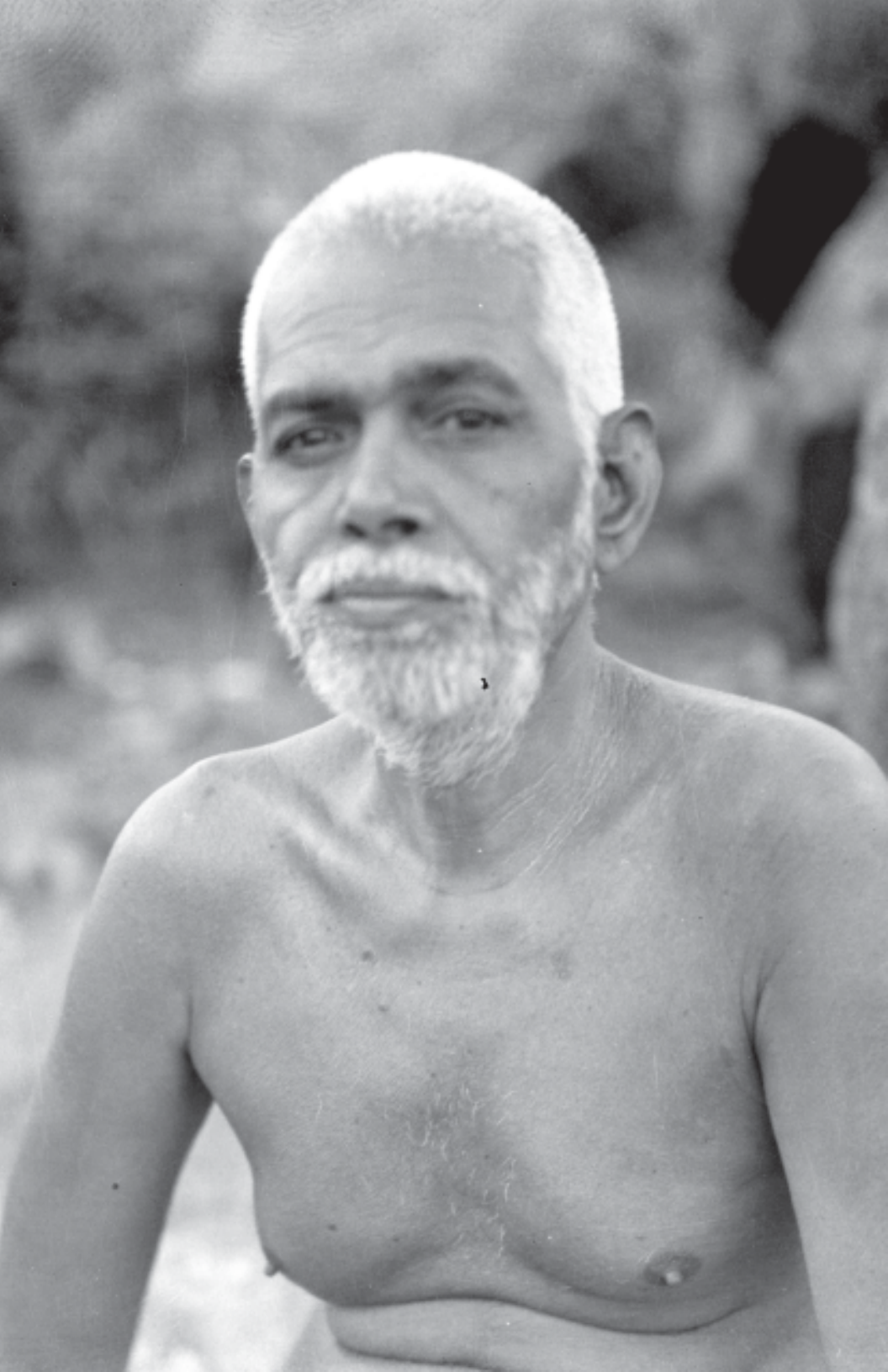
It is beyond any doubt that the *Mandukya Upanisad* is an exceptional work containing the highest teachings of the *Advaitic* tradition and presenting them in a systematic, logical and concise manner. Therefore, for the suitably qualified seeker who wishes to 'leap-frog', as it were, from the hollow relative existence of mundane living to the unconditioned plenitude of the absolute, the *Upanisad* is an indispensable companion. Indeed, when handled by a teacher who has true wisdom, it is a lethal instrument assured of severing 'the knot of the heart and dispelling all doubts'¹⁷ and giving the student the vision where 'there is no cessation of the seeing of the seer.'¹⁸ ▲

¹⁵ This abidance, once established, is an all-expansive unitary experience and it is verily *Turiya*. Cognitions and thoughts appear but there is no more than the mere witness of their rising and passing. In the absence of judgement, the Brahman-vid does not react and even when he acts it is never out of attachment or aversion.

¹⁶ As part of the *upadesa* (teaching) to his wife *Maitreyi*, who wanted to know the way to immortality, *Yajnavalkya* empathically points out that, "The Self alone should verily be seen or realized (*drastavyah*), heard of (*srotavyo*), reflected on (*mantavyo*) and contemplated upon (*nididhyasitavyah*)." *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 2.4.5.

¹⁷ *Mundaka Upanisad* 2.2.9.

¹⁸ *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 4.3.23.



VIDEO INTERVIEW

My Early Years with Bhagavan

BANU SHARMA

I am the son of Sri T.K. Sundersa Iyer, who was a teacher in the Municipal High School, Tiruvannamalai. From the time he was a schoolboy my father was an ardent devotee of Bhagavan and used to visit him at Virupaksha Cave. Sadly, I lost my mother when I was just five days old. As my family was very poor, my father was unable to take care of me and my mother's brother's family was not interested in taking care of me either as they were still grieving over their sister's death. Finally, after being appealed to by other relatives, one of my mother's brothers, Sri Kannikeshwar Iyer, a banker in Tiruvannamalai, came forward to care for me. I was brought up at Sanipoondi, my grandmother's village, where I was breast-fed by all the village ladies irrespective of caste and creed. Even the shepherds who supplied milk to our house used to give us extra milk and curd. This was narrated to me by my grandmother in later years.

I studied in my village up to the 7th year and then came to Tiruvannamalai to continue my studies with my father. In the meantime my father married again and they had two children Arunsharma and Sankari.

I was not a petted child in our family, but as I used to visit Sri Ramanasramam with my father, I would dine with Bhagavan and even used to climb over his back and play with him. In those days there were no restrictions with regards to touching or playing with Bhagavan.

My father, though not a graduate, was allowed to take English classes for the final class of the school and he also acted as a translator for the visiting foreign devotees to the ashram and worked for the government on translation assignments. My father was my school teacher at the municipal school. Interestingly I was not promoted to the next class by him as I was a poor student! This being the case, my father thought he should make an effort to secure a good future for me and hence spoke to one of the visiting devotees of Bhagavan called Maurice Frydman, who had opened a factory in Bangalore in 1933. My father also spoke to another relative of mine, Professor N.R. Krishnamurthy who lectured at a college in Madurai, and he too responded favourably. When my father told me of these two proposals, I was just a boy of 15 and unable to make a decision and so I went to Bhagavan to ask his opinion. Sri Bhagavan replied, "Why! You can go to Bangalore." So that day, without the knowledge of my relatives, my father brought me to the ashram and the sarvadhakari permitted me to stay with him that night and the next day I started for Bangalore with Maurice Frydman.

Frydman took complete care of me and asked me to go round the factory and choose a job suitable for me. I thought I would like to work in the tool room, but he told me that I was too weak physically and appointed me to be his personal clerk. While I was in Bangalore, Bhagavan often enquired about me with my father. This was conveyed to me by my father when I went to Tiruvannamalai after six months. When I was 17 years old, my marriage proposal came up and I hesitated as I was too young and asked Bhagavan about this. He replied that I

could get married. In those days my monthly salary was Rs.28. Once I ran up a debt of Rs.28. by purchasing on credit for my family's needs and I wrote about this to my father. As usual my father showed all my letters to Bhagavan and so this letter too was read by Bhagavan. During my next visit I prostrated to Bhagavan as he was coming down from Arunachala — when I got up, Bhagavan asked, "What, you have incurred a debt of Rs.28? A debt is like cotton and fire together." But I could not understand the meaning. When I came back to Bangalore, on payday, the accountant of the factory, who was a good friend of mine voluntarily offered me Rs.30 and told me to clear the debt immediately, he also gave me the option of paying this money back at Rs.2 per month, and advised me not to purchase anything on credit and not to incur any debts from then on. I followed this to the letter and till today I have never incurred any debt. This I consider the grace of Bhagavan.

In 1940, a Dutch academic, Dr. Mees, who was a friend of Frydman came to Bangalore and told Frydman about his philosophical doubts and the need of a competent person to clear them. Frydman told him to go to Tiruvannamalai and assured him that Bhagavan would clear all his doubts. As he was hesitant about travelling alone, Frydman asked me to go along with him and while on our way to Tiruvannamalai, I requested Dr. Mees to write down all his doubts so that they could be cleared with Bhagavan. We came to the presence of Bhagavan around 8:30am and there we sat silently until the lunch bell rang at 11 am. While we were sitting in the hall, several people asked questions and Bhagavan answered, but Dr. Mees never raised his doubts. When we left for lunch, I asked him why he did not ask any questions, to which Dr. Mees replied, "I got all my doubts cleared, just by the darshan of Bhagavan."

Dr. Mees also wanted to visit the Arunachaleswara temple in town. At that time non-Hindus were not permitted to enter the temple sanctum, I purchased an 8-feet dhoti and made him wear it as a caste Brahmin would wear (*panchakatcham*) and asked him to smear his forehead with vibhuti and took him to the temple. He was so engrossed in the grandeur of the temple that I could not drag him out for a long

time. Dr. Mees offered me the chance to go to Holland for higher studies, but my father declined the offer.

Frydman treated me like his own child and took care of all my comforts and also taught me English. Later he took sannyas as Swami Bharatananada and continued in his factory services until he left for Bombay.

In 1947, on the way back from Tirupati where we had taken my second son for his tonsure ceremony we alighted at Tiruvannamalai and my stepmother handed over the child to Bhagavan who smeared his head with vibhuti with his own hands.

My sister Sankari when she was eight years old, while playing outside the home near a bush, happened to pick up a oomathangai that bit. Immediately she became agitated and started crying, "Snake!" This happened one evening around 7pm and as usual my father was at the ashram. My stepmother became panic stricken and so I brought my sister to Bhagavan. Bhagavan asked her to sit in the hall and she became quiet. When she came out she again started to cry, "Snake snake." I took her back to Bhagavan and reported the matter. Bhagavan called for the ashram doctor Dr. Shiva Rao, and asked him to give a medicine to induce vomiting. After this treatment she was completely cured.

In 1945, I was afflicted by typhoid and was laid up in my father's place in Tiruvannamalai. My father, who used to visit his house only about once in three days, didn't come home for a long time, so I sent word through my brother to fetch him to our place. It seems the same morning Bhagavan asked my father about my ailment and if he had visited me. That evening he came home with vibhuti prasad and applied it to my forehead and soon I started recovering.

On the night of 12th April 1950, I had a dream that Bhagavan had left his body and I told my wife that I was leaving for Tiruvannamalai. When I reached the ashram, my father was surprised to see me and enquired about my sudden visit. When I told him of my dream, he exclaimed, "We are all here with our fingers crossed and you come here with this news!" Because of the dream, I was blessed with the last darshan of Bhagavan. I was also one of the blessed persons to carry

Bhagavan's body to the place of the present samadhi. We filled a white cloth bag containing the body of Sri Bhagavan with camphor vibhuti and bilva leaves, among other things, and lowered it into the samadhi pit. Had I missed this opportunity, I would have regretted it for the rest of my life, for in a small way I was, by this deed, able to pay tribute to Bhagavan for all the kindness and blessings he had bestowed on me and my family over the years.

I continued to work at Mr. Frydman's factory until 1956 when, along with Sri Krishnamurthy, I started my own factory. We were involved in the super-structural aspects of building factories at Bangalore and were quite successful.

Had it not been for the grace of Bhagavan I would not have been able, with the minimal education I had received, to lead a comfortable life, educate and marry my three sons and five daughters into decent and secure families. But for Bhagavan's grace I would not have succeeded in all my endeavours. Even now, I get dreams of prostrating to Bhagavan. ▲



Alexander Suvailov

KEYWORD

Jivanmukti

JOHN GRIMES

Sanskrit: Jivanmukti: Liberated while embodied.

Sri Ramana has been called a Sage, a *jnani*, a *jivanmukta*, an embodiment of the one non-dual Self. The mystery and the wonder is that a person can *seemingly* be both beyond and within duality at the same time. A Sage is thus in, what appears to others to be, two mutually contradictory states at the same time.

Critics say that the concept of being-liberated-while-living is a contradiction in terms. How can the individual, who is embodied, coexist with liberation, which, by the critic's definition, is free from embodiment? How can the body, which is due to accumulated past actions (*prarabdha-karma*), continue after the attainment of knowledge when it is acknowledged that ignorance and all *karmas* are dissolved with the attainment of knowledge? Critics contend, 1) If liberation is the destruction of ignorance, how does the physical body continue to exist and function (since it is the effect of ignorance)? 2) If liberation

is an accomplished fact, then why speak of the destruction of bondage and the attainment of liberation? 3) Why is a distinction made between liberation-with-form (*jivanmukti*), and without-form (*videhamukti*)?

Sankara, as well as Sri Ramana, replied that upon Self-realization, all *karmas* are destroyed. The liberated individual need not wait until his *prarabdha-karma* is exhausted (through enjoyment or suffering) before freedom occurs. Whether the physical body persists or not is of no consequence to the liberated individual. One who is free appears, for all outward appearances, to act in terms of agency and purpose. But, such a one is no longer subject to this delusion. Having no desires, such an individual does not act in the common sense of the term. Latent impressions may impel actions, but there is “no one home” to whom such actions can be attributed. Like a fan that has been switched off, momentum continues to impel the blades around until their previous impetus has exhausted itself. It is said that when a *jivanmukta's karmas* have been exhausted, the physical body drops. But, to attribute actions to a *jivanmukta* is a misunderstanding.

The concept of *jivanmukti* is certainly one of the most original and inspirational ideas that India has contributed to the world. Of all the Indian philosophical systems that propound *jivanmukti*, only Advaita and to a certain extent Sankhya, accept the notion of *jivanmukti*. But Advaita Vedanta is unique in that it is the only school that must *necessarily* embrace the concept. That is, doctrinally, Advaita's metaphysics has a built-in necessity that *demand*s the concept. If one grants Advaita's presuppositions, *jivanmukti* is not only a logical consequence, but necessarily so.

The word ‘*jivanmukti*’ itself does not occur in the canonical texts of Vedanta. It is not found in the *Vedas* or in the earlier *Upanisads*, the *Bhagavadgita*, or the *Brahmasutras*. However, the concept of liberated-while-living can be found scattered throughout other literature that either directly or indirectly point to the idea. For instance:

While I (Vamadeva) was in the womb I realized (the Self and subsequently lived a long and productive life).

A mortal becomes immortal, attains Brahman, even here, when the knots of the heart are destroyed.

He who knows that which is set in the cave of the heart, he, here on earth, cuts the knot of ignorance.

Brahman-knowledge takes place even in this life.¹

Sri Ramana maintained that the Self and liberation have the *same* meaning. This implies that the term ‘*jivanmukti*’ is both relative and redundant. The qualifier ‘*jivan*’ is unnecessary. A *mukta* is a *mukta*, with or without a body. It has been said that a knower of the Self with a body is a *jivanmukta* and when that person sheds the body, such a one attains *videhamukti*. But this difference exists only for the onlooker, not the *mukta*. As Bhagavan remarked, “*Mukti* is synonymous with the Self. *Jivanmukti* and *videhamukti* are all for the ignorant. The *jnani* is not conscious of *mukti* or *bandha*. Bondage, liberation, and orders of *mukti* are all said for an *ajnani* in order that ignorance might be shaken off. There is only *mukti* and nothing else.”²

The distinctive insight of Sri Ramana is simple to state and even more devastating in its implications: “Liberation is our very nature. We are That.”³ To unpack this *sutra*-like insight is to make explicit what is implied. In other words, the individual is the Absolute, the seeker is the sought — not sometime later, in a place above and beyond, but here and now. Thus, the concept of liberation-while-living is spoken of to an *ajnani*, but in actual fact there is only the Self and all such designations are but for those who do not know and experience this. Any seeking obviously exemplifies a denial of the presence of the sought and necessarily implies ignorance of what-is.

Some people believe that a *jivanmukta* must live in two states or planes of existence at the same time: the empirical plane and the trans-empirical plane. People observe that a *mukta* moves about in the world and observe that the *mukta* apparently sees the same objects others

¹ *Aitareya Upanisad* 2.1.5-6.; *Kausitaki Upanisad* 2.3.1.; *Mundaka Upanisad* 2.1.10.; *Brahma Sutra* 3.4.51.

² M. Venkataramiah (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1978. §266, p.221.

³ Devaraja Mudaliar, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2006. 24-12-45, p. 76.

see, i.e. other individuals, tables, monkeys, etc. It is not as if the *mukta* does not see them. Thus, people conclude, since the Sage sees both the world and objects therein, as well as the Self, must not he dwell on two planes at once? Bhagavan replied: “You say that the *jnani* sees the path, treads it, comes across obstacles, avoids them, etc. In whose eye-sight is all this, in the *jnani's* or yours? He sees only the Self and *all in* the Self. For instance, you see a reflection in the mirror *and* the mirror. You know the mirror to be the reality and the picture in it a mere reflection. Is it necessary that in order to see the mirror, we should cease to see the reflection in it?”⁴ Sri Ramana said: “Coming here, some people do not ask about themselves. They ask, ‘Does the *jivanmukta* see the world? Is he affected by *karma*? What is liberation, after being disembodied? Is one liberated only after being disembodied or even while alive in the body? Should the body of the Sage resolve itself in light or disappear from view in any other manner? Can he be liberated though the body is left behind as a corpse?’ Their questions are endless. Why worry oneself in so many ways? Does liberation consist in knowing these things? Therefore, I say to them, ‘Leave liberation alone. Is there bondage? Know this. See yourself first and foremost.’”⁵

When asked the difference between *jivanmukti* and *videhamukti*, Bhagavan replied:

“There is no difference. For those who ask, it is said, ‘A *jnani* with a body is a *jivanmukta* and he attains *videhamukti* when he sheds the body.’ But this difference exists only for the onlooker, not for the *jnani*. His state is the same before and after the body is dropped. We think of the *jnani* as a human form or as being in that form; but he knows that he is the Self, the one reality which is both inside and out, and which is not bounded by any form or shape.”⁶

Sri Ramana once remarked to a seeker: “What is your idea of a *jnani*? Is he the body or something different? If he is something apart

from the body, how can he be affected by the body?”⁷ Hence, these two, bondage and liberation, are imaginations. They do not pertain to the Self. How can there be any imaginations of the partless, actionless, taintless, non-dual Reality that is like the sky? The ultimate Truth is that there is neither birth, death, bondage, nor seeker with a burning-desire-for-liberation, none liberated.

Some may contend that there is activity even for the liberated, that is, a *jivanmukta* may seem to be engaged in various activities. However, this contention is based on a mistaken view. Since ignorance, which is the cause of bondage, has been destroyed, the embodied state of the liberated one and the so-called activities in which he is supposed to be engaged *from the standpoint of others*, do not bind him anymore. Since the root cause of activity has been destroyed, the residual *karmanas* that account for the continuance of his body have already been made ineffective. Sri Ramana remarked: “People surmise the existence of the pure mind in the *jivanmukta* and the personal God. They ask how he could otherwise live and act. But this is only a concession to argument. The pure mind is in fact the Absolute Consciousness. The object to be witnessed and the witness finally merge together and Absolute Consciousness alone remains. It is not a state of blank or ignorance but is the Supreme Self.”⁸

How can one tell whether a person is a *jivanmukta* or not? Truly speaking, unless one is a *mukta* oneself, one cannot tell. If a person still functions at the mental level, all one would see is the body and personality. One cannot identify a *mukta* by what (s)he says or does because these are only mental judgements. A *mukta* only can identify another *mukta* because him or herself has no mind.

Earlier we observed that there are no stages or degrees of realization. A *jivanmukta* lives permanently in an effortless, thought-free state. However, Bhagavan sometimes spoke of three levels of experience when the mind has been sufficiently purified. *Savikalpa samadhi* is an

⁴ Ibid., 6-3-46. p.167- 68.

⁵ M. Venkataramiah (comp.), op.cit., §578, p.534.

⁶ D. Mudaliar, op.cit., 9-1-46. p. 101.

⁷ Ibid., 22-3-46. p.182.

⁸ A. Osborne (ed.), *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, 2008. p.198. See also M. Venkataramiah (comp.), op.cit., §68. p.76.

advanced stage of concentration in which the mind, by constant effort, continuously holds on to the object it is meditating on. *Kevala nirvikalpa samadhi* occurs when the mind temporarily disappears and leaves a true experience of the Self in which there is no awareness of the body or the world. However, since this state is temporary, it is not Self-realisation. Although the sense-organs, including the mind, have ceased to function, the mind has not yet been destroyed. The final state or *mukti (sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi)* is that state wherein the mind or 'I-thought' (*aham vritti*) has been permanently destroyed.

Some *muktas* say that a person whose mind completely subsides into the Heart for a short time can talk like a *jivanmukta*. Their experience of the Self is the same as that of an enlightened person. However, their 'I'-thought is not yet destroyed and will re-emerge at some future time. Such an experience is not the final state because it is not permanent. To be a *jivanmukta* is to dwell permanently in the Self and only such a person is truly capable of recognizing it. ▲

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's Commentary

Verse Twenty Two

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 22. The Self gives the Light of Consciousness to the inner equipment (*antahkarana*) and remains enveloped by that and shines there. The only way of union with Pure Consciousness is to turn the mind within and lodge it in the Self. Can there be any other way (for merger with God) than this? (No).

Commentary

The previous verse explained that the Self cannot be seen or experienced using the ordinary approach of the subject-object technique; that is, there being a 'seer' and 'the seen'. True 'seeing' is realizing ones' identity with the Self. The inner instrument *antahkarana*

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consists of the fourfold apparatus of ego, mind, intellect and store-house consciousness (*chit*).

This inner instrument is itself a manifestation of the Self. The *antahkarana* is aware of all the phenomena. However, this awareness is not due to its own inherent power. It derives its power of awareness from the Self. The Self, having bestowed consciousness to this inner instrument, remains concealed at the source of manifestation where it shines. Here, we can take recourse to the analogy of sun to explain this mystery. The rays from the sun reveal and illumine the whole solar system. Yet, the very rays prevent us from directly seeing the disc of the sun. Similarly, the *antahkarana*, which is merely a ray from the Self, veils our 'seeing' from the very Self from which all activity derives. Thus the limitless consciousness of the Self is obscured by the limited *antahkarana*.

In other words, God (who is referred to in this verse as the Lord) is 'He that shines in the intellect, endowing it with the light of consciousness'. The light of consciousness is that which is recognised in the higher intellect that falsely thinks it alone is the source of illumination. God or Self is the source of the consciousness that manifests in the intellect. Thus we should understand that the mechanism of the intellect cannot be used to know the Self because the consciousness, which is fundamental to the intellect's existence, is independent of the intellect and indistinguishable from the Self. That is, if the intellect tries to know the Self, it will either be obliterated or will erroneously think and know Him as different from the Self. The right knowing of God is knowing Him as the Self. It is not a process of knowing but of Being in identity with Him.

Ultimately the intellect itself is an obstacle to that state of Being. So long as the intellect functions as a separate identity, that State of Unity will not arise. He that desires that State, should turn the 'search-light' of intellect inward, and seek his identity with the Self within the heart. Then the True Lord, as the Self, will shine. Primordial ignorance will then be instantaneously annihilated. In this verse Bhagavan is saying that if by the process of introversion,

you turn the mind inward and intensify the search to trace its origin, you can 'see' the Self. This process is known as *nididhyaasana*.

If you transcend the mind's fluctuations and make the mind dissolve in pure consciousness — by being one with It, is God-realization or Self-realization. Bhagavan says that this is the direct path for Realization.

The experience of difference will appear as real as long as the mind or intellect survives and the ego is not extinguished. To prepare and purify the mind, devotion to Him is performed in all its varieties—*puja* (ritualistic worship), chanting, singing His glories etc. The mind expresses itself here as ideas, feeling and thoughts related to God. However, the consciousness here still remains at the level of expression or feeling. Bhagavan has said that the highest devotion is to understand God as the Self and then seek Him by the direct method of turning the mind inward.

This inner instrument or *antahkarana* has to retreat and sink in pure consciousness, even as bubbles on the surface of the ocean burst and become one with it. In the eloquent simile of Bhagavan in *akshara mana malai* (verse 101), it is like the ice-cube dissolving itself in the ocean. The molecules of the ice-cube and the ocean are of same chemical stuff — two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. The difference is that the ocean is unlimited and the ice-cube is limited. Once the ice-cube-consciousness goes and the ocean-consciousness envelops it, the ice-cube is one with the ocean.

So far, out of the triad of the entities enumerated — the individual soul, God and the world — two have been expounded in the previous verses. The truth of the soul is explained in the next verse. ▲



The Teaching of the *Guru Gita*

Part One: Principles of Guru Yoga

N. A. MOHAN RAO

Among the eighteen principal *Puranas* attributed to Veda Vyasa, the *Skanda Purana* is by far the largest.¹ It is held in great esteem by spiritual seekers for its extensive treatment of various aspects of the higher reality and *sadhana*. Bhagavan's frequent citing of anecdotes and teachings from this *Purana* corroborates this fact.

¹ *Puranas* (pronounced *Purâna-s*) are ancient Hindu texts that aim to keep one's mind occupied on God with a succession of mythological stories and to convey spiritual truths in an unauthoritative tone. The *Skanda Purana* has 81,100 verses, as compared to the popular *Bhagavatam* with its 18,000 verses.

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According to a legend in this *Purana*, Lord Siva and his consort Parvati were once seated on Mount Kailas², surrounded by eminent *rishis*³ and others. Parvati asked Siva to explain to her the nature and greatness of the Guru.⁴ Siva gladly consented, because the rishis would also receive the teaching and through them it would percolate to deserving seekers. His teaching, contained in 351 *slokas*, has come to be known as *Sri Guru Gita*.

The *Guru Gita* touches on practically every aspect of the subject of 'the Guru'. Many of its verses are, apart from being instructive, so full of poetic beauty that they resonate in our minds long after we hear them. Scores of soul-stirring panegyrics to the Guru dot the text from beginning to end. Naturally, these verses have been extensively cited in spiritual literature. Even a cursory reading of this text charges us with deep feelings of devotion to the Guru, which stands us in good stead in our *sadhana*.

The *Guru Gita* teaches two methods for attaining Self-realization: a complete surrender to the Guru, and self-effort based on meditation.⁵ Both are to be practised under the aegis of a Guru who is himself Self-realized. The method of surrender has come to be known as 'Guru

² Mount Kailas is located in the northern reaches of the Himalayas in Tibet. In its subtle aspect, it is believed to be the abode of Siva and Parvati and therefore figures so in many *Puranas* and epics.

³ The term *rishis* denotes not merely realized sages, but other ascetics pursuing serious *tapas* (penance). It is, however, commonly translated as 'sages' for want of a better equivalent.

⁴ Parvati's request appears very significant considering that Siva, as Dakshinamurti, was the very first Guru in the world. He is therefore the most suited to expound on the nature of a Guru.

⁵ The *Guru Gita* does not state this explicitly. This inference is drawn by comparing verses such as 43, 101 and 135 on one hand, and 126, 160 and 311 on the other. Vide *Sri Guru Gita* (Telugu), Transliteration, word-to-word meanings and commentary, Sivacharanam, Sri Vyasasramam, Yerpedu (2006). Incidentally, this comes close to Bhagavan's teaching that there are only two methods for Self-realization: surrender to God, Guru or the Self, and self-effort through *vichara*. D. Mudaliar, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 28.6.1946.

Yoga'.⁶ We shall take a detailed look at it in this article. The second method, referred to as *mantra-diksha* (v.311), is identical to conventional *jnana yoga*, which is well-known and is not discussed here.⁷

A peculiar feature of the *Guru Gita* is its inexplicable lack of organization. Verses with closely allied meaning are found scattered widely apart. The haphazard order of the verses quoted here must be understood in this light. Any attempt to paraphrase the text therefore inevitably involves subjective judgments and conclusions. This article is no exception. The essential message, however, rings out loud and clear.

Who is a Guru?

The very term 'Guru' is self-explanatory:

*gukaraschandhakarastu rukarastannirodha-krit
andhakara-vinasitvad-gururityabhidhiyate.* (v.45)

“The 'gu' sound stands for 'darkness' (i.e., ignorance). The 'ru' sound stands for the one who destroys it. Being thus the destroyer of ignorance, he is called the 'Guru'.”

It is noteworthy that the Guru is *defined* here as a remover of ignorance, not as bestower of *jnana*. This is as it should be, since the disciple is ever of the nature of *jnana*, but is only ignorant of it. When the ignorance is removed, he finds his true nature without need for further external intervention.⁸

The way the Guru goes about this job is detailed in this verse of exceptional beauty:

⁶ <http://www.experiencefestival.com/guru-yoga>. Interestingly, the term 'Guru Yoga' is found in Buddhism too, with a nearly identical connotation.

⁷ Typical verses dealing with *mantra-diksha*, arranged in a logical order, are: 308, 309, 310, 134, 86, 240, 241, 218, 222, 219, 126, 160, 125 and 166.

⁸ M.Venkataramiah (comp), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §282, Entry of 16.11.1936. Yet it is not uncommon to come across passages in literature referring to the Guru as bestower of *jnana*. Obviously, such statements are to be taken only figuratively, not literally.

*karuna-khadga-patena chhitva pasashtakam sisoh
samyagananda janakah sadgurusso'bhidhiyate* (v.129)

“He who by the sword of his compassion cuts the eight-fold fetters⁹ of the disciple and (thus) gives birth to spontaneous bliss (in him) is called the ‘Guru’.”

Nature of the Guru

The *Guru Gita* proclaims that none of the spiritual *sadhanas* are of any avail unless the real nature of the Guru (*guru-tattva*) is first understood:

*japastapo-vratam tirtham yajno-danam tathaivacha
guru-tattvamavijnaya sarvam vyartham bhavet-priye* (v.24)

“O dear (Parvati), japa, *tapas*, *vrata*,¹⁰ pilgrimage, *yajna*, and so also charity — all these are futile, if one has not known the real nature of the Guru.”

The text proceeds to declare the highest nature of the Guru:

gurussakshat-parabrahma tasmai sri-gurave namah.
(v.58, line 2)

“The Guru is verily *Parabrahma*. To such a Guru, (my) obeisance.”

The theme of the Guru’s non-dual nature is further elaborated in this oft-quoted verse:

*brahmanandam parama-sukhadam kevalam jnana-murtim
dvandvatitam gagana-sadrisam tattvamasyadi-lakshyam
ekam nityam vimalamachalam sarvadhi-sakshi-bhutam
bhavatitam triguna-rahitam sadgurum tam namami* (v.111)

“(The Guru is) supreme Bliss, bestower of ecstatic happiness, the Absolute, the embodiment of *jnana*, beyond duality, (in purity) of

⁹ The eight-fold fetters are said to be: hatred, shame, caste (social class), (commitment to) good culture, fear, (protecting one’s) reputation, pride and egoism.

¹⁰ *Vrata* is a religious vow observed to fulfill a specific desire of a worldly or spiritual nature.

the likeness of space, the objective of (the teaching of) *mahavakyas* like *tat-tvam-asi*, the One, the Eternal, free from evil, immovable (from his state of *jnana*), witness to the intellects of all beings¹¹, beyond thought, and devoid of the three *gunas*. To such a Guru, I offer my obeisance.”

On the dualistic plane, the Guru is identified with the highest triune of Gods, representing the creation, sustenance and dissolution principles:

gurur-brahma gurur-vishnur-gurur-devo-maheswarah
(v.58, line 1)

“The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, and the Guru is Lord Siva.”

The Guru is therefore considered to possess all the attributes normally ascribed to God:

... .. *jagamam sthiramevacha
vyaptam yena jagat-sarvam tasmai sri-gurave namah*
(v.65 in part)

“He who pervades the entire world inclusive of the movable (beings) and the immovable (Nature) — to such a Guru, (my) obeisance.”

gurur-visvam nachanyo'sti tasmai sri-gurave namah
(v.81, line 2)

“The Guru is the world. There is nothing other than him (in the manifest universe). To such a Guru, (my) obeisance.”

The uninitiated who tend to identify the Guru with his body may look upon such verses as mere respectful tributes to the Guru, devoid of truth; but Bhagavan sets at rest any notions of this kind:¹²

¹¹ Typical instances of Bhagavan’s knowledge of the inner workings of others’ intellects in both waking and dream states may be found in *Crumbs From His Table* by R. Swarnagiri, (7th ed., 2006), p.48, and *Bhagavan Smrutulu* (Telugu), Chalam, Chalam Friends, Bhimunipatnam (1989), p.132, respectively.

¹² M. Venkataramiah, op.cit., §612 of 19.1.1939. The Sanskrit saying seen here is originally from the closing verse (§18) of Sankara’s *Dakshinamurti Stotram*.

“*Isvaro gururatmeti* (The Self is the God and the Guru) ... The Master is thus God manifest as human being.” Verse 24, cited above, clearly urges us to place our full faith in these manifold depictions of the Guru’s nature.

Guru Yoga

The *Guru Gita* reiterates the Vedantic teaching that Self-realization is the supreme goal of life, and proclaims the pivotal role of the Guru in its attainment:

*guru-buddhya tmano nanyat satyam satyam varanane
tallabhartham prayatnastu kartavyascha manishibhih* (v.25)

“O Parvati (of winsome face), there is nothing other than the Self that can be known through the intellect lodged in the Guru. This is true, doubly true. To make effort to obtain it is the duty of a wise man.”

The system of *sadhana* that is so centred on the Guru has come to be known as ‘Guru Yoga’.

Guru Yoga holds that the Guru is the sole facilitator of the disciple’s Realization. The disciple’s task consists merely in placing his or her complete faith in the Guru and serving him day and night with full devotion. In due course, the Guru takes compassion upon him and confers *Jnana*.¹³ Unlike in *jnana yoga*, there is absolutely no need for the disciple to learn any *sastras* or become proficient in meditation, *pranayama* or other techniques. We find here a parallel to Bhagavan’s teaching:¹⁴ “The realization is the result of the Master’s grace more than teachings, lectures, meditation, etc. They are only secondary aids whereas the former is the primary and the essential cause.”

¹³ It is not that the Guru is extracting a price from the disciple by way of service in exchange for this favour. The Guru, merged in his Self, is in no need of service from the disciple or anybody else. His receiving of service is meant only to provide an opportunity for the disciple to overcome the baser instincts of his ego, and thus merit the Guru’s grace for eventual annulment of the ego.

¹⁴ M. Venkataramiah, op.cit., §13 dated 07.01.1935.

*jnanam vina mukti-padam labhyate guru-bhaktitah
gurossamanato nanyat sadhanam guru-marginam* (v.101)

“Even without knowledge of the *sastras*, one obtains Liberation through devotion to the Guru. To followers of *guru-marga*, there is no other means equal to the Guru (for obtaining it.)”

guru-vaktre sthitam brahma prapyate tat-prasadatah
(v.40, line 1)

“*Brahma-jnana*, which resides in the Guru’s face, is obtained (only) through his bestowal.”

*naguroradhikam tattvam naguroradhikam tapah
naguroradhikam jnanam tasmai sri-gurave namah* (v.77)

“There is no essence greater than the Guru, there is no penance greater than the Guru, and there is no knowledge greater than the Guru. To such a Guru, (my) obeisance.”

The extent of surrender that is expected of the disciple is brought out crisply in this verse:

*guru-murtim smarennityam gurorname sada-japet
gurorajnam prakurvita guroranyannabhavayet* (v.39)

“One should always keep the Guru’s form in mind; should always do *japa* of the Guru’s name; should carry out the Guru’s orders; and should not think of anything other than the Guru.”

It is thus clear that whereas *bhakti yoga* requires constant remembrance of and surrender to God, Guru Yoga prescribes the same towards the Guru. Trusting the Guru to be his God, the disciple feels secure that even his mundane life is under the dominion of the Guru, and this makes his job of surrender that much simpler.

Among the proponents of Guru Yoga in the past century, perhaps the most notable has been Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi (*mahasamadhi* 1918).¹⁵

¹⁵ Sai Baba is not known to have used the term ‘Guru Yoga’. But his teachings leave no doubt that he means it.

He narrates his own tutelage under his Guru as follows: “Night and day I gazed at him, with no thought of hunger and thirst. ... I had no other subject to meditate, nor any other thing than my Guru to attend. He was my sole refuge. My mind was always fixed on him.”¹⁶ ... “He took care of me as tenderly as a mother-bird does her young ones. ... By his Grace, Realization flashed upon me of itself, without effort or study. I had nothing to seek. Everything became as clear to me as broad daylight.”¹⁷

Sai Baba’s teaching to his devotees followed similar lines: “Make me the sole object of your thoughts and actions, and you will no doubt attain *Paramartha*. ... No *sadhana* or proficiency in the six *sastras* is necessary. Have faith and confidence in your Guru. Believe that the Guru is the sole actor and doer. Blessed is he who knows the greatness of his Guru, and thinks of him to be the incarnation of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.”¹⁸ We cannot fail to notice how closely these words replicate the teaching of the *Guru Gita* verses 39, 101, 24 and 58 (line 1) given above. ▲

(To be concluded)

¹⁶ N.V. Gunaji (Tr.), *Shri Sai Satcharita*. Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, Shirdi (6/ed, 2002); p.98

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.171&c172.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.98.

Sadashiva Brahmendra

JOHN MAYNARD

There are special moments in our lives when, for no apparent reason, we are forcibly struck and attracted to the name and form of a saint or guru. We feel empathy and want to know more about that saint. In the *Aradhana* 1996 edition of the *The Mountain Path* I was drawn to such a one. There was an article on the life of the towering Tamil jnani and *avadhuta*, Sadashiva Brahmendra.¹ Drawn to this article I read it over and over in 2005, and after making notes on the locations mentioned, I felt prompted to pay a visit to this place of his life and samadhi. Four years later I have visited his samadhi twice, Nerur, near Karur, Tamil Nadu being an easy and scenic days’ motorcycle drive from Tiruvannamalai, and have now become familiar with what

¹ Sadashiva Brahmendra: One with Brahman, by Raman. *Aradhana* 1996 *The Mountain Path*, pp. 47-51.

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is known of Sadashiva Brahmendra's life story, with the locations of two of his three known samadhis, and with the few extant translations of his works in English. His small rural temple, ashram and samadhi in Nerur still retains a simplicity and atmosphere as might have been found in Ramanasramam itself in the 1920s. The sacred Kaveri river flows a hundred metres away.

Since Sadashiva Brahmendra's life has already been more fully described in the 1996 *The Mountain Path*, I offer here only a skeleton biography of his early life and death, leaving aside most of the siddhis, miracles and other details available elsewhere. The dates of his birth and death have been surmised by researchers qualified in Tamil Nadu's regional history and from the histories of the rulers around Nerur at that time. These rulers were also his devotees. Parts of his life story have been handed down verbally. A recently released Kannada book, now translated into English, edited by Sri T. P. Vinayaka Rao, *Sadashiva Brahmendra, His Life, Extracted Teachings and Reflections*,¹ despite its shortcomings, does a fine job of bringing together information on his life on this earth.

Sadashiva Brahmendra was born in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, almost exactly two hundred years before the advent of Ramana Maharshi to this world, his birth date being circa 1670-1680 and his *Jiva* Mahasamadhi date 1750. His parents were pious Brahmins whose clan originally came from Andhra Pradesh. They were named Somanatha Yogi and Parvatidevi. His father had earned the title of Yogi due to his austere lifestyle from an early age and for his immersion in Kundalini Yoga. Though married, the couple lived together as *Brahmacharis*, leading a life of *tapasya*. After fifteen years of marriage Parvatidevi told her husband that they should consider having a child as they would otherwise become too old to have one. He agreed, and

¹ T. P. Vinayaka Rao, *Sadashiva Brahmendra, His Life, Reflections and Extracted Teachings*. 1st Edition 2006, Pub. by Sri Sadguru Sadashiva Brahmendral Seva Trust, Nerur, T.N. India 639004. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes come from this book.

Interested readers may also see *Sri Sadashiva Brahmendra* (a short biography), translated by Dr. Prema Nandakumar, 1st Edition 1993. Pub. by Rani Bhavani Devi Memorial Trust, Challapalli, Krishna Dist., A.P.



Statue of Sadashiva Brahmendra adjacent the Samadhi

instructed her that in order to cause the birth of a gifted and spiritual child she should enter more deeply into meditation and the performance of *mantrajapa*. He initiated Parvatidevi into *Ramanama* which she pursued day and night. They undertook a *yatra* to temples and sacred sites in South India and *en-route*, in Rameshwaram, the presiding deity Ramanatha appeared to both of them simultaneously but independently in dreams, assuring them that Parvatidevi would give birth to an exceptional child. Sivaramakrishna — as he was originally named — was duly born to them.

From his earliest days he showed signs of possessing a brilliant, spiritually gifted nature, and was sent to the Vedapatasala at a young age; there he rapidly progressed in his studies.

Sivaramakrishna's marriage was arranged when he was twelve years old, after which his mother gave permission for him to leave home to study with Sridhara Venkatesa Iyyaval² in Tiruvisainallur. The teacher quickly discovered his protegee's brilliant scholarship and natural spiritual aptitude. Iyyaval in turn arranged for Sivaramakrishna to study under one Paramasivendra, in Kumbakonam.³ Here too he quickly became recognized as a brilliant diamond in the making; he was highly praised by the Sankaracharya. His reputation grew widely until he was duly discovered by some travelling ministers under orders from the Mysore court to find and return with a scholar of high acclaim to serve the raja.

In Mysore the young Sivaramakrishna's task was to test the competence of incoming scholars and musicians and set their salaries according to their abilities. Since he was by now extremely well versed in all aspects of Vedanta and in music, he was able to silence and defeat any prospective court pundit in debate, to correct the subtlest errors in the rendition of a musical *raga*, and hence order their salaries to be set lower than they might have expected. A verse

² See *The Mountain Path*, January-June 2000, p.111.

³ T.P. Vinakaya Rao in his appendix notes on page 278-79 writes that the guru is a different and later Paramasivendra — not the earlier Paramasivendra, the Sankaracharya of Kumbakonam who died in 1598 according to the Kanchipuram Mutt.

he composed later, in his *Sadhaka Avastha*, might be seen as an autobiographical reflection on this juncture of his life. Sri Ramana Maharshi chose this as verse 37 in the *Supplement to the Forty Verses*:

Though a man looks on the world as a wisp of straw and holds all sacred lore in his hand, it is hard for him to escape from thralldom if he has yielded to vile flattery, the harlot.⁴

Gopalakrishna, a scholar from Thanjavur, and a fellow devotee of Sri Paramasivendra, on hearing of the fame of this young Sivaramakrishna, went to the Mysore court with the intention of defeating him in debate. However, upon meeting Sivaramakrishna he could only bow his head. He asked to serve him as his attendant. After some weeks at the court Gopalakrishna returned and gave a report to Paramasivendra on his experiences with Sivaramakrishna whose lifestyle, expertise and fame Gopalakrishna described. His preceptor then sent a message to Sivaramakrishna telling him that he, the *guru*, wanted to have his darshan. Sivaramakrishna resigned his post immediately and rushed to Sri Paramasivendra. A few fiery words flew from the Sankaracharya: they threw his devotee into a new phase of his life. Sri Paramasivendra said:

“You have already learned to silence the mouths of everyone else, but you have not learned to shut your own mouth!”

This single sentence shooting forth from his guru was enough to thoroughly shake-up Sivaramakrishna. He resolved to remain in *maunam* (silence) thenceforth. Paramasivendra initiated him into *sannyas* and gave him the monastic name ‘Sadashiva’.

After remaining with his guru for an unknown period he travelled to Nerur on the banks of the Kaveri. He must have found it to be a quiet, unpopulated place by a holy river, thus suitable for *tapas*. Here he mastered the five yogas, and the *siddhis* (paranormal powers) which

⁴ *Reality in Forty Verses: Supplement, The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.136, sixth revised edition, 1996.

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came to him naturally. At one time he was visiting Sri Bodhendra Swami ⁵ and Sri Iyyaval. They both argued that since he was now in continuous communion with God, he no longer needed to maintain the vow of *maunam*. Sadashiva saw the wisdom of their words and allowed one devotional *kirtana* verse to soar from his lips:

Chant 'Mukunda!' O my tongue, chant 'Mukunda!'
Chant 'Kesava!' 'Madhava!' 'Govinda!'
Chant 'Krishna!' 'Ananda!' ' Ever Blissful One!'
Chant 'O Lover of Radha!' ' Hari!' ' Rama!'
Chant 'O Lotus-eyed One, who is dark like the rain-cloud!'
Chant 'You who ride on Garuda, wielding the sword Nandaka!'
'You who cut off the heads of the ten-headed Ravana!'
Chant 'O friend of Akrura!' 'O wielder of the discus!'
'O spotless Swan!' 'Destroyer of Kama!'

It is said that Sri Iyyaval was overjoyed at this sudden change. However Sri Brahmendra immediately retired into his inflexible vow of silence.

From Nerur Brahmendra is said to have travelled widely in India, walking naked as a silent *avadhuta* even as far as the Turkish borders and to Karachi where his third samadhi is located. (After Partition this samadhi site may have become untended and unrecognizable, but it was visited by devotees as recently as the twentieth century.) Sadashiva was said to have possessed a peculiar and very efficient way of walking, or rather moving, at high speed. His mind fixed on the Self, entirely God intoxicated, he travelled like a spirited somnambulist, with no destination, desire or purpose. If he fell down anywhere he might lie in the same position for weeks without moving. Once he was buried under a hay-stack, only departing when the hay was removed months later. Priests were once quoted as saying that they saw him leave one location by moving through the air. Despite being covered by dust and straw, as he himself wrote later, his body was said to glow like

⁵ See *The Mountain Path*, January -June, 2001 p.95.



gold. There exist many stories of his *siddhi leelas* that he used for the benefit of others or as a natural part of his yogic *sadhana* period.

Since his lifespan appears to have covered seventy to eighty years, we are clearly missing much of his life history; each brief biography has recounted the same tales and facts. What is certain however is that after long wanderings he returned to Nerur and lived a quiet and stationary life after an incident in which he was attacked by a Muslim ruler. This happened when Sadashiva had inadvertently wandered towards a local Raja's harem, moving about naked as usual. The Muslim ruler, outraged by this affront by an apparent madman, sliced off one of his arms at the shoulder with his sword. But Sadashiva merely walked on. The monarch, realizing too late that he had wounded a great saint, blocked Brahmendra's path while still holding the bloody severed arm. Sadashiva's consciousness returned to his body and he asked the Muslim Raja what the matter was. Showing the arm the Muslim ruler replied:

"I have committed a sin against you, please forgive me!"

The Brahmendra replied, "No one has sinned, and none has been sinned against. Go!"

But the frantic Raja continued to beg for forgiveness, threatening suicide for his awful deed:

"What is that?" Sadashiva asked.

"It is your hand! See, I have cut off your arm!" cried the desperate ruler.

Sadashiva took back his arm, held it to his shoulder and the arm resumed its place with no trace of a wound, and he calmly walked on. He reflected, after this incident, that his wanderings might inadvertently cause negative karma to others, and he therefore resolved to return to Nerur.

Among his chief devotees were the local rajas of Pudukkottai, Thanjavur and Mysore. Sadasiva once wrote a mantra or *maha-vakya* in the Kaveri sands for Maharaja Vijaya Ragunatha Tondaiman, the ruler of Pudukkottai. The Raja had this mantra written in sand preserved in a golden casket which can still be viewed in a small ancient

Dakshinamurti temple in what is today a Muslim quarter of Pudukkottai. In this last period of his life, he summoned the three rajas by his mental powers and called together the Brahmins of the Nerur area, to inform them that he planned to take *jiva samadhi* on an auspicious day and hour. He told the rulers to have a pit prepared in accordance with the injunctions of Tirumular in the *Tirumantiram* for the construction of samadhis. But his royal devotees were not to be so easily persuaded, they pleaded with him to reconsider his sad decision. His answer, like Sri Ramana's parting words, was gentle and instructive but firm.

"You may envision me in your minds. What is the use of seeing this body? Did I not lie buried for months in the sands of the Kaveri? Simply because you cannot see me does not mean I am no longer here. It is all right for me."

Before he entered his samadhi he made two prophecies, both of which came to pass soon after he was interred:

"After nine days a sacred Vilva tree will sprout over my body. Let this be. It will grow and give shelter. In twelve days a Brahmachari of Kasi will arrive bearing a white *Bana Linga*. Place this lingam twelve feet to the east and build a temple over it. Do not cover the vilva tree, but build a platform around it."

He slowly moved towards the prepared pit, sat down in meditation posture and entered into samadhi; this was the last time he was seen on earth. The three rajas and the grieving devotees shovelled camphor, sand, salts and vibhuti over his erect and still breathing body. As foretold, on the ninth day, a vilva sapling sprouted from the soil above his head, and on the twelfth day a *Bana Linga*⁵ arrived from Kashi, borne by a Brahmachari who stated that he had been told by a sage to bring the *Bana Linga* to Nerur. This *Lingam* was installed close to the samadhi, as Sadashiva Brahmendra had

⁵ *Bana* or *Baana lingam*: a naturally formed lingam occurring in the Narmada River in Thayadikund, near Omkareshwar, Madhya Pradesh.

instructed, and a temple was built around it. For the protection of the three visible symbols, (the samadhi, the lingam and the tree) and out of their devotion to their master the three rajas erected a wall around the samadhi and built a temple over the Lingam. Later a second wall was built around the compound. Within this a small ashram flourishes today. The vilva tree grew tall and spread a leafy canopy over the samadhi. It thrived until almost the end of the twentieth century; recently a fire broke out and destroyed more of the recently deceased tree, leaving only the trunk and a few blackened branches. The temple over the *Bana Lingam* still stands and puja is performed at both these shrines.

In Manamadurai, behind the sanctum sanctorum of the beautiful Siva temple dedicated to Anandavalli Somanathesvara, stands Sadashiva's second samadhi. It is said that Sadashiva had made the promise that when he left his physical body he would appear to a *shastri* (priest) of Manamadurai as well as to another in Karachi. He kept his promise. Behind the Manamadurai samadhi there is another grove of vilva trees, the tree sacred to Lord Siva. (Collecting just one vilva fruit I brought this back to Ramanasramam and the ashram today has 15-20 saplings.) Sundaram, the grand-nephew of Sri Bhagavan's mother, Alagammal, still lives beside this powerful and attractive temple, which stands on the banks of the Vaigai river. Sundaram and his wife informed me that Sri Bhagavan used to play in this house as a young boy. Since Manamadurai is only about thirty kilometres from Tiruchuli this is quite possible.

Both the Nerur and Manamadurai samadhis radiate a palpable power, in which meditation becomes simple and natural, as if one is sitting in the presence of a great master. On my first venture, when I sat for a few hours at the Nerur samadhi I was overwhelmed by this silence and likened it to Sri Bhagavan's presence at his samadhi – the power and the atmosphere were so similar. Returning a year later I stayed for three days in Nerur and Karur, and found that the sense of depth and meditative peace was still there. I was never sure of its source, but there was also a sonorous *omkar* in the atmosphere on this second visit.

Sadashiva Brahmendra is best known today for his devotional *kirtanas* and *bhajans*, dedicated to Siva, Rama, Krishna and Brahman; twenty-three of these songs still exist and are regularly performed. Various scholars assume that the *kirtanas* and *bhajans* were all written early in his life; in most of them he clearly reveals his full-blown God-realization as well as his bhakti. Written in Sanskrit, even in translation the throbbing dance of Lord Nataraja is sensed through the lilting repetition of words and phrases, His anklets rhythmically knocking life into the meanings hidden deep below the perfect surface.

Most of Sadashiva's Sanskrit verses and commentaries are out-of-print today, and fewer still are available in English. A reader might wrongly assume from his *bhajans* alone that he was solely a *bhakta*, but a reading of his other works reveal him as a profound advaitin, who lived in a mystical devotion that was beyond liberation. Among these other works are *Siddhanta Kalpavali*, *Brahma-tattva-prakasika*, *Yogasudhakara*, *Paramahansacarya*, *Siva-manasa-puja* and *Advaitarasamanjari*; about eighteen in total. To these philosophical works he brought flashes of poetry, making the highest Vedantic truths available to everyone.

It is hard to pinpoint the time of Sadashiva's awakening from the writings and the songs now available because all of his works demonstrate a deep maturity and authority. In the few *kirtanas* we now possess he moves from the sublime:

“Worship Him who is the quintessence of the Vedas, who is sought by Yoga, whose body is Bliss and who is the support of the worlds...”

and,

“He plays in my Heart, Rama; He plays in my Heart...”

to the Oceanic:

“I am verily Brahman only, by the grace of my good guru, I am verily Brahman only...”

“By the grace of my guru I am verily *Brahman* only, *Brahman* which is all *Chit* and pure *Ananda*, as revealed by the Upanishads,

which is immeasurable and immaculate and which is the one changeless Ocean of Existence and of nectar-like Bliss...”

This brief introduction gives only a few of the many highlights of this extraordinary jnani's life and teachings. Like Sri Ramana Maharshi he lived mainly in silence, teaching only through his few verses, *bhajans* and commentaries, and through the tales left to us of his miraculous life. He was ever devoted to his *guru*, Sri Paramasivendra, never founded an ashram or remained with any group of disciples for long. His transcendent crowning glory is the *Atma Vidya Vilasa*, part two. Its sixty-two verses on the quintessential experience of the jnani, are a semi-autobiographical song of the transcendental emancipated state of the Self-realised One. Like the *Avadhuta Gita* of Dattatreya it is not a teaching, but a series of concise statements of jnana. These songs were among the favourite verses of Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati, the thirty-fourth Sankaracharya of Sringeri.

His Holiness Sri Satchidananda Sivabhinava Narasimha Bharati of Sringeri went to Nerur one hundred and fifty years after the *jiva samadhi* of Sadashiva Brahmendra, before taking his seat as the thirty-third Sankaracharya. It is said he still harboured doubts about his attainment of *Parisa Yoga*, the raising of the *prana* from *muladhara* to *sahasrara* centre. Such was his faith in Sadashiva's living vitality beyond his corporeal grave that he went to Nerur to obtain his darshan and teaching. About one and a half miles from Nerur his palanquin stopped, the bearers complaining that they were unable to move forward due to some force bearing against them. The Sankaracharya immediately understood, left the palanquin, and, bowing to Sadashiva every few steps, reached the samadhi on foot. He sat at the samadhi alone for three days and nights, only bathing in the Kaveri early each morning. On the fourth dawn two voices were heard within the compound wall by the scholars gathered outside. The Sankacharya's doubts were cleared and in gratitude he composed, the *Sri Sadasivendra-stavah*, forty-five verses in praise of Sadashiva Brahmendra, each verse containing the line:

“To Sadashiva our Homage.” ▲

Atma Vidya Vilasa

A Selection

SADASHIVA BRAHMENDRA
TRANSLATED BY V. NARAYANAN

This translation is taken from Atma Vidya Vilasa by Sadashiva Brahmendra, published with a benediction by H. H. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati of Kanchi.¹

I bow down to that first great Teacher [Dakshinamurti] who is immaculate, whose lotus hand is in the *chinmudra* pose, who bestows on His devotees all their desires and who is overflowing with endless bliss.

I now begin to say a few sweet words of praise, in order that I may rest in my own Self; I whose divine greatness has been awakened perforce by the teaching of my *guru* (preceptor) Paramasivendra.

¹ *Atma Vidya Vilasa* translated by Sri V. Narayanan M.A. M.L. English and Tamil, 3rd Edition, 1951. Published by Sri Kamakoti Kosastahnam, 4 Francis Joseph Street, Chennai.

The supreme soul shines pure and awake, devoid of all mutations (*vikalpas*); it is unique, eternal and free from passion; it is an indivisible whole, untouched by Maya and free from the *gunas*.

He who was sleeping under the influence of Maya and who during his sleep had dreams by the thousands; he is now awakened by the words of his Guru and delights in the ocean of Bliss.

By the grace of his good Guru, the wise man rejoices silently and much pleased at heart and with his mind submerged in his own nature as Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

The good Sannyasin is unique, rejoicing at will in the utmost regions of incomparable Bliss, with his heart's passions completely cooled by its proximity [orig. 'nearness'] to the surging waves of Grace flowing from his good teacher [guru].

The good Ascetic, from whose heart darkness has been dispelled by the sun-like radiance of his good Guru's grace, is sporting in the boundless ocean of Bliss.

The Sage rests quiet, visualizing the Atman that remains after he has by his Buddhi uncreated (by involution) the five elements, inverting the order of their creation (evolution).

He wanders about, with his desires crushed and with his pride, self-esteem and envy all gone, realizing in his mind that this universe in its entirety is insubstantial and proceeds from Maya.

He sports like a child, plunged in the Ocean of pure bliss and delighted with the diverse actions of men, without any feeling of 'You' and 'I'.

Delighted in the Atman [in his Self] and rid of the bondage of *karma* (action), the Prince of Sannyasins is wandering about in the outskirts of the jungle, like a deaf, blind idiot. Alone the happy one enjoys, remaining in the close embrace of *santi* (equanimity) on the bed of his own *ananda* (bliss), serene and unruffled by all other sensations.

The King of Ascetics shines supreme in his own kingdom, in the majesty of his own blissful Self (*Atman*), having made all the wealth of non-attachment his own and having uprooted his enemies, the sense-pleasures.

Though the sun be cool, though the moon scorch and the tongue of fire leap downward, the jivanmukta knows it to be the work of Maya and does not wonder thereat.

The King of Ascetics sports in the expanse of unvarying Bliss, which is ever most pleasing, riding high on the neck of the elephant of Right Knowledge and vanquishing his enemy, Ignorance.

He shines supreme enjoying, as Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, with the blemish of egoism gone, with his mind quite calm and composed, and with his thoughts cool and pleasant like the full moon.

Fully engrossed in the enjoyment of his own Bliss, he remains in another world as it were; and, as strikes his fancy, here he is engaged in thought, and there he is singing, and there he is dancing.

Having skillfully caught the fickle antelope of his *manas* (mind) in the net of Discernment (*vimarsana*) he, the unique one, reposes in the Self, tired with hunting in the forests of the Vedas.

Unique he triumphs, wandering at will in the forest of Fearlessness, having felled the cruel tiger called *chitta* (mentality) with the sharp-edged sword of his brave mind (*manas*).

The blemish-less Sun of a supreme ascetic stalks unique in the sky of *chit* (knowledge), with his abundant thoughts as the rays causing the lotuses of good men's hearts to bloom.

The great Muni shines in the ethereal region of *chit* (*Vishnupada*), the fit abode of the Gods, a spotless moon which causes the blue lilies to bloom and the moonlight of whose wisdom dispels ignorance.

The Recluse is the gentle wind which blows pleasantly in the grove of Knowledge-Bliss and prevents all fatigue by its lovely progress, along with the fragrance of flowers (Realized souls).

The Ascetic shines, a peacock in the region of the forest, whence fear has fled and where grow the luscious fruit of Beatitude (*Nisreya*) and the pleasing flowers of perfect knowledge.

Abandoning the desert region of the worthless world, he, the good swan, sports freely in this excellent lake which is all *chit* (knowledge) and full of the sweet waters of perfect bliss.

The great recluse is the cuckoo which coos soft sweet words in the grove which is made cool by the secret lore (*Tantras*) of the Upanishads and where all the Vedas are in bloom.

The excellent man of wisdom is the great lion which sports in the wide forest of Bliss, having torn asunder the wild elephant Delusion (*Moha*) and driven away all the tigers, which are sins.

The ascetic is a wild young elephant who, cool and wet from meditation, sports in the high regions of the lofty peak of supreme Knowledge, beyond the reach of the lion, Ignorance.

The Sage shines supreme, silent and placid, with the ground under the tree as his resting place and with his palm as the begging bowl, wearing nothing but (only) the jewel of non-attachment.

The great Recluse who has awakened to the state of the perfect Existence-Knowledge-Bliss rests in his house, which is the deserted bush on the river bank, on the rare and very comfortable bed of soft sands.

The Recluse shines as a king of kings, resting serenely on the soft bed of bare ground, with the cool breeze as his unique *chamara* (royal whisk) and with the full moon as the lamp of his royal chamber.

The king of ascetics takes his rest on a broad slab of stone, which is lovely because on every side of it the pure waters of the river are flowing, while the southern breeze from the Malaya Hills blows gently.

Verily the silent sage, ever engaged in inward meditation, takes the alms placed in his hands as foods and wanders along the street like an idiot.

Having dissolved the entire world by right knowledge and being under the power of the Perfect substance that survives such dissolution, he puts into his mouth by force of *Prarabdha Karma* (past actions which have begun to bear fruit) the handful of food which comes to him.

Taking rest in the outskirts of the forest and regarding the entire universe as a mere blade of grass, the Yogin, his body

smearred with mud and straw, enjoys secret Bliss in regions beyond death and old age.

The Yogin sees nothing; nor does he speak; he does not hear any word that is spoken. He remains steadfast in the incomparable region of Bliss, immovable like a block of wood.

The great Sannyasin who knows the truth of all the Vedas wanders like an ignorant fool unnoticed, devoid of every sense of difference, and seeing only perfection everywhere and in all creatures.

Embracing the lady *Virati* (equanimity) and by bliss overpowered, he sleeps with his hand for a pillow, with nothing for coverlet, and with the bare ground as bedding.

In the inner apartments of the Vedas, the king of ascetics delights in self-illumination, as in the company of lovely courtesans whose lingering vestige of difference is all gone.

The king amongst ascetics enjoys the company of *mukti* (liberation) in the lofty mansions of Truth, which is reached by the broad way of *vairagya* and which is lit by the excellent lamp of supreme knowledge.

The man who knows the Self accepts as a rosary the rows of blue lily flowers in lonely places and as a divine healing herb (*kalpavalli*) the absence of carnal desire and as magic pills of immortality, the absence of egoism.

The Sage rejects nothing, considering it bad; nor does he accept anything, considering it good. Knowing that everything is the result of *avidya* (ignorance), he remains unattached to anything.

He does not think at all of what is past, nor does he care in his mind about the future. He does not even care what is in front of him; he is the One Perfect Bliss in everything.

The king of Sannyasins rests alone, rooted in Self and enjoying the inner Bliss; he rejects nothing that comes to him and never desires what does not come to him.

Alone, a mendicant is disporting himself as he pleases, free from all bondage, having reached the stage of perfection with his pure, full-blown Knowledge-Bliss.

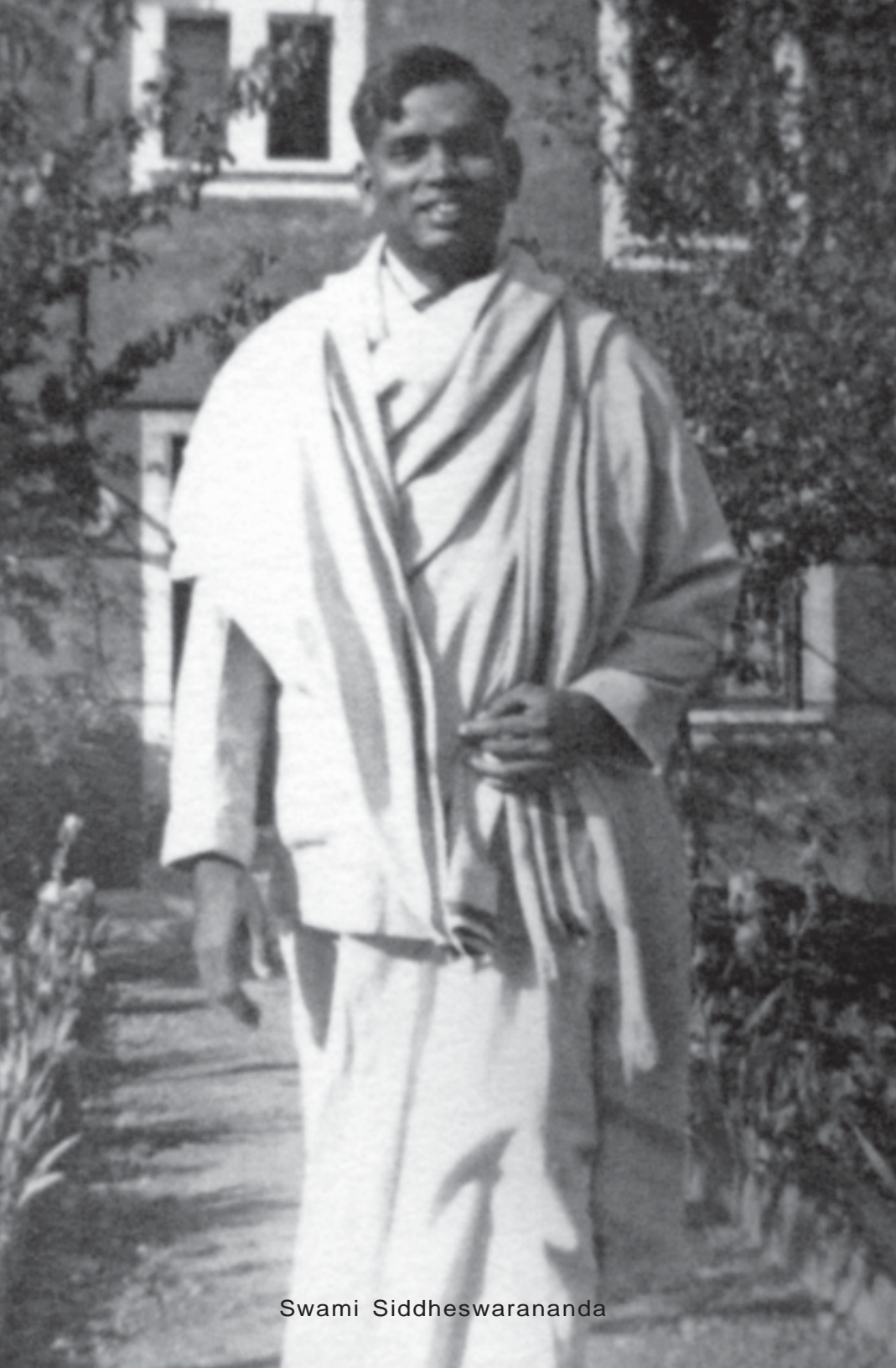
The great ascetic transcends the rule of *varna* and *asrama* (caste and status), shaking off from him the injunctions and prohibitions (of the Sastras); he remains merely the perfect Knowledge-Bliss.

Enjoying the fruit of the *prarabdha-karma*, the wise man destroys all *karma* and having slipped off the bonds which bind him through his body, he becomes verily the Absolute Brahman.

The eternal That (*Tat*) shines, unperceived by the eye, the nose and the tongue, free from the *gunas* of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, the one Truth, peerless and unafraid.

The wise man contemplating daily on the splendour of *atma-vidya* described here will grow ripe in the wisdom of the Supreme Soul and reach at once the ultimate Truth.

Thus is completed this work named "Atma Vidya Vilasa", composed by Sadasivendra, the disciple of the gracious [guru] Paramasivendra. ▲



Swami Siddheswarananda

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Letters

SWAMI SIDDHESWARANANDA

Swami Siddheswarananda was a member of the Ramakrishna Order. He visited Bhagavan on a number of occasions between 1931 and 1936. Soon afterwards, he was instructed by his Order to proceed to France where he served as head of the Ramakrishna Math at Gretz, near Paris. He was a much loved and respected teacher, and played an important role in the spread of Vedanta in France. He passed away at the Gretz centre in 1957.

We are grateful to Mr. Patrick Sicard for presenting the Ashram Archives with a portfolio of the swami's writings and facsimiles of letters he wrote. We have made a selection from several letters he addressed to Arthur and Lucia Osborne.

29th January 1956

At the Feet of Sri Bhagavan we are all friends. I hope you are getting regularly our monthly Bulletin and often you will find the Presence of Bhagavan evoked in the commentaries on the Gita verses, through quotations from his sayings. I do not know whether you read French. When I read in some papers after his passing away the words "I shall be here more than ever," I told friends here: "This

cannot possibly be the words of Bhagavan,” and when you wrote the words he actually pronounced were: “I am not going anywhere, I am here,” I got the assurance. Those few words contain the real metaphysics of Vedanta. If it were otherwise “I shall be here more than ever”, those words only would indicate the religious attitude. Sri Bhagavan is Vedanta condensed in its purest form and his fundamental message is that of pure jnana.

Owing to ill health for the last so many years, I could not do my correspondence regularly. Now, bedridden with a severe attack of coronary thrombosis since 1953, the presence of Bhagavan and his unperturbed mind stands before me through his wonderful smile and beaming eyes that convey the Vedantic initiation more by the look than through the words.

18th March 1956

You will certainly have read my article on Sri Bhagavan under the title ‘Vedantic Tradition in Sri Ramana Maharshi’ in the Souvenir number published by the Ashrama somewhere in 1946. Through the suggestion of friends I would like to publish it as a separate opusculum [publication] and perhaps I may add a few pages of my personal reminiscences. Many of the things related in your book I have personally heard from Sri Bhagavan himself. I would like that my Indian English is properly revised and corrected. May I request you the favour of doing this work during your forthcoming holidays? On the Sivaratri of 1931 I was at the Ashrama and it so happened I could have a long period of silence in his presence; Bhagavan was practically alone in the hall as all had gone for circumambulating the mountain. Bhagavan asked me, “Why don’t you also go?” I said that “Sitting near you is as good as walking around the hill” and he smiled. I thought that he was very disposed to reply if I asked a question and I asked him in what way an inquirer coming near him, who remains in silence, is benefitted by his presence. He told me that persons who come with a lot of questions in their mind and agitated by those questions project their thoughts on him; but he being impersonal, the mass of energy liberated from the questioner does not find any place for absorbing those thoughts. SILENCE, as it

were, acts like a solid wall on which a rubberball is thrown up; and because the ball does not stick to the wall, it rebounds, and it may so happen that it comes back and cuts at the root of the devotee’s mental structure and like a boomerang destroys the whole force of mental *vrittis*. This, in turn, creates SILENCE in the devotees and when this happens, according to Bhagavan, this is the highest initiation. In expressing this conversation, I have used a modern language. Bhagavan spoke to me in Malayalam. I remember I took a paper and pencil and drew a sketch before him to represent what I have written before; and Bhagavan smiled and said: “That’s it”. This explanation I have not so far found anywhere and do you think that I can introduce it in my reminiscences of Bhagavan? I have often spoken about it to Lady Bateman, who had a sublime experience when she met Bhagavan; she wanted explanations and I narrated to her this experience. I have many other touching and personal incidents to relate but I am afraid it would be a sort of snobism to introduce oneself as the object of Bhagavan’s grace when the whole pattern of his teaching is impersonal.

21st May 1956

Yes, Swami Ramdas paid us a visit here and his books are very interesting. You are quite right in telling that “having seen Bhagavan, there was nothing else to see”, but if the occasion comes, there will be no harm in going to see him. Unless one gets thoroughly incorporated in the doctrine of one’s own Guru it is dangerous, generally speaking, to visit other personalities. The danger does not come from these Great Ones, but from the coterie of disciples that surround them and who always, in their hero-worship, want to increase the number of admirers of their own Master. In your case, there is no such danger. The personal Guru and the impersonal Truth have become ONE for you. If occasion comes your way, it is nice to meet Swami Ramdas.

In 1936, I made a special pilgrimage to Tiruvannamalai to consult Sri Bhagavan about the illustrations of the cow and the coin given in the commentary of the 2nd mantra of the *Mandukya Upanishad*. In answer to my question, he replied that when an enumeration is done, after counting three, there is a ‘four’. To this I raised the objection that

there is not only a four but all the numbers that come after three and he replied that with regard to experience catalogued under different numbers, there can be only three — the state of waking as number one; the state of dream as number two and dreamless sleep as number three and because the mind, working on a causal basis, has made an enumeration, we cannot avoid making a state that is transcendental and counting that as number four. All the other infinite series of numbers, each representing the transcendental, can be grouped under number 'four', thus avoiding the fatigue of counting an infinite series. I found this explanation extremely original and Bhagavan added that when the causal attitude is known through realisation (*anubhav*) then the mind will not fly off in search of numbers! It will be concentrated on itself. That mind itself will be known as Brahman. This realisation, without seeking a causal explanation, is the realisation of *turiya*, where *turiya* is not only a transcendental state, but it becomes equated with REALITY. It is from that day, sitting near Bhagavan, that a Vedantic Truth became living. In fact, at no moment there is experience of the dual. Reality as such is non-dual. It is only mental constructions born of ignorance that create multiplicity. The full significance of the illustrations of the coin given in the *Mandukya* was communicated by Bhagavan in a silent, intuitive way by referring to *turiya* as the fourth. Whenever I explain Vedanta, this communication of Maharshi stands prominently in my mind as the basic instruction in Vedanta. Taking the illustration of the coin in the Upanishad, when the quarter merges into the half, the half is again 2 quarters, 2 times a quarter — the numerator 1 always remains. When the $3/4$ is taken, it is again 3 times a quarter — the numerator is always 1. If we divide it into an indefinite series, the numerator 1 will never be eliminated — and Vedantically speaking, it is just a symbol; this ONE is the consciousness of existence that never gets objectified, it is existence, SAT, which Sankara uses with great dexterity in his commentary on the Gita, Ch.11, v.16. This ONE is a metaphysical intuition; with every cognition it is there. It is non-dual.

It is near Bhagavan this Truth became evident. ▲

Labbaika

KHADRE ALAM

TRANSLATED BY NAWAZUDDIN

The life story of Khadre Alam, the Sufi saint who composed this poem is not known except that he is an ancestor to my paternal uncle. From the poem it is learnt that it was composed in the year 1209 of Hijri. The present Hijri year is 1429. So we could say that it was composed almost 220 years ago in the style of Dakni Urdu, a dialect of Urdu, the language originated and used by the Mughals when they ruled India.

The manuscript is a family treasure handed down from generation to generation and is presently kept at an ancestral home in Chennai. The poems have never been previously translated or published.

The free use of Persian couplets from the writings of Moulana Rumi reveals the poet's knowledge of Persian and indicates that he was a learned man of the time. He belonged to the Qadiri Tariqa of Sufism.

Nawazuddin lives in Tiruvannamalai and works at the State Bank of India. He is involved with the Annamalai Re-forestation Society.

The title of the poem is *Irshad al maani dar tanzalat ar rahamani* (A Guide to the Meaning of Divine Revelation). It contains 30 beautifully narrated stories with their subtle meaning dealing with the Immanent as well as Transcendent nature of God. The following story from the collection illustrates Sufism in its multidimensional aspect.

Sufism is the esoteric religion of Islam. Sufis down the ages have expressed the esoteric philosophy through parables. Sufis are master story tellers and Khadre Alam is no exception. A story which seems apparently too trivial in nature is used to convey the subtle meaning of the Divinity.

Sufism is akin to Advaita in the sense that it deals with the immanent nature of God. It is also different from Advaita in the sense that it emphasizes the negation of all that is understood till one completely subsists in the Transcendent God. A Sufi journey starts with 'I and Thou', i.e., the existence of me and you. It ends with 'There is neither I nor You but only He'.

The poet in one of the stories emphasized the necessity of seeking the right Master. In another story he says that one should know one's Creator in order to worship him rightfully. Every story in this collection is a masterpiece of its kind.

LABBAIKA

Once the Archangel Gabriel, while in the presence of God, heard God saying *labbaika* — 'at thy service'.
It was obviously an answer to one of God's beloved servants.
Incessantly God was saying labbaika and at that instant there was no intonation other than labbaika.

Gabriel asked God,
"To whom do you answer with labbaika?"
God said,
"O Gabriel, you have been bestowed with the power
To travel the entire world in an instant:

Go and seek my friend to whose supplications I answer
[with labbaika]."

Gabriel went around the entire world in search of the friend.
He searched for him in the Holy Kaaba, in the Mosque,
And in the Monasteries but could not find the friend.
Exhausted by the search he returned to the service of God
And found that God was still answering
His friend's summons.

Said Gabriel,
"O Bountiful, my search has not yielded me your friend.
My knowledge is nonexistent in your Presence.
Show me your friend to whom
You have affectionately answered."

When Gabriel's bewilderment increased,
God instructed him to go to a particular forest
And find an old temple.
He arrived at the forest and approached the temple.
Pleased with this revelation, he found a person
With a bell held in his hand in front of an idol.
With great passion he sounded the bell, and there,
Gabriel heard the voice of God's answer — the labbaika.

Gabriel found that the idol and the Lord, the bell and the
Labbaika seemed to be in harmony with each other
— there was no distinction between them.
On witnessing this phenomenon Gabriel lost the use of his
Sense faculties and became oblivious to his surroundings.

When he regained consciousness and heard the labbaika,
He said,
"O Lord, please reveal this mystery to me.
The idol worshipper, the idol and the temple
Are objects of blasphemy.

What is the relevance of the perpetual and sublime intonation
Of the Lord in this place?”
Then the most Splendid Lord said,
“O Gabriel my Essence is Peerless.
Its splendour has no distinction between honour and shame,
Garden and furnace, war and peace.
Without Essence these objects are mere appearances.
When the veil of focus [determination] is removed
Every manifestation proclaims the labbaika.”

O well-mannered brothers, listen with the ear of wisdom
To the meaning of the parable.
Who is the person in the forest?
Where is the temple, the idol and the bell?

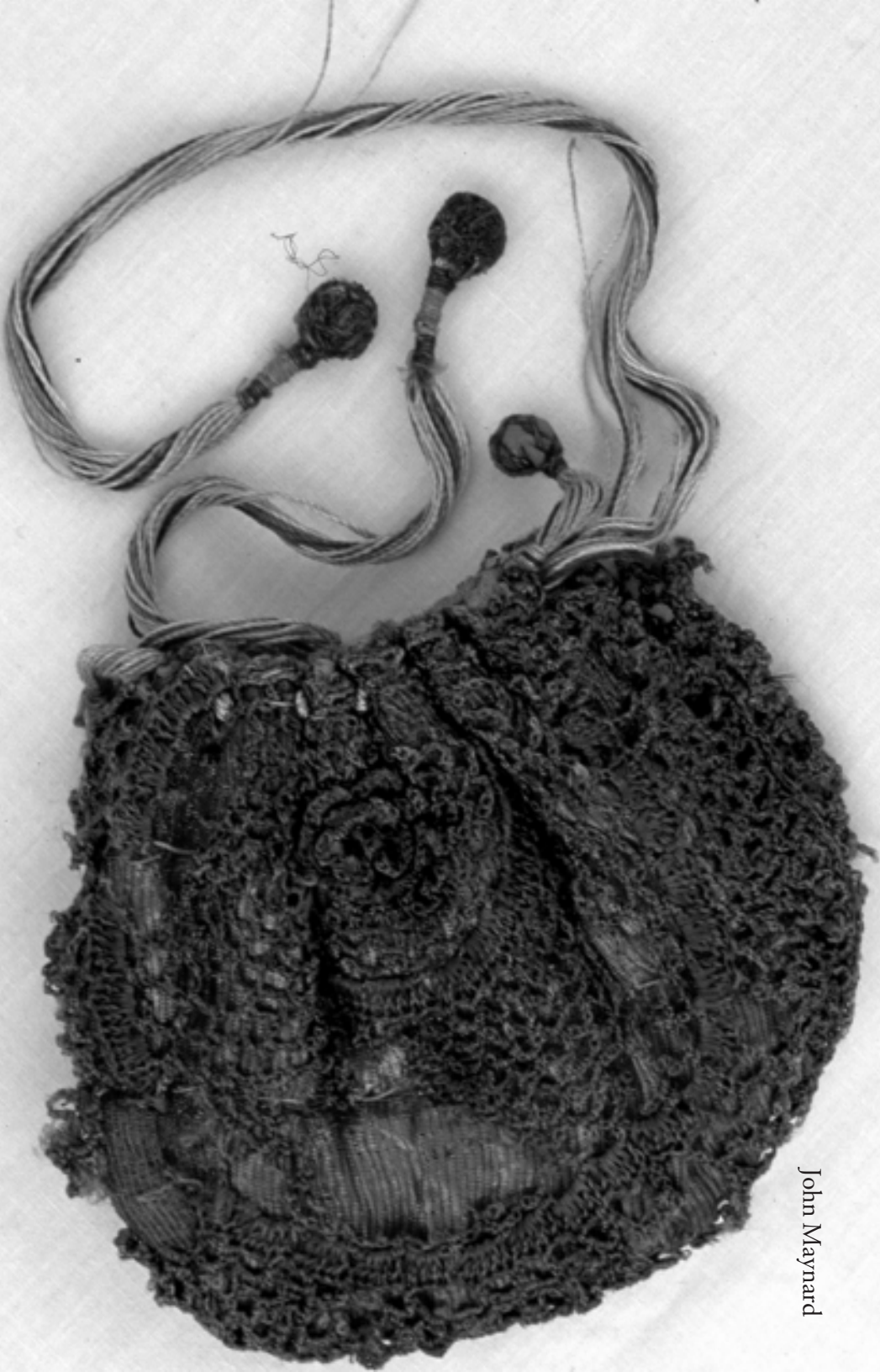
The forest is this physical body.
The temple is the taciturn soul in the body.
The idol is the Absolute Light.
Dissolve your personality and make the temple
As the precinct of the Absolute Light.

The bell is the inspiration and expiration of the breath.
With every in-breath negate the forms of objects and their
Knowledge so that you subsist
In the Lord with the out-breath.
The inherent meaning is the remembrance of God
With every breath.
After every negation of known objects, there is a positive
Knowledge — the affirmation of God —
Which, with persistence, becomes permanent.
The sound of the bell is, therefore,
The contemplation of God synchronized with breath.
It is the intonation of the name of God.

The Archangel Gabriel is the seat of revelation.
Speech has descended on the soul
Which was previously reticent.
Besides, whatever may be the external austerities
Adopted by the novice,
They are like the activities of a dead spirit
In a virtuous material body.
The beginner is merely occupied with
And absorbed in his worship
Unmindful of their ultimate subsistence in the Lord.
The seeker of worldly things is first among the beasts.

For the seeker of the Lord there is no happiness or unrest.
He neither fears the hell nor hopes for the heaven.
The seeker of the soul is the seeker of Truth,
Who is not obliged to observe a man-made custom.
He neither has a fondness of name nor is worried about his
Body and spirit.

O listeners, Khadre Alam possesses the eloquence of Meru
And has listened to labbaika
In the sanctuary of the Lord. ▲



John Maynard

Practical Sadhana

Part Five Which Way Within

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA

Question: Without doubt, God and His scriptures, and those who take up a serious spiritual practice, agree that the ultimate goal is within. But when the mind of man goes within, it finds an unimaginable variety of species, living in worlds within worlds of thought. What is the method of first locating, then concentrating on, and then attaining the One thing needful?

Unquestionably, the human mind is a well-seasoned traveller, with a photographic memory, through untold lifetimes of worlds of experience.

The Buddha once directed his followers to consider the vast number of different species existing in our creation. His followers were

Swami Sadasivananda first came to Arunachala in 1970. Soon after he became a monk under the direction of Ananda Mayi Ma.

Opposite Page. Ashram Archives: Bhagavan's Vibhuti Bag.

perplexed by the vastness of the types, shapes and colours of millions of life forms. He then declared: “The human mind is more variegated than this variety of known life.”

Yet we are told to turn within and seek the source that gave birth to these vast worlds. It is no wonder that many, due to memories of painful struggles and past failures, simply declare: “I am not going there as I would destroy the little peace I have.” The sense of an apparently uncontrollable world on fire seems to be supported even by the statements of Arjuna and Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjuna said:

“O Madhusudana, I do not see how it is possible to maintain the steady state of *Yogic* equanimity which you have taught. The mind is ever so restless! Verily, O Krishna, the mind is fickle, impetuous, powerful and turbulent. To me, it seems as difficult to control the mind as it is to control the wind.” Lord Krishna said: “Indeed, the mind is restless and difficult to control, but it can be brought under control by *abhyasa* (practice) and *vairagya* (detachment), O son of Kunti. It is my opinion that *Yoga* is difficult for anyone who lacks self-control, but can be attained by one who has mastered the lower self, if he adopts the proper means.”¹

Our Infallible Weapon

Common sense shows us that to combat and conquer a foe that is so powerful and turbulent, we must develop our own powers and stability. Meditation is the means to this end. The methods to adopt depend on where we stand. But first, we must make an affirmation that we will change our life for the better. Practically, we must first decide to invest the time for repeated effort, and then develop strength and perseverance to develop the right discernment and ensuing virtues that will strengthen us. Spiritual life improves much like worldly life: steadily step-by-step.

When we were babies crawling on the floor but wanting to be in the arms of our mother, we leaped forward only to come down with

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 6, verses 33-36. (Translation by Swami Jyotirmayananda, Yoga Research Foundation, www.yrf.org)

a crash. We thus learned to first stand and then move towards our goal. Through our repeated efforts, and failures, we achieved success.

Likewise, in spiritual practice the first task is to develop the skill of concentration within meditation. In fact, in the *Pali Canon* containing the words of the Buddha, whom the spiritual world reveres as the master of meditation, the *Pali* word used for meditation, *bhavana*, means ‘development’.²

The Buddha, also being the master of metaphor, likened this development to building a bridge over a swiftly running river. The foundations of this bridge on either shore are virtue and discernment. The most important foundation, in the middle of turbulent currents, is concentration. If our concentration rests on a weak foundation, then it is only a matter of time before our virtue and discernment are washed away. Therefore, the first step is to develop concentration.

Concentration and Vigilance

We have heard from Lord Krishna and his beloved disciple the description of the nature of the mind. We know from science that the vital nature of all life is in the blood. The life-blood of the mind is movement! To concentrate means to steady and ultimately control this movement that constantly produces distraction (mental restlessness). Therefore, to establish concentration in meditation means to control the mind. But how to do so?

When Sri Ramana Maharshi was living on sacred Arunachala in the Virupaksha cave, a devotee whose most urgent concern was this very question visited him daily.

The devotee asked Bhagavan:

“Of the means for mind-control, which is the most important?”

The Master replied:

“Breath control is the means for mind control.”³

² Gunaratna, www.accesstoinsight.org, “It burns up opposing states, thus it is jhana” (Vin. A. i, 116). The purport being that jhana “burns up” or destroys the mental defilements, thus the development (*bhavana*) of serenity and insight is promoted.

³ Self-Enquiry (*Vichara Sangraham*) of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, trans. by Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, Sri Ramanasramam, 2005, p. 17.

The devotee was a *bhakta* (devotee) of Lord Rama and was well aware that this answer was a well-established practice. He was no doubt aware that what was being referred to was not the complicated, misused and sometimes destructive practice of *yogic pranayama*, but rather the practice known as ‘watching the breath’. After Bhagavan briefly discussed breath retention and regulation, the devotee restated his question:

“How is breath-control the means for mind-control?”

Bhagavan replied: “There is no doubt that breath-control is the means for mind-control, because the mind, like breath, is a part of air, because the nature of mobility is common to both, because the place of origin is common to both, and because when one of them is controlled the other gets controlled.”⁴

Bhagavan speaks clearly of breath-control in Chapter Six of the *Sri Ramana Gita* as well:

“One should control the fickle mind by controlling the breath and then it, like a tethered animal, ceases to stray.

“With the control of breath, control of thoughts also is achieved. When thoughts are controlled one stands established at their source.

“Control of breath means merely watching with the mind the flow of breath. Through such constant watching *kumbhaka* does come about.”⁵

Deception of the Mind

Years later Bhagavan was again requested to expand on this means for controlling the mind. But prior to us discussing this, the need arises to address those modern practitioners, some of whom call themselves Neo-Advaitins, who declare that the mind and the so-called ego are both illusions.

The need to control the mind simply does not exist, and therefore absolutely *no effort* need be made to attain the Divine state referred to as the “one thing needful”. They refer to Bhagavan saying that the ‘one

thing’ needful is absolute Knowledge of the Self, and that it is always present. Further, they emphatically propound that Bhagavan’s *essential* teaching proclaims, ‘We are That’, and that the guru’s work is *solely* to reveal this Truth.

Undoubtedly, Bhagavan’s teaching emphasized that the Self (God) is within us. His essential teaching, however, as a *jagat guru*, was the revelation of *atma vichara* as the path of enquiry, which effectively removes our central ignorance, namely our identification with the ego or false “I”. This leads one to the direct experience (*aparoksha anubhava*) of Self-realization. Bhagavan definitively clarified this Truth, and that of the guru’s role, when He declared:

“If ignorance is wiped out the confusion will end and true knowledge unfolded. By remaining in contact with realized sages one *gradually* loses his ignorance till it disappears totally. The eternal Self is thus revealed... Without understanding it aright people think that the Guru teaches something like ‘TATTVAMASI’ and immediately the disciple realizes ‘I am Brahman’. In their ignorance they conceive Brahman to be something much bigger and far more powerful than anything else. With a limited ‘I’, man is so stuck up and wild. What will he be if the same ‘I’ is increased enormously? He will certainly be proportionately more ignorant and more foolish. This false ‘I’ must perish. Its annihilation is the fruit of service to the Guru. Realization is eternal and is not granted by the Guru. The Guru helps only the removal of ignorance — that is all.”⁶

Bhagavan, in answer to questions, has said that *Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras* were the quintessence of *ashthanga yoga* (the eight-limbed yoga followed by millions and respected by all). Let us apply Patanjali’s wisdom to decide whether we face the obstacles to knowledge that he describes, or whether for us this is all merely an illusion that is very easily dispelled, as suggested by Neo-Advaita teachers.

⁶ S.S. Cohen, *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Sri Ramanasramam 2006, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, \$350 p. 172. There are some variations in the quotation with the original *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Cohen has reworked some sentences of the shorthand style of M. Venkataramiah’s notes. He may have been present during the said exchange.

⁴ Ibid. p. 18.

⁵ *Sri Ramana Gita*, Sri Ramanasramam 2004, p. 25, verses 3-5.

Patanjali declares: “Sickness, mental laziness, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, sloth, craving for sense-pleasure, false perception, despair caused by failure to concentrate and unsteadiness in concentration: these distractions are the obstacles to knowledge. These distractions are accompanied by grief, despondency, trembling of the body and irregular breathing.”⁷

To those who assert that they do not believe these human traits, which derive from ignorance, are anything other than illusion all that can be said is: “Try wishing them away, and good luck!”

Strength of Breath

In 1945, Bhagavan was again requested to explain whether breath-control or watching the breath was essential for controlling the mind. I quote from *Day by Day with Bhagavan*:

“In continuation of an old question of his with reference to a certain passage in *Maha Yoga*, he asked Bhagavan whether it was necessary and a condition precedent for a man to watch his breathing before beginning the mental quest ‘Who am I?’”

“*Bhagavan*: All depends on a man’s *pakva*, i.e., his aptitude and fitness. Those who do not have the mental strength⁸ to concentrate or control their mind and direct it on the quest are advised to watch their breathing, since such watching will naturally and as a matter of course lead to cessation of thought and bring the mind under control. Breath and mind arise from the same place and when one of them is controlled, the other is also controlled. As a matter of fact, in the quest method — which is more correctly ‘Whence am I?’ and not merely ‘Who am I?’ — we are not simply trying to eliminate saying ‘we are not the body, not the senses and so on,’ to reach what remains as the ultimate reality, but we are trying to find whence the ‘I’ thought

⁷ Swami Prabhavananda, *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, Sri Ramakrishna Math 2005, Sutras 30-31, p.388.

⁸ Another translation of ‘mental strength’ is preparedness gained through repeated practice. The word *pakva* comes from the root ‘*pach*’ which means ‘to ripen’, ‘to be cooked’. Bhagavan used the derivative ‘*pakvi*’ which, by implication, means those who have become mature through the cooking process of *sadhana* (spiritual practice).

or the ego arises within us. The method contains within it, though implicitly and not expressly, the watching of the breath. When we watch wherefrom the ‘I’ thought, the root of all thoughts, springs, we are necessarily watching the source of the breath also, as the ‘I’ thought and the breath arise from the same source.

“Mr. Prasad again asked whether, for controlling breath, the regular *pranayama* is not better in which 1:4:2 proportion for breathing in, retaining, and breathing out is prescribed. Bhagavan replied: ‘All those proportions, sometimes regulated not by counting but by uttering *mantras*, etc., are aids for controlling the mind. That is all. Watching the breath is also one form of *pranayama*. Retaining breath, etc., is more violent and may be harmful in some cases, e.g. where there is no proper Guru to guide the *sadhak* [the one performing the spiritual practice] at every step and stage. But merely watching the breath is easy and involves no risk.’”⁹

Watch and Pray

This method is indeed easy, and can be joined to any form of *sadhana* (spiritual practice) that one is engaged in. The breath is not controlled but merely watched with acute attention. Its movement should at all times remain natural and comfortable. It is helpful at first to centre one’s attention without stress on any area where the movement of the breath is physically palpable or noticeable. The attention of the mind with alert awareness on the movement of the breath satisfies the mind’s life-sustaining urge to circulate through movement.

Thus we watch and pray with calm but steady concentration. The place of our origin, that forgotten abode of the Self, is Self-revealing. Becoming truly still, and calling on God with patient perseverance, we will enter and experience:

“The Way, the Truth and the Light.” ▲

(*To be continued*)

⁹ Devaraja Mudaliar, *Day by Day With Bhagavan*, Sri Ramanasramam 2002. pp.55-56, 1-12-1945.



Sri N. Balarama Reddy

DENNIS HARTEL

With a deep and sincere conviction, he said: “He was a being whose advent into this world would bless the Earth Goddess. There is a line in the *Bhagavatam*, which says: ‘They put their feet on the earth, the earth feels blessed.’ To my mind, he was one of the most glorious beings that has ever visited this earth. The more you live with him, the more you feel that you have done something in the past, something great, which entitled you to deserve association with Bhagavan.”

This statement was made by Sri N. Balarama Reddy as he reminisced on his unforgettable good fortune in coming to stay with Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1937. He was 29 years old at the time, and until his final day, at the age of 87, he remained fully anchored in Sri Bhagavan, whether he resided in the Ashram, his village, or elsewhere.

October 30, 2008 marked the anniversary of his birth centenary and many of Sri Bhagavan's devotees, who were fortunate to receive wise counsel and inspiration from Sri Balarama Reddy, fondly remembered his gentle and serene presence on that day. There is much to learn from and emulate in his one-pointed life of practice and surrender to the will of the Master.

He told us that his life took a turn while in the middle of his M.A. studies at Banaras Hindu University. At that time he began to question the relative value of university degrees in the light of his ever-deepening desire to follow wholeheartedly a spiritual path. He had come to the realization that the purpose of life was not to accumulate material wealth or possessions, but to attain God and experience the universal, underlying Reality. Tradition tells us that one must learn Self-Knowledge from an authentic Guru, and this led him in search of a Master who could guide him to the realization of the Truth.

After visiting ashrams in North India and meeting reputed Gurus, he finally made his way to Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry in 1931. He later said that none of Aurobindo's philosophical writings could convey his or the Mother's power as spiritual embodiments. The magnetic power of these two spiritual giants kept him glued to Aurobindo's Ashram for almost six years.

While he was in Aurobindo Ashram he met Kapali Sastriar, the esteemed disciple of both Aurobindo and Ganapati Muni. As Kapali was a casual visitor to Sri Ramanasramam, he would on occasion describe to Balarama, in an intriguing manner, these visits. This prompted Balarama's first visit to Tiruvannamalai in 1933. He made a second, three-day visit, in 1935 and another in 1936. By this time, he felt so overwhelmingly attracted to the Maharshi and his path of Self-enquiry that he made up his mind to secure the blessings of Aurobindo and the Mother and to take up residence with the Maharshi in his Ashram.

By making this move, was he not changing his Guru? Is it proper to do this? These were the doubts that assailed him. He put these doubts to the Maharshi for resolution and, understanding the aptitude of Balarama and his scope for spiritual fulfillment, Sri Bhagavan did not hesitate to tell him that it was not improper for him to do so. The

Maharshi always asserted that the Guru is only One, and that He must ultimately be experienced as one's own Self.

Only then did Balarama have the courage to move on to new ground, to a new path, and a new guide. The ancients say that a seeker should stick to one path and one Guru. This is the *sine qua non* for spiritual progress. But that one Guru should be the embodiment of all that the seeker aspires for, and the teachings should be in harmony with the disciple's natural spiritual tendencies. Balarama, through Sri Bhagavan's grace, received many assurances that his decision was right, and it was a decision he never regretted.

After settling in the Ashram he led a quiet life, practising the teachings in the presence of the Master. Now there was nothing else in this world that could attract him or pull him away from the path he had taken. Here it must be mentioned that Balarama was born into a wealthy landlord family, but had no attachment to the fruits of his family inheritance. His father too, was a serious sadhaka who encouraged and supported Balarama in his spiritual quest.

Later Balarama built a cottage in the Ashram and spent most of his time there. During the last years of his life he rarely left the Ashram. He was persuaded in 1995 to see a doctor in Bangalore for an ailment. The doctor examined him thoroughly, took several tests and declared him fit and free from any serious problem. On the very day he was declared healthy, Balarama was sitting with an attendant in his room in Bangalore when he saw a vision of Bhagavan calling him and asking him to come with him. He mentioned this to the attendant who dismissed it as imagination, reminding Balarama that the doctor had just given a certificate of good health. Not fooled by the doctor's assessment or the attendant's observation, Balarama knew his end was near. Later that same day, to the surprise of everyone, he expired. His body was taken to his village in Andhra Pradesh and its cremation was performed. The president of Sri Ramanasramam and other devotees attended the cremation.

The promise of the Lord that He saves those who dedicate their life to Him, heart and soul, was totally fulfilled in the life of Sri N. Balarama Reddy. As a devotee of the Master, he is an everlasting example to us all.





HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

Coming Under An Unknown Spiritual Influence

S.K.GOROWALA

It was in April 1969 that I visited Ramana Ashram for the first time. Till then, my knowledge of Maharshi Ramana was only through a couple of books published by the Ashram giving the background of his life and an outline of his philosophy. In addition to these books, I had also been going over the quarterly magazine published under the editorship of Arthur Osborne, which invariably brought out some excellent articles by some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramana. In this literature I had naturally come across the Puranic fable of Arunachala hill, at the base of which Ramana lived all his life from the age of about sixteen, when he first came to Tiruvannamalai and where he went into Samadhi. Though I was reading about Sri Ramana, my morning puja was only of my *Ishta Dev*, Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna.

For the reader to get a clear sense of the happenings in this small episode which changed my life, I feel it would be relevant to understand my state of mind at that time. My background and the environment in which I grew up also bears a direct relationship with the episode.

My father was a pure Gandhian; he wore only *khadi*. Mother too often wore simple khadi saris. I recall listening to the hum of the *charkha* every morning, usually combined with the muted recitation of some prayer. I think they used to use the *charkha* in turn, father in the mornings and mother in the afternoons. They both followed some of the tenets of the Sikh religion as taught by Guru Nanak Dev, the first guru. In addition they both followed a daily routine laid down by Swamy Dayanand, founder of the Arya Samaj. A common factor in these two organized religions is the fundamental belief in God as the all pervasive consciousness which in essence is formless; as such there is no worship of any deity with form. My father read and recited from the Bhagwat Gita and the Upanishads regularly. I being the youngest boy child (I had two elder sisters and two brothers, the eldest, twelve years older than me), I was inducted into the daily evening Vedic prayers of the family. The elder boys, being busy with their own studies, were not expected to join in this ritual. Father was deeply involved in the Arya Samaj movement in Delhi, of which he was the president for a number of years. Here the period I am referring to is the early 1930s. Every Sunday morning and often on regular evenings, it was my father's habit to visit the Arya Samaj, where regular lectures on texts of the Upanishads were held. I was invariably asked to accompany the parents on these occasions. Though I was only around five years of age, I do recall some of these talks by a few of the learned swamis. I can even today picture Swamy Kevalananda, who gave discourses on Kathopnishad, sitting on the dais and telling the story of the young boy Nachketas, who was sent to the god of death Yama and had long discussions with him.

Father was a man of deep intellect and studied a wide variety of literature connected with religious, scientific, as well as political thought. His special interest in Sufi thought went to the extent of learning by heart some of their verses in the original Persian. During our evening

prayers and often after dinner, he spent time with both my sisters and myself reciting some of these verses, translating them into English and Punjabi. He mostly addressed my elder sister, who was a sensitive and intelligent girl, ten years older than me. I, as the little one around, just listened to all the dialogue and the stories. My mind being a clean slate at that age, I managed to automatically retain some of these stories in my memory. It is these early memories which affect one's background and become the backbone of one's personality.

Subsequently, I did my schooling in DAV Schools in Delhi and then went to the Benaras Hindu University, from where I emerged as a science graduate. This happened just before the historic 15 August 1947, our first Independence Day. I had earlier applied to join the Indian Air Force, for which I cleared all tests and became an Officer Cadet, training as a fighter pilot in the IAF in October that year. I was commissioned in April 1950 as a Pilot Officer. While undergoing further training on Spitfire aircraft, which was the prestigious British fighter responsible for winning the Battle of Britain in World War II, I met with a near-fatal crash on take-off. This was due to engine failure and not my fault.

I suffered multiple injuries, losing an eye, breaking both my knees and receiving skull and facial fractures, which entailed prolonged plastic surgery. All this took more than a dozen operations, with long curing periods of a month or two inbetween. Most of my curing period was spent on sick leave or on light administrative duties in my parent station, Ambala.

After having got over this interim period, I was finally absorbed into the IAF performing air traffic control duties. With my close association with the pilots, I naturally made a good friendly controller. These duties I enjoyed and continued to perform at different Air Force stations, handling all types of fighter as well as transport aircraft.

After more than fifteen years of service I got married. In due course, in the year 1969 the wife had just returned from the hospital with our third daughter when I received my posting order from Bangalore to New Delhi. I was required to move within a fortnight. It was at this juncture that I felt that I might not be in a position to visit the south

again for some time and my wish to visit Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry and Ramana Ashram at Tiruvannamalai might remain unfulfilled. As I had ten days holiday, my wife was quite happy to let me leave Bangalore for three days to visit both these places.

Next morning I packed a week-ender and going over to the bus-stand, asked for the bus to Pondy, “Sir, bus for Pondy two o’clock”. So I asked for the bus to Tiruvannamalai, “T N Malai bus ready, sir. Stage 17 — go quick, sir”.

Within five minutes I found myself sitting at a window seat on the bus to Tiruvannamalai. I was told it was a five-hour journey. The bus started on its way, my mind had no worries, no anxieties, the scene of the movement on the road, traffic going by, sounds of horns of vehicles were the usual routine the mind was habituated to. Their impact on my blank mind, sort of mesmerized me and I started hearing my own inner voice, *Om Sree Arunachala ... Om Sree Arunachala ... Om Sree Arunachala...* Gradually, the scenario outside started to fade away. The inner voice and the *japam* going on of its own volition became more predominant. I recall the scenario from the window changing from the early morning low intensity traffic to practically nil and city buildings changing to green paddy fields. While everything remained as if in the background, the mind itself was engulfed in the auto-japam...*Om Sree Arunachala ... Om Sree Arunachala ... Om Sree Arunachala...*

Here I must make it clear that I had never indulged in a practice of *japam* related to Sri Arunachala. All I had known of Arunachala was that it is the name of the hill at the base of which, Maharshi Ramana had lived and spent his whole life. I was also familiar with the Puranic story about Lord Shiva acquiring the form of this hill on earth, but in my heart-of-hearts, I did not have any deep emotion, adoration or *bhava* for either Lord Shiva or his form on earth as Arunachaleshwara. My practice of *japam*, which was not routine or regular, was only related to my *Ishta Deva*, Sri Ramakrishna.

The *japam* carried on, interminably and without any volition on my part. After a couple of hours the bus stopped at a way side restaurant; everyone got off and so did I and sat down with other

passengers at a table for four, but I could not speak, when an attendant came to take an order, I managed to convey my needs by nodding and with sign language, without disturbing the rhythm of the inner voice that continued its recitation. I had some idly and coffee and at the end paid a ten-rupee note at the counter, received back some change, gave the cashier a thank-you smile with a nod, went back to the bus and resumed my seat. The bus recommenced its journey to Tiruvannamalai. Throughout the coffee break, there was no interruption in the *japam*. We had one more short halt enroute. Throughout I remained as if possessed, in the same trance, no change...till after a gradual turn of the road I saw the peak of the hill — Sri Arunachala. I do not know if physically I joined my palms in the most reverent *namaskar*, bowing down my head with tears of bliss flowing from my eyes, but within it happened just like that.

Within minutes after that, I found myself at the gate of the Ramana Ashram. ▲

The Eleventh Volume of Vasishtha Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni’s *Collected Works*, which contains *Prakirnakam* or Miscellaneous Writings, was released before Sri Bhagavan’s Samadhi on the 23rd February, Maha Sivaratri. There is one more volume yet to be completed that consists of a complete index of the previous eleven volumes. Sri K. Natesan who, over many decades, lovingly collected and preserved the manuscripts of Sri Ganapati Muni, was instrumental in the publication of this historic series. He was unable to attend the function due to the infirmities of old age. He is now 95 years. He is presently residing in the house of his younger brother in Tiruvannamalai town.



Alexander Shivalov

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION

The Breath of Life

The Practice of Breath Meditation

SWAMI NIRMALANANDA GIRI

This article is the second in a new series of practical instructions to assist seekers. These instructions are not meant as a substitute for self-enquiry but are secondary exercises to help purify the mind.

In our inmost being we are ever-free, ever-perfect, but we have forgotten and wander in aimless suffering for countless incarnations. Meditation is the way of remembering and restoration. A person suffering from amnesia has not ceased to be who he really is, but he needs to regain his memory. The 'memory block' from which we suffer is the condition of the various levels on which we presently function, especially the *buddhi*, the intelligence. Our consciousness is dislocated from its natural centre.

Meditation is the process of re-centring our awareness into the principle of pure consciousness, our essential being. We have lost this awareness through awareness of external objects, and become addicted to objective consciousness. Rather than disperse our consciousness

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through objects that draw us outward away from the source of our being, we must take an object that will have the opposite effect, present it to the mind, and reverse our consciousness. That object is the breath, which is the meeting place of body, mind, and spirit.

By sitting with closed eyes and letting the mind become easefully absorbed in experiencing the movements of the breath we enter into the consciousness from which it arises — the eternal Witness Consciousness. The flowing breath is not the same but different each time we breathe. So we are not fixing our attention on a ‘thing’ at all, but on an utter intangible. The breath, then, is not really the object of meditation. Rather it is our inner consciousness that naturally and spontaneously becomes the object in Breath Meditation.

Bhagavan’s teaching regarding breath-control through witnessing its movement is clearly given in Chapter Six of the *Sri Ramana Gita*:

One should control the fickle mind by controlling the breath and then it, like a tethered animal, ceases to stray.

With the control of breath, control of thoughts also is achieved. When thoughts are controlled one stands established at their source.

Control of breath means merely watching with the mind the flow of breath. Through such constant watching *kumbhaka* does come about.¹

We start with awareness of the ordinary physical breath, but that awareness, when cultivated correctly, leads us into higher awareness, which enables us to perceive the subtle movement behind the breath. Ultimately, we come into contact with the Breather of the breath, our own spirit. In many spiritual traditions the same word is used for both breath and spirit, underscoring the esoteric principle that in essence they are the same, though we naturally think of spirit as being the cause of breath(ing).

The Practice of Breath Meditation

1) Sit upright, comfortable and relaxed, with your hands on your knees or thighs or resting, one on the other, in your lap.

¹ *Sri Ramana Gita*, Sri Ramanasramam 2004, p. 25, verses 3-5.

2) Turn your eyes slightly downward and close them gently. This removes visual distractions and reduces your brain-wave activity by about seventy-five percent, thus helping to calm the mind.

3) Your mouth should be closed so that all breathing is done through the nose. This, too, aids in quieting the mind. Though your mouth is closed, the jaw muscles should be relaxed so the upper and lower teeth are not clenched or touching one another, but parted.

4) Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply three or four times, feeling the inhaling and exhaling breath moving in and out through your nostrils.

5) Now breathe naturally and easefully, keeping your awareness on the tip of your nose, feeling the breath as it flows in and out of your nostrils. (Some people become more aware of the actual noisetip, even the very end of the nose, and others remain more aware of the nostrils. Whichever happens naturally is the best for you. So whenever this article says ‘noisetip’ it applies equally to the nostrils.) Do not ‘follow’ the breath in and out of your body, but just be aware of the breath movement sensation at the tip of your nose.

6) Keeping your awareness on the tip of your nose, breathe naturally and calmly, easefully observing the sensation of the breath moving there throughout all your inhalations and exhalations. This enables you to enter effortlessly into the Witness Consciousness that is your true nature.

7) Do this for the rest of the meditation time, letting your awareness merge into the breath at the noisetip and, feeling the sensations of the breath moving there. After a while it may feel as though the breath is flowing in and out the tip of your nose more than the actual nostrils. (By “tip of the nose” is meant the half-inch or so at the end of the nose, not just the exact end of the nose.) That is perfectly all right, but not necessary. But whichever it may be, the focus of your attention should be only at that point — not somewhere else either outside or inside the body.

8) Let the breath ‘be’ as it will. If the breath is naturally long, let it be so. If it is short, let it be so. If the inhalations and exhalations are of unequal length, that is just fine. Let the breath be natural and unforced,

and just observe and experience it. In time you will find that your breath will also become more subtle and refined, and slow down. Sometimes your breath can become so light that it almost seems as though you are not breathing at all. At such times you may perceive that your inhaling and exhaling are more like a magnetic pull or flow in and out instead of actual breath movements. This occurs as the prana that produces the breath switches back and forth in polarity from positive to negative. It is also normal for your breath awareness to move back and forth from more objective to more subtle and back to more objective.

The breath is a kind of barometer of the subtle energies of body and mind. Sometimes it is very smooth, light and easeful, and at other times it feels heavy, even constricted, 'clogged', sticky, ragged, uneven, and generally uncomfortable and 'not right'. It can even feel as though it has knots, clumps, clots, and tangles. When this is so, do not try to interfere with it or 'make it better'. Rather, just be calmly aware and let it be as it is. If you do this, the problem in the subtle energy levels which the breath is reflecting will correct itself and the breath will become easy and pleasant.

9) In Breath Meditation we only focus our awareness on the breath at the nosetip, and not on any other point of the body such as the 'third eye'. This is so the subtle life energies will move as they will without any interference from us. For those energies are intelligent, just as are the cells of our body. However, as you meditate, you may become aware of one or more areas of your body at different times. This is all right when they come and go spontaneously, but keep centered on your nosetip and your breath.

10) Thoughts, impressions, memories, inner sensations, and suchlike may also arise during meditation. Be calmly aware of all these things in a detached and objective manner. Let them come and go as they will, but keep your attention centred on the tip of the nose and your breath moving there. Be indifferent to any inner or outer phenomena. Breath Meditation produces peace, awareness and quiet joy in your mind as well as soothing radiations of energy in the physical and subtle bodies. Be calmly aware of all these things in a detached and objective

manner — they are part of the transforming effect of meditation, and are perfectly all right — but keep your attention centred in your breath. Even though something feels very right or good when it occurs, it should not be forced or hung on to. The sum and substance of it all is this: It is not the experience we are after, but the effect.

11) If you find yourself getting restless, distracted, 'fuzzy', anxious or tense in any degree, just inhale and exhale slowly and deeply a few times, feeling the inhaling and exhaling breath moving in and out through your nostrils, at the same time feeling that you are releasing and breathing out all tensions. Then resume meditating as before. Relaxation is the key to successful meditation practice.

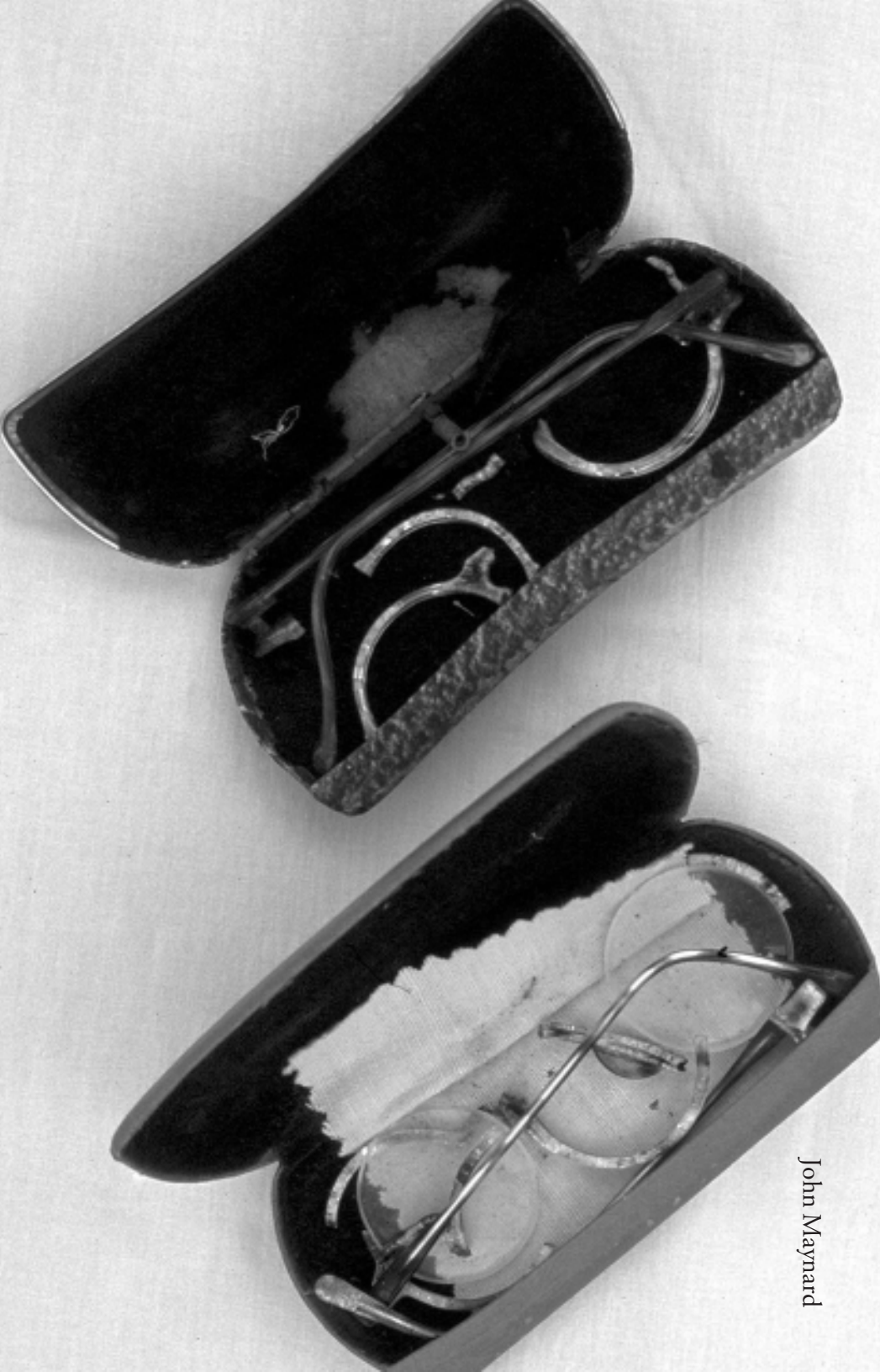
12) Keep in mind that Breath Meditation basically consists of being aware in a relaxed and easeful manner of your breath as it moves in and out at the tip of your nose. That is all!

At the end of your meditation time, keep on being calmly aware of your breath moving in and out of your nosetip as you go about your various activities. In this way you can maintain the calm and clear state of meditation.

Simple and Easy

Can it be that simple and easy? Yes, it can, and is. Suppose some people who have always lived in tents entered a house and came upon a locked door. Knowing nothing of doors, locks and keys, how would they open it? They might throw themselves against it, beat on it with their fists or heavy objects such as sledgehammers. If someone approached them with a tiny key, which looks as if it could easily snap in two, and told them it would open the door, they would laugh at him. But he would simply insert the key, turn it, and enter. It would be that simple and that easy. Breath Meditation is also that simple and easy because it goes directly to the root of our bondage which is a single (and therefore simple) thing: loss of awareness.

All the theory and eulogy in the world regarding a meditation practice mean virtually nothing. But practice is everything. In meditation more than anything else, practice certainly does Make Perfect. And the practice is so marvellously simple. ▲



John Maynard

Leaves From Memories

The Grace of Sri Bhagavan

B.C. MRITHYUNJAYA

Thasmai Sri Ramanaya loka gurave shokasya hanthre namaha

— Swami Brahmananda Saraswathi

I lost my mother when I was fourteen months old and as a result my father had special love for me since I was the last child in the family. He was a retired teacher and was highly respected for his honesty and sincerity and although his life was full of tragedies, he never lost confidence and faith in God.

Till the age of eighteen I had neither heard of Sri Bhagavan nor had seen his photograph. It was exactly on Friday the 14th April 1950, the Mahanirvana day of Sri Bhagavan, while I was sitting in front of my house about 200 miles away from Tiruvannamalai, that I noticed a 'shooting star with a luminous tail' moving slowly across the sky from the South to the North and slowly disappearing. I was astonished at this sight and told my father about it.

B.C. Mrithyunjaya is a retired school principal. He lives in Banaglore.

Opposite Page. Ashram Archives: Bhagavan's Glasses.

I could not get to sleep until late that night as I kept remembering the star. Next morning while I was still in bed, my father showed me an English newspaper that reported the Mahanirvana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi along with his photograph. The paper also reported the shooting star that I had noticed the previous night. I gazed at the photo of Sri Bhagavan and was completely absorbed by his blissful look, which haunted me. From that moment my attitude to life changed. The Lord of Arunachala, Sri Ramana, in his infinite mercy showered upon me his grace and blessings. I began to feel that he and he alone could protect me from worldly troubles and I developed an urge to visit Sri Ramanasramam as soon as possible, although being young and a student I could not fulfill my ambition as yet. After my graduation I was employed as a high school teacher in Bangalore. The desire to visit the holy land of Sri Ramanasramam increased day by day. In the meantime I came in contact with the late Sri Ramachandra Rao, an ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan.

Having decided to visit the Ashram, I went to reserve my seat to Tiruvannamalai, only to find, to my bitter disappointment, that everything was booked for the next two days. At a loss, I was standing disconsolately at the city bus stop when to my great surprise a stranger approached me and told me that he was a businessman from Tiruvannamalai and had reserved his seat for the return journey but due to unavoidable circumstances he could not go. He also asked me if I could help him to sell the ticket he had reserved! For a moment I was dumbfounded, then I immediately felt that Sri Bhagavan himself must have sent him to help me. My joy knew no bounds and my depressed attitude disappeared at once. I purchased his ticket and travelled to Tiruvannamalai next morning as scheduled.

The moment I stepped on the holy soil of Sri Ramanasramam, I felt a strong attraction to the place and to the silence that prevailed there. The visit awakened me from the sleep of ignorance. At the entrance I met Sri. K. Padmanabhan, who showed me the way to the office. I also introduced myself to the then ashram President, Sri T.N. Venkataraman and conveyed my respects. The happiness that flooded my heart and made me one with the Supreme Lord of the Universe,

Sri Ramana is indescribable. Though I had not been fortunate enough to see Sri Bhagavan in his physical form, he blessed me with his Grace and I felt that he was as much alive as during his lifetime.

I saw that Sri Bhagavan the universal Supreme Being abides in my heart leading me on to the ultimate goal. The ashram is a veritable Abode of Bliss for devotees and visitors. The whole atmosphere is charged with universal love. Swami Rajeshwarananda told me of the sacred hill of Arunachala and advised me to perform *giri pradakshina*, which I did in all sincerity and earnestness. I also visited the various caves situated on the hill where Sri Bhagavan spent his early days in seclusion.

On the day of my departure, I met the president of the Ashram to pay my respects and express my gratitude. Tears rolling from my eyes and voice choked, I began to weep like a child since my attachment to Sri Bhagavan had become so deep that I could not suppress the agony of my departure. The President held me by his hands and consoled me saying, "Sri Bhagavan is everywhere. He is with you all the time whether you are here or not." From then on, for the next fifty years, I have been a frequent visitor to Sri Ramanasramam and realize how fortunate I am to be at the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan Arunachala Ramana, which has become the focal point of my earthly sojourn.

The holy hill of Arunachala is very sacred as it is the symbol of peace, purity and eternity. It is the centre of the emancipation of man from 'ego'. It is the hill of refuge that cures the ills of recurring rebirth. Sri Bhagavan said, "Arunachala is the spiritual centre of the world." He encouraged the devotees to perform *giri pradakshina*.

karthiruragnaya prapayathe phalam

karma kim param karma thajjadam Upadeshasara, verse one

After my retirement from service, I decided to perform *mandala giri pradakshina* of the holy hill of Arunachala, but dire family duties began to haunt me. My children's education was over and they had to be settled in life, which was my responsibility, and so the question of leaving the family for forty-eight days became a worry and caused my dilemma, although the ever present faith in Sri Bhagavan never left me. During the hours of distress, I recalled Bhagavan's saying, "The

ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds. He knows his burden.” I realized that what has to happen will happen whether I am with my family or in the Ashram. The best way for me was to have full faith in Bhagavan and surrender to him. I continuously gazed at the peaceful countenance of Sri Bhagavan, I was absorbed by him. This gave me the confidence that I should go ahead with my programme, leaving the entire burden of the family in his hands. Having decided to go, I wrote to the Ashram president and he responded saying that I was welcome. I must confess that whenever I try to accomplish something on my own, I tend to fail miserably in my endeavour; but when I surrender myself to the Lord of the Universe Sri Ramana the result is instant. I realized that nothing could happen without his Grace and I had no reason to be despondent. At that stage I remembered Sri Bhagavan’s saying: “Surrender, all will be well. Throw all responsibilities on to God. If one surrenders to God, there will be no cause for anxiety. If you are protected by God, you must be able to abide by his will and not grieve over whether things go as you would wish or not. If your desires are fulfilled, do not be elated, and if you are frustrated, do not be disappointed. The elation may be deceptive and should be checked, for initial joy may end in grief.”

eashwararpatham nechaya krutham

chittashodhakam mukti sadhakam

Upadeshasara, verse 3

I left for Sri Ramanasramam on the 10 December 1991. I was provided with a room facing holy Arunachala and next morning I completed my ablutions by 3 a.m., prostrated at the Samadhi of Sri Bhagavan for his blessings and started my *mandala girupradakshina*.

It is said that, there are painful situations in one’s life that have to be faced with an aching heart. This became almost true during my *giripradakshina*. I had already completed thirty-two of the forty-eight days by 12th January 1992 when I developed a severe headache and was feeling restless, uncomfortable and feverish. It was about 5.30 pm and I was seated at the entrance of Sri Bhagavan’s Samadhi when the president of the Ashram sent word to me to meet him immediately. He told me that he had received a telephone call from my wife who would ring back in an hour. By 6 pm she phoned me, almost in tears

and asked me to return home as soon as possible since there were problems for my family. The children were nervous and my presence was immediately needed. I was very upset and was in tears of regret that I had to give up my remaining sixteen days of *giripradakshina*. I phoned my wife and informed her that I would be returning by morning at the earliest and asked her to manage till then.

I could not get to sleep until late that night for worry and disappointment, but at exactly 12.20 am I had the vision of Sri Bhagavan standing at the cot near my head with his cool refreshing smile and as he kept on looking at me I was filled with joy. His majestic figure fascinated me beyond words. His gentleness and grace were sublime and all-pervasive. The vision remained for about three minutes and disappeared. After this Divine experience I did not sleep again. How could I ever describe the indescribable happiness that flooded my heart and made me one with the Supreme Self? Next morning I left for my last *giripradakshina* as I had to leave for home early but when I returned to the Ashram there was another phone call from my wife to inform me that the situation was quite normal, there was no need for alarm and that I need not return home but should stay and complete the remaining sixteen days of *giripradakshina*. I was amazed by this news and recalled my experience of the previous night with Sri Bhagavan. I realized that he is the single sustenance that protects me against all obstacles. Distress often leads us to God. I stayed back in the Ashram and completed the remaining days of *giripradakshina*. As the president said, I am really blessed by Sri Bhagavan’s Grace.

This experience at the Ashram made me feel that Sri Bhagavan is the very basis of my existence and I am filled with peace and tranquility, love and affection that flow into my heart from the holy hill of Arunachalam which sustains me every minute of my existence. As long as Arunachala Ramana remains enshrined in my heart, no amount of suffering and pain would be able to deflect me from abiding at his lotus feet. I feel that I cannot survive for a moment without his Grace since I have found my new life. As Sri Bhagavan has said, “Guru’s grace is worth more than study and meditation. It is primary, all others are secondary.” ▲



BOOK EXCERPT

Short Sketches of Saints: Known & Unknown

Lord Dattatreya

J.P. VASWANI

Dada Jashan P. Vaswani was born in 1918, at Hyderabad, now in Pakistan. He was a brilliant student but gave up a promising academic career to follow his guru, his saintly uncle Sadhu T.L. Vaswani. He said of his master's teaching: "Everything we have is a trust, a loan to be passed on to others: our time, our talent, our experience, our knowledge, our wisdom, our position and prestige in society, our bank accounts, our properties, our possessions; our life itself is a loan given to us to be passed on to those whose need is greater than ours. And that left such a stamp on me."

We thank the Gita Publishing House, Pune, for permission to reprint this entire chapter. They may be contacted at gph@sadhuvaswani.org

Many of J.P. Vaswani's books have been published by Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. They may be contacted at both sterlingpublishers@airtelmail.in and www.sterlingpublishers.com

Short Sketches of Saints: Known and Unknown. pp.234, Rs200.

Let me tell you about an *acharya*, an *avatara* of the Lord, who is worshipped by many Hindus as a God. He is Lord Dattatreya, who is regarded as a Divine Incarnation of the Holy Trinity, Brahma,

Shiva and Vishnu. The word Datta in Sanskrit means 'given'; and 'Atreya' signifies the lineage of the great Sage Atri. Dattatreya was 'given' to sage Atri and his wife, Anasuya, as a gift of the Gods. Dattatreya is also regarded as the *Aadi Guru* in the Nath tradition of worship.

There are many versions of the legend of Dattatreya, and each one of them is deeply symbolic and significant. I shall narrate to you the version of his story as it is told to us in the *Markandeya Purana*.

Sage Atri and his wife Anasuya were a pious and a devoted couple; Anasuya was an ideal *rishi patni*, who was a tremendous source of support to her husband in his spiritual practices. A few rishis who had met the couple, happened to speak very highly of her faith and devotion to her husband. Indeed, they praised her to the skies.

This came to the notice of Goddesses Lakshmi, Parvati and Saraswati. When they heard of Anasuya and her great qualities as a *pativrata*, they begged their husbands — Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma — to put Anasuya to the test, so that they may see how devoted she was.

The Holy Trinity of the Gods assumed the role of mendicant *sanyasis* and went to Atri's ashram; there, they begged for food with the traditional words: *Bhavati bikshaam dehi*. As you know, India's ancient scriptures tell us that it is our duty to feed those who come to our door. *Athiti devo bhava*: the guest is the equivalent of God. And when they happen to be ascetics who are obliged to live on food that is begged as *biksha*, it is incumbent upon the lady of the house to offer them food, even if it happens to be the last morsel in the house! Accordingly, the pious and devout Anasuya came out immediately, to offer them food. But the three mendicants laid an impossible condition before her: they would not accept food at her hands, unless she served them without any clothes on her person — in other words, completely naked.

This might sound shocking to us in the modern age! But in those days of *Tretayuga*, people were made of sterner stuff, and would analyse the reasons behind such strange requests. So did Anasuya. Being the perfect *grahasti* she knew it was her sacred duty to feed the mendicants, who had begged food from her; in this sense, they would be like her children, and she, who offered them food, would be in their mother's position. But the strange condition they had laid, revealed that they

were no ordinary mendicants. Above all, so true and faithful was her devotion to her husband, that Anasuya was certain that no harm or shame would ever come to her. She decided to accept the strange condition and offer food to the visitors.

She meditated on the form of her husband, took refuge at his feet, and sprinkled over the three *Sanyasins*, a few drops of water which were used for washing the feet of her husband. The moment Anasuya did this, the Gods who were standing before her, turned into tiny infants, mewling and crying at her doorstep. Overjoyed at this Divine Miracle, Anasuya picked the infants up and fed them with her own milk. Upon her husband's return, she narrated the story to him, and he was delighted and proud to hear of her noble conduct. The couple decided that they would keep the 'divine children' with them — and such was the Sage's *taposhakti*, that the Holy Trinity stayed in his ashram as three tiny, helpless infants.

However, alarm bells began to ring for their wives, who quickly descended to the earth to explain the *leela* to Anasuya. They freely acknowledged that she was indeed, a true *pativrata* and begged her to return their consorts to them. Instantly, sage Atri turned the infants into their original form — and Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma blessed the holy couple and granted them a boon of their choice. Anasuya prayed that she should be blessed with a son, who would be the very incarnation of the Holy Trinity — and by this Divine Boon was born Dattatreya.

When Dattatreya attained manhood, he was gentle, peaceful and amiable. As he had the grace of the Tri-Murtis, and as he was a great *Jnani*, all rishis and ascetics worshipped him. While the Adinath *Sampradaya* regards Dattatreya as the Lord of yoga and the first Guru, he is worshipped by millions of Hindus as a benevolent God.

Dattatreya is usually depicted with three heads, symbolising Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva — as well as past, present and future; and the three states of consciousness, waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. He is portrayed sitting in meditation beneath an *adumbara* (wish-fulfilling) tree. In front of him are four dogs representing the Vedas.

According to the *Brahma Purana*, Dattatreya performed *tapasya* on the banks of the River Gautami, and was blessed by Lord Shiva to

become a *Brahma Gnani*. Thus, he is worshipped as *Adi Siddha*, the primordial accomplished one.

Dattatreya is one of the oldest deities, and mention is made of him in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Several different sects and traditions have accepted him as an *avatar* and he continues to be worshipped widely in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

In the *Srimad Bhagawatam*, we have another fascinating reference to Lord Dattatreya, narrated by Sri Krishna to his friend Uddhava. Dattatreya, speaking to King Yadu, a great ancestor and forefather of Sri Krishna, had revealed that he had learnt invaluable lessons and precepts from each of his twenty-four *Gurus* — the different aspects of creation.

It is said that King Yadu was wonder struck by Dattatreya's spiritual radiance and the perfect contentment and peace in which he seemed to live, and begged him to reveal the secret of his happiness, as well as the name of the Guru who had imparted the same to him.

To this, the illustrious *avatara purusha* replied, "The Self alone is my Guru. Yet, I have learned wisdom from twenty-four other sources. Therefore, I regard them too, as my Gurus." He then mentioned the names of his twenty-four Gurus, and spoke of the wisdom they had bestowed on him.

Who were these fascinating group of twenty-four great teachers?

They were:

Earth, water, air, sky, fire, the sun, the moon, a pigeon, a python, the ocean, a moth, a honeybee, an elephant, a honey-gatherer, a deer, a fish, a dancing girl, an osprey, a child, an arrow-maker, a maiden, a serpent, a spider and a wasp.

What was the nature of the wisdom that these Gurus imparted to Dattatreya?

1. *The Earth* taught him the qualities of patience, forbearance and doing good to others.

From the moment we get up from sleep, we stand upon the earth, we stamp upon it, we tread upon it, we jump and walk upon it. The earth puts up with it all — it puts up with billions upon billions of people like us and continues to support us.

The trees that grow upon the earth share this quality with their earth mother. They provide shelter and fruits to everyone — even to those who throw stones at them.

The true seeker learns to cultivate endurance, compassion and selflessness from the earth.

2. *Water* taught him the lesson of purity. Water quenches thirst; its quality is sweet, its feel is smooth; water also washes, cleanses and purifies.

The seeker should aspire to become like the water — cleansing, purifying and thirst-quenching in the service of others.

3. *The Air* taught him detachment. It carries so many smells and vapours with it, good and bad, but it remains unaffected by them all.

The seeker must realise that his *atman* too, is like the air, good and bad *karmas* cannot affect its essential nature.

4. *The Sky* taught him the nature of all-pervading Brahma which is all around us, everywhere — and yet not in contact with any object.

The seeker must learn that deep within himself is the unlimited, infinite space of pure awareness that is the Self.

5. *Fire* taught him about the quality of illumination and effulgence. Fire burns everything; it gives out light and removes darkness.

The seeker must be like the fire which destroys all evil, and continues to shed radiance. His self-knowledge should dispel the darkness of ignorance around him.

6. *The Sun* taught him the unity of all Being. Although there is one Sun in the sky, its reflection is found in various forms in reservoirs, rivers and even in the smallest earthen pots.

The seeker learns from the sun that the *jivatmas* are but reflections of the one great *Paramatma*.

7. *The Moon* taught him that Reality is unchanging, while appearances are illusory. The moon seems to wax and wane in our sight, but it is ever the same. So too, the Self is perfect and changeless, while man rises or falls according to his actions in life.

8. *A Pigeon* taught him an unforgettable lesson on worldly attachments which often become entanglements for the soul.

The sage saw a family of pigeons living on a tree. One day, the father and mother had left their young ones behind and flown out to gather food. Finding the young ones alone, a hunter spread his net and

caught the young birds. When the parents returned and saw their young ones ensnared, they were disconsolate. In profound grief, overwhelmed by her inability to save her children, the mother threw herself into the net. Seeing her, the father followed her example — and thus the whole family was trapped in misery. Perhaps, if the parent-birds had applied themselves to the problem, they could have found ways and means to save their little ones. But, as it happened, all of them perished at the hands of the hunter.

The seeker must learn that attachment is the root cause of all worldly bondage. Our worldly entanglements only lead to misery.

9. *The Python* taught him that God provides for all creatures, according to their needs. The python is a gigantic creature which cannot move about nimbly to gather its food; yet God, in His wisdom and mercy, sends food to this creature. The aspirant must learn from the python the spirit of surrender and acceptance, in the complete faith that God will deal with us according to our *karmic* needs.

10. *The Ocean* taught him the quality of tranquility, of being unmoved by all incidents and accidents of life. Just as the ocean remains in place even as hundreds of rivers and waterways pour into it, so the soul must rest within its own bounds, in its own sense of fullness.

The aspirants must learn profundity and depth from the ocean, that he may remain calm and still and deep, as the tides of change rise and flow all around him.

11. *The Moth* taught him two valuable lessons: when man becomes dazzled by earthly enchantments, he will perish by his own desires even as the moth rushes into the flame, to be destroyed. A higher and more profound lesson is that when it seeks light, it enters the light and allows itself, its individuality to be merged with the light.

From the moth, the seeker must learn to keep away from self-destructive passions and desires, while aspiring to become One with God.

12. *The Honeybee* taught him that the nectar of life is gathered from different sources. Similarly a *sanyasi* begs for a little food from each household that he may not become a burden on any one individual.

The seeker must learn that spiritual qualities can be imbibed from all sorts of experiences. He must learn to absorb and assimilate his

experiences and gather the honey of the spiritual wisdom from these sources.

13. *The Elephant* taught him to be wary of temptation and lust. Lured by the sight of the female elephant, the male elephant walks foolishly into the trap laid by men — falling into a pit cleverly covered with grass so as to make it trip and fall.

The aspirant must learn from this that he must practise self-control and avoid being lured by lust and passion.

14. *The Honey-gatherer* is a bird which is a kind of robber among the fauna and flora. After the industrious bees have worked hard to gather and store the honey in the hives, they relax, hoping to enjoy the fruit of their labour later. At this time the honey-gatherer arrives and steals all the honey, leaving very little for the bees.

The lesson that the seeker must learn is not to hoard and preserve wealth for an unknown, unseen future — for that future may never be ours! It is better we utilise our wealth for the present benefit of us and others, instead of hoarding excessive wealth beyond our needs.

15. *The Deer* is often lured and trapped by hunters using a strange device — they play upon drums creating a kind of music that entralls the deer. It pursues the music, walking into the trap laid by the hunters.

For the aspirant, this ‘enchanted’ music represents the fleeting, alluring sensory pleasures that the world has to offer. When we are lured by these pleasures, we have no time to spare for the higher, loftier aspects of our life. Therefore, we must resist the ‘call’ of the senses.

16. *The Fish* taught Dattatreya a valuable lesson: its eyes are always open; it swims about freely in the water; and yet, it allows itself to be ‘hooked’ miserably, by ‘swallowing the bait’ that is put out to catch it! The bait is a pathetic worm — and the fish falls for the sake of this little worm, suffering horrible pain and then a miserable death.

The aspirant should learn that he should not ‘rise to the bait’ by yielding to every temptation that is presented, to him. More particularly, he should guard against greed for the wrong kinds of food.

17. *A Dancing-girl* named Pingala taught the hermit another valuable lesson. She depended for her livelihood on wealthy ‘customers’ who would pay her in return for her company. One day, she waited

and waited for her rich clients — and not one of them appeared. At first she gave in to hopelessness — but out of this grew her sense of dispassion. She became determined to devote all her effort and attention to God, rather than to her earthly patrons. The ‘treasure’ she would earn by this would be far more valuable than the material wealth her customers brought her.

The seeker too, must learn that worldly ambition is less worthwhile than higher aspirations. Instead of directing our desire towards people and treasures which come and go, we should direct it towards God, for in His Love is our salvation.

18. *An Osprey* taught Dattatreya to guard against the sense of greed and covetousness. This bird found a piece of meat and grabbed it in his beak. As he flew away with it, he was pursued by vultures and hawks and other birds of prey. Feeling threatened by their pursuit he dropped the piece of meat he was carrying and lo and behold, the birds of prey quit following him and swooped down on the meat instead!

From this the seeker must learn that the man who covets worldly wealth and pleasures must face enmity hostility and unforeseen dangers. When he ‘lets go’ of these, he attains peace and tranquility.

19. *A Child* taught him the value of carefree existence and true happiness. When you scold or speak harshly to him, the child cries; but he forgets your anger and harshness soon, and smiles at you happily. He does not harbour any grudge or resentment; he holds no ill-will against anyone for long.

The aspirant must also cultivate this quality of child-like innocence and simplicity, which will enable him to be positive and cheerful at all times, with all people.

20. *A Poor maiden* was husking paddy, when visitors bringing a proposal of marriage for her, came to see her parents. They were seated in the outer room, while her chores kept her busy in the kitchen. She realised that the many bangles and bracelets she wore on her arm were jingling and making too much noise; embarrassed, she removed a few of them — but the noise did not abate. One by one, she removed all of them until there was just one bangle on each wrist. Now, she continued peacefully with her work.

The many ‘bonds’ and ‘attachments’ of this world only add to the stress and clamour of life. They breed dependence. Likewise, multiplicity of wants and constant company of crowds hampers us from self-realisation. Solitude, breaking away from crowds, will help us move towards our goal unhindered.

21. *The Arrow-maker* was a role-model of focus and concentration. His mind, his eyes and his hands were all directed towards his chosen task of forging arrows and directing them at their target. When the King passed by him in a long, royal procession, the arrow-maker did not even notice them; such was his concentration and focus.

The aspirant too, must learn to practise his sadhana with one-pointed mind, *ekagrita*. Our soul should be like the arrow which is directed at the target of Liberation or *Moksha*. We must not let our attention be distracted by the shouts and shows of this world.

22. *A Serpent* taught Dattatreya the lesson of non-possession and independence. A serpent does not make a home for itself; it dwells in holes dug by other animals. And a serpent lives on its own — not in groups or with other serpents.

An aspirant must also learn to do without possessions and attachment.

23. *The Spider* spins its web out of its own saliva, and sometimes, he himself gets entangled in it. We must guard against getting entangled in the web of our own desires. Also, the spider reminds us that this vast Universe is a web of illusion created by *Brahman*. The world is not material, not real; it is made up of the substance of God.

24. *The Wasp*, in its life-cycle, passes from the egg, through the larva and the pupa to its final form. It teaches us not to identify with the body — our physical form — and realise that we are the *atman*, the immortal soul, which is ever ready to fly towards God and Liberation!

These were the twenty-four Gurus of Dattatreya — and he himself acknowledged them as such.

May we be inspired by his illustrious example! Let us also have open minds; let us be free from prejudice and intolerance; let us learn from all; let us learn in every way we can! ▲

Sri Arunachala Venba

Part Five

SADHU OM SWAMI

TRANSLATION BY SADHU TANMAYA CHAITANYA

84. Arunachala is that supreme *vastu* (Reality) which Sadguru Ramana ever points out in His supreme silence and by His very presence, after locking the clamouring restlessness of our mind and senses, and by revealing the ever-present 'I-I' Consciousness as *aham sphurana* in our hearts. The showering grace of Guru Ramana is Arunachala in manifest form.

85. The holy name 'Arunachala' is the loud instruction proclaimed by Sri Ramana Sadguru with the *sankalpa* (will or intention) that His devotees should attain by invoking the Lord's Name the highest blessedness through extinction of all desires in the flame of *vichara*. Arunachala is indeed the king ruling over the mighty trinity of deities Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra [in charge of creation, sustenance and dissolution respectively].

86. Whatever I need to perform well through my triple instruments of body, mind and speech at whatever place and whichever appropriate time in and through all my worldly (*vyavaharika*) transactions is all carried out by Arunachala by His abundant Grace. He is verily my loving Father.

87. Arunachala is the holy Mantra emanating from the lotus countenance of Sadguru Ramana, who came with the lustre of a hundred rising suns effulgent in true Self-knowledge. Arunachala is verily the supreme Knowledge of Self.

88. When my power of austerity (*tapo virya*) diminishes due to *pramada* (forgetfulness, lapse in Self-attention) induced by *tamoguna*, Arunachala induces a fresh courage and impetus in my heart through the whiplash teaching of Sadguru Ramana who is the lion of Vedanta exuding the power of Lord Shiva with the highest dictum "You are verily That Brahman". Arunachala is the golden treasure revealed to me by Guru Ramana.

89. It is a wonder if a seeker does not understand in a trice what this 'love of Self' or 'Self-enquiry' means, as championed by Sri Ramana. But then it is Arunachala who has kept it as a mystery. My *svadharma* (foremost duty) is the quest of the Self, and as Arunachala is the Self, Arunachala is my *svadharma*.

Note: From now on, the pace quickens, the pining is more intense, and there is a crescendo of the author's all-consuming love of Arunachala, leading to the climax of total abandonment to His Love and Will in complete self-effacement.

90. Arunachala stands before me so that I may lose myself in His worship. Arunachala waits for me there to dissolve myself in tears of love. What is Arunachala but the true meaning of pure devotion which makes me Siva the Self by cleansing me in those tears of love!

91. Arunachala is attained here for my eyes to behold!
To be bound in true love, here is Arunachala!
Lo! The turbulent senses are subdued and quietened in awe of
Arunachala! Wonder indeed that is Arunachala!
To me Arunachala is verily the Divine Father commanding all
my love!

92. The God that I saw is Arunachala!
The one who came as Guru Ramana is Arunachala!
Wicked though I am, my very first thought was Arunachala!
All these that happen by His Grace is Arunachala!

93. Arunachala alone is worth remembering!
Arunachala is the nectar in my Heart which I drink!
Arunachala kindles Self-enquiry in those who drink such nectar
By ending their thoughts!
Arunachala is the Mother who graciously bestows
Self-knowledge to those who pursue Self-enquiry!

94. Arunachala is the One I adore and praise!
Arunachala is the nectarine sweetness that fills my being
When I chant 'Arunachala'!
Arunachala is *mukti*, the Liberation that is the real treasure!
Arunachala is the great power of Guru Ramana's Silence!

95. What is manifest before me is Arunachala!
What makes the Unmanifest Reality
Pervade me as Bliss is Arunachala!
What reins in my body, mind and speech is Arunachala.
My hunger and thirst insatiable is for Arunachala!

96. Arunachala is all that I care for in mundane life.
Arunachala is all the joyous essence of my daily life.
Arunachala is the lustrous face of Guru Ramana.
Arunachala is the very heart of egoless devotees.

97. The primordial Reality (*vastu*) is Arunachala!
The inner light of Atman, shining as 'I-I' is Arunachala.
Siva whose head and feet could not be seen
By vain disputants Brahma and Vishnu is Arunachala.

98. Arunachala is the form assumed by the formless Supreme.
Arunachala is the formless state in which all forms of creation
Dissolve in the end.
Arunachala is the one who came as Guru Ramana!
Arunachala is everything to the Self-realised!

99. It is Arunachala who bears with all the failings
In my egoistic life caused by my body, mind and speech,
As I failed to abide in the silence of Self-knowledge
That Guru's Grace can bestow.
It is Arunachala who will ultimately root out my ego.

100. Praise be unto the golden form of Arunachala!
Praise be unto the lotus feet of Guru Ramana!
Praise be unto those devotees who have surrendered to
Arunachala Ramana Sadguru!
Praise be unto the holy name 'Arunachala Siva'!

OM TAT SAT
Sri Ramanarpanamastu



(concluded)

BOOK REVIEWS



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN AMERICA New Findings by Asim Chaudhuri. Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2008. 936pp, Rs375. ISBN 81-7505-297-X www.advaitashrama.org

This new publication commissioned by the Ramakrishna Order is based, in part, on the *Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples* and *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*. One would think that there is nothing further but the author has researched further afield about the swami's activities in the USA, and unearthed new information from newspapers, reports and articles. What is fascinating is the number of public lectures and homely talks in private homes the great swami undertook. It is quite staggering how he was able to renew himself each day and face a mostly naïve and sceptical audience for whom Hinduism and Vedanta were not just exotic concepts but a world they had absolutely no idea about. The swami literally started from scratch. For a person who enjoyed the thrust of argument, some of the situations he faced would have tested his mercurial Bengali temperament to the full. Armed with a brilliant mind and a flamboyant rhetorical skill he won many across. He may not have convinced the majority but, at the very least, he made them listen. This was a significant victory in itself and the seeds of his talks would, for the most part, only bear fruit long after his departure from this world. He did fulfil Sri Ramakrishna's prophecy that he would spread his spiritual message.

The author followed in the swami's footsteps and traced his progression from state to state, city to city creating a photographic record, and researching the extensive documentation of what local people thought of him. What I found is striking and heart-warming was the admiration and respect he was given. Just to take a sample from announcements or reports: "the distinguished Hindu...Vivekananda is one of the most remarkable men of the world...the audience found so many occasions to applaud the visiting lecturer last night, as his quick answers silenced, if they did not convince his questioners..."

Time and again, he adjusted his talks with apt similes to the level of his listeners without compromising the subtlety of Vedanta.

Whether he was called the 'high priest from India', 'the Hindoo monk' or 'Viva Kananda', it made no difference to his dynamic and forthright approach correcting many of the false assumptions among his audience. He neither hedged nor apologised for his country and its beliefs. To the contrary he revealed its wisdom and fearlessly showed the shortcomings of his host country.

Reading this book makes one realise what a phenomenon Swamiji was and why he was so important to the restoration of self-respect among Indians in general and Hindus in particular. — T.P. Ganapati Rao

SAUSSURE AND HIS INTERPRETERS by Roy Harris. Motilal Banarsidass Pub. Delhi, 2007. 262pp, Rs450 (HB). ISBN 978-81-208-2765-3 www.mlbd.com

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) was a professor of Sanskrit and Indo-European languages at Paris and later Geneva. In the later part of his life he taught a Course of General Linguistics and is probably the most influential linguist in the twentieth century, but has been—because of language—misinterpreted by many.

When the West academia accepted that Kant was right: *we shall have to make do with appearances*, what in India we call *maya*, this long overdue recognition gave birth to, not introspection, but to positivism, the school of Wittgenstein, and structural linguistics and analysis. The point is that if everything is phenomenological and we all keep talking and writing away why not dissect and analyze our modes of analysis and communication? Western philosophy can't bear the idea of silence.

For anyone interested in the world influence on 20th century linguistics, anthropology, literary analysis, sociology, psychology, semiotics, political correctness, etc.,—whose corpus remains part of an international curriculum, this book is a goldmine. Educators in this field must be having it (with Larousse) by their bedsides already. It is good that we have at last an Indian edition. The author, a prize-winning Saussure translator is a keen critic of his (mis)interpreters to whom a chapter each is devoted; intellectual household names like Chomsky, Levi-Strauss, Derrida, Lacan, and Barthes, amongst others, figure in Harris' detective-like search for their truths and the truth about Saussure. It is a tribute to Saussure's deeply knotted and enlightened thought

that —misinterpretations or no — it excited the brains of so many eminent thinkers!

But Saussure seems to be saying (amongst so many other things) something quite simple: — with language you never step into the same stream twice; like life, language whether spoken, in text, or in signs and symbols, flows on and does its own thing, much like its users. Here are some well-known quotes of Saussure: “The connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary,” and “In language there are only differences, and no positive terms.”

Are You So Sure about Saussure? would be my suggestion for a new title. I'd change also the gloomy dust jacket. Motilal seems to specialise in stodgy made-in-a-minute computer graphic title-covers. — S.Govind



PEACE IN THE BUDDHA'S DISCOURSES A Compilation and Discussion by Dennis Candy. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. 2008. 142pp, US\$3.50. ISBN 978-955-24-0309-5 www.bps.lk

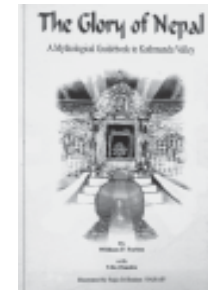
The Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka has performed a remarkable service over the past 50 years. Their publications have given guidance to many who turned to Buddhism for knowledge and understanding. We have reviewed a number of BPS publications notably the teachings of the Thai meditation master, Ajan Chan.

The book under review is an anthology of the Buddha teachings on *santi*, peace. The Buddha used many terms to describe this state of mind: calmness, tranquillity, contentment, the list goes on and on. For those who have visited a Theravada Buddhist country one can notice, with a little discernment, the sense of calmness and respect which is at the base of social relationships. Peace along with an underlying impression of respect. The aim of this collection is to bring together all the most important teachings of the Buddha culled from the so-called Three Baskets, that is, the complete works of the Buddha.

It is a helpful introduction for those keen to deepen their knowledge of Buddhism with the view to follow its precepts. Through meditation we begin to observe the mental processes and the rise and fall of thoughts and slowly disengage their hold on our attention so that we become more detached and peaceful. — Andrew Clement

A GIFT FROM LAKSHMI Modern Short Stories by Prema Sastri. Songbyrde Publications. 2007. 172pp, Rs150. ISBN 81-904119-0-X

This is a collection of simply charming stories. Though a little rough in places they give a picture of India and people that more polished writers have neither the eye nor the necessary intelligent innocence to observe. There is nothing clever about the stories and are in 'naïve' elemental style of RK Narayan. They touch the heart with their unpretentiousness and straight forward observation of humanity. I had reluctantly started to read the book for the sake of a review and quickly found the stories captured my interest. The stories are about revelation and transformation. They are concerned with illusion and how characters face the truth: be it loneliness, the shattering of the dreams of youth, the importance of friendship and family and bitter betrayal. The presentation is fine except for the odd usage of a double-spacing between paragraphs.



THE GLORY OF NEPAL A Mythological Guidebook to Kathmandu Valley By William Forbes with V.K. Chaube. Pilgrims Publishing, Varanasi. 2000. 292pp, Rs195. pilgrims@satyam.net.in

This book contains translated Sanskrit stories from a section of the *Skanda Purana*, the *Himavatkhanda*, and the *Nepal-Mahatmya* which shows the creation of a society exclusively based on Vedic dharma. It explains why the Himalayas are holy and where the beliefs originated. After translating the stories of how among others Siva as Pasupati settled in the valley of Kathmandu and how the first pilgrims came to the valley, the authors have gone to considerable trouble to track down and identify the various sacred sites involved with these myths and point out their significance for those pilgrims who venture on a *yatra*. Like the six sacred sites for Lord Murugan in Tamil Nadu or the sacred sites for Lord Ganesha in Maharashtra, a whole fabric of legend surrounds the temples in the Kathmandu Valley.

This book is an excellent guide for those who wish to know more about Hinduism in Nepal and want to know and undertake the specific circumambulation in the valley of these important Nepalese sacred sites.

It also contains a very detailed and useful glossary on Hindu gods and technical terms. — Christopher Quilkey ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN

The 129th Jayanti Celebrations

The Jayanti celebrations of Bhagavan are an opportunity for devotees to remember Bhagavan who lives in the hearts of devotees. Many gathered this year on the 11th of January at our Master's Feet to offer homage in an atmosphere of joy. The Ashram wore a festive look for the celebration which began the night before with a music performance by Ramanajali of Bangalore.

Many devotees rose early the next morning. The Jayanti day began 4am with a *nagaswaram* music recital, *mangala isai*, by T.R. Pichandi. After the *Dhanurmasa* and *Vishnu Sahasranama*, there was a special Tamil *Parayana* on Jayanti day. The wonderful atmosphere reverberated with the chanting of *Ramana Sadguru*, that composition dear to Ramana bhaktas written by Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer. The chanting was done with a deep sense of devotion. It was followed by the chanting of *Chatvarimsat* (Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana) and milk offering to Bhagavan. *Mahanyasa Rudrabhishekam* and elaborate *puja* followed. The *mangala arati* at 11am was the grand finale to the morning's celebrations. The *nagaswaram* music by T.R. Pitchandi and Kattimedu brothers' party throughout the celebrations added to the occasion.

Though feeding of the poor is a daily event at the Ashram right from its early days, on Jayanti day, *Narayana Seva* has a unique character. A large *pandal* was erected at the *Kurangu Thottam* at the western end of the Ashram and the *sadhus* were fed with specially cooked rice and sweets. Devotees were also treated to special lunch.

The celebrations were concluded with the evening concert of Ramana music by Sakkubhai Srinivasan and her group from Bangalore.

Kovai Suhasini sang before Bhagavan's Samadhi in the afternoon.

Pongal

On 14th Pongal Festival (*makara sankranti*), which is a Tamil festival especially for the farmers of Tamil Nadu, which celebrates the rice

harvest. Pongal was also celebrated at the Ashram. It is a day of thanks and giving to the Sun God.

The second day of the festival is *Mattu Pongal* which is dedicated to the cows and bulls who were responsible for helping gather the harvest. At our ashram too, the cows, bulls and calves were the centre of attraction and the objects of special affection on this sacred day. The Ashram *Gosala* (cowshed) was given a thorough cleaning. The cows and bulls were given a bath, their horns were painted, vermilion applied to the foreheads, and garlands put round their necks. The Ashram priests offered *puja* to the cows. *Prasad* was distributed to devotees.

Earlier a special *puja* was offered at the samadhi of Cow Lakshmi and the Nandi (sacred bull) at the Matrubhuteswara Temple.

Sri Vidya Havan

This important annual function was conducted in Sri Ramanasramam, which occurred this year on Sunday, the 18th January. The rituals are elaborate and take about ten hours to complete.

The grand *puja* in honour of the Goddess began at 7am. The *Navavarana Puja* was conducted between 8-11am. The priests then began the main programme with *Lalita Sahasranama Homa*, *Lalita Trisati Homa*, *Kanya Puja* and *Subasini Puja*. The thrilling climax (*Purnabuti*) was at 4:00pm.

The materials offered as oblation to the sacrificial fire are: lotus flowers, clarified butter, purasa twigs, sugarcane, charkarai pongal (sweet rice pudding), dhurva grass, puffed rice, bilva leaves, white mustard and navadhanya.

Many devotees gathered for this significant ritual which is meant to renew the shakti of the Mother's lingam and the Sri Ramanalingam for the well-being of the ashram and propagation of Bhagavan's teachings.

Mahasivrati

Maha Sivaratri (The Great Night of Siva) was celebrated at Arunachala on 23rd February. The festival occurs every year on the 13th or 14th day in the *Krishna Paksha* (waning moon) of the Tamil month of *Maasi* in the Hindu Calendar (that is, the night before and day of the

new moon). The festival is a sober affair principally celebrated by offerings of bilva leaves to the Lord Shiva who is considered the adi guru, the primordial teacher. If possible all day fasting and an all night-long vigil, which is said to be beneficial for our spiritual well-being.

According to scriptural tradition, penance is performed to gain the blessings of Lord Siva through special rituals and meditation. An all-night vigil was maintained by many ashram devotees who came from all over India to be here for this momentous event. Throughout the night pujas and chanting were conducted before the Sri Ramanalingam.

Unlike full moon nights there were fewer Siva bhaktas performing *giri pradakshina* and the atmosphere was more calm and meditative. The Arunachalaeswar temple in town was packed with people who came to hear the *thevaram* (sacred hymns in praise of Lord Siva) sung by the *oduvans* (special singers) in the main hall of the temple.

Obituary



Ramaswamy Venkataraman, who was India's eighth president and helped draft the country's constitution, died on the 27th January after a short illness. He was 98 years old.

Sri R. Venkataraman served as president from 1987 to 1992 and before that was also the country's vice president. He was a member of the Constituent Assembly that wrote India's constitution. A gifted administrator, he served in many ministerial positions both in his native Tamil Nadu and at the Central level. Though he rose to the highest position in India, like a true Gandhian, he never failed to display his innate humility and amiability. He served his country as president with great distinction during a particularly turbulent period politically. His strict adherence to the constitution and respect for the rule of law steadied the country.

From the 1930s he was a devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi. ▲