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Divine Names of Arunachala

5. ओं प्रपन्नरक्षकाय नमः

om prapannarakṣakāya namaḥ

Obeisance to the Protector of those who take refuge in Him.

Prapannarakshakaya: *Prapanna* means one who has taken refuge; *Raksha* means protection. The name means one who protects those who take refuge in Him. Sri Ramana Maharshi explains the practical significance of this in *Talks*, “He [Lord Arunachala] knows what is best and when and how to do it. Leave everything entirely to Him. His is the burden: you have no longer any cares. All your cares are His. Such is surrender.” [Talk§450]

6. ओं धीराय नमः

om dhīrāya namaḥ

Obeisance to the Lord who is the Brave One.

The name *Dhīrāh* is commonly understood to mean valorous or brave one. However Sri Ramana Maharshi in *Talks* explains “dhih = intellect; rah = watch; protection. So *dhīrāh* is the one, who always keeps the mind inward bent without letting it loose.” [Talk§352] When this appellation is applied to Lord Arunachala, the name means, “The One, the remembrance of whom protects the mind from straying or wandering.”

Surrender

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* there is a famous story about an elephant named Gajendra, which illustrates the importance of devotion and the power of the guru. The elephant Gajendra was the king of a large herd of elephants and was proud of his position. One hot summer's day he went down from the mountainside where the group lived to a large lake that was cool and inviting with lotuses to eat. Gajendra entered the lake and lollled around enjoying the refreshing water. Unbeknownst to him there was a crocodile who lived there and was disturbed by Gajendra's frolicking. The angry crocodile caught him by one leg and began to pull him down into the depths. In spite of his strength Gajendra could not break the crocodile's grip. He struggled hard for years but all his efforts were unsuccessful. The *Purāṇa* says that the crocodile held Gajendra's foot for over a thousand years. In the meantime all his entourage of queens and courtiers abandoned him thinking that he was dead. He eventually realised that he could not be released from the iron vice of the crocodile's teeth and that only God

could help him. Gajendra then plucked a lotus from the pond with his trunk and offered it to the Lord as an expression of *ātma samarpaṇ*, self-surrender. Lord Viṣṇu heard his cries and appeared before him. Lord Viṣṇu came down from his mount, Garuda, and hauled Gajendra and the crocodile from the water. With his *cakra* he ripped apart the jaws of the crocodile and saved Gajendra.

Much like Gajendra we live with a certain degree of complacency because we may have all kinds of security in terms of money, power and family connections that support our image of ourselves. The first thing we need to realise on the spiritual path is how much we do not know and that all our ideas about spiritual life are hearsay and have little grounding in reality. We live as much in a dream world as in everyday reality. The discrepancy between the two is quite often the eventual cause of some type of crisis or breakdown when we finally see that we are not only entirely dependent on the goodwill of others if we are to live, but that we are reliant on some higher transcendental power that gives meaning to our lives and frees us from our human predicament. To accept our helplessness is the first step on the ladder of spiritual ascent. The second step is to realise that the laws that govern the spiritual life are not the same as those which command our physical life, just as the aims of each are different. For a wealthy person it does not make sense to give everything up and live a simple life devoted to prayer. Where is the profit in it?

The idea of giving up or of surrender is normally associated with losing or giving up control, be it materially or a position, say, of power. To a person interested in material benefits it seems a loss but for someone who wishes to reach a higher than material satisfaction, having first tasted its benefits and slowly seeing that it is not the panacea for all one's troubles, it is a positive step. For it means letting go of control, actual or more often illusory control of a situation that was always out of our reach. Consider addicts of any type who think that by alcohol or drugs or some other behavioural pattern, they are in control of their lives because it gives them a brief explosion of euphoria free of all responsibilities.

What surrender means is jettisoning an outmoded way of behaviour that no longer is relevant because one has matured beyond that condition. How could Bhagavan explain to his family that after

the supreme revelation he could no longer live the life he had before? Obviously he could not and left without explanation. He did not run away but went forward to meet his destiny.

It is the same with us. There are times when our modes of thinking or feeling are obsolete and we endure the painful process of shedding an old skin. It does not mean we run off but that our relationship with the world and those in it has radically altered. Sometimes we can rationally explain it, sometimes not; hence the confusion when others ask us what happened. Unless that person has been through a similar rite of passage, any explanation is pointless. When a person discovers her or his destiny and truly believes in it, nothing can stand in the way. Neither security, calls from family, loved ones, society's demands for conformity to its values, nothing. That is why Bhagavan's story continues to inspire us. Here was someone for whom the power of Arunachala overrode every other consideration.

Presumably all the devotees who read this editorial have also experienced the pull, the magnetic attraction of Arunachala that makes all other ways of spending one's time but a pale imitation of reality. Arunachala is a hard rock upon which we can beat our head at times, but its sweetness is like no other.

Surrendering to Arunachala is not the same as giving up anything intentionally. Arunachala puts the world in perspective and makes us realise what is important and what is not. It means accepting and embracing our connection with something far greater than ourselves. What we are surrendering is our small conception of who we are and acknowledging a transcendental power that can take us beyond our addictive thoughts which come round again and again but which we mindlessly hold on to for fear of being left with nothing. It can be a terrifying process but the Guru is always there.

Trust is required if the power of grace is to find fulfilment in us. Bhagavan's Grace is ever available, but for it to enter us we must have faith in the process, because it is not always smooth till our negative habits or *vāsanās* are cleansed. Trust means being open to new possibilities that we have not yet been capable of conceiving by our own volition. Trust means opening up to a higher power, not in a thoughtless way, but with due consideration, patience and humility. Surrender does not mean sitting there like a stuffed doll

expecting the heavens to open up. It demands our total attention and active consent. Like the silent chanting of a mantra the attitude of surrender has to become as natural as rhythmic breathing if it is to have an effect.

There are forces at work in this world which are beyond the range of our perception. We are like blind mice feeling our way tentatively by touching the walls of the familiar. We live in a multiple-dimensional world where the waking world is but an extension of the dream (*svapna*) and deep sleep (*susupti*) planes of existence. If we are to believe in a higher purpose to our lives it makes sense that with our limited awareness it is impossible to progress until we surrender our narrow will to a greater will.

Bhagavan is our Guru and as such commands two realities. He is a teacher: through the remembrance of his physical form as a portal, we are able to communicate with this divine force. We read the instructions he gave us in books and we practise them. He is also the pervasive reality of Truth (*sattvam*). He is both teacher and dweller in our hearts. As a teacher he guides us externally if we but listen; and as the permanent resident of our Heart, he silently pulls us into the cave of the Heart. If we allow it Bhagavan will take care of us. That is his nature and requires no effort on his behalf. It is spontaneous.

We may ask how it can be that he is the indweller in all our hearts.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* it is said that Lord Krishna married 16,000 gopīs. The *Purāṇa* tells us about the life of Krishna's wives after their marriages. It is said that each of the wives had a home with maid-servants and that Krishna divided himself into multiple forms, one for each wife. *Nārada*, Viṣṇu's devotee, wandering sage and benign mischief maker, was curious to find out how Krishna managed this. He went to every house and saw Krishna present with his wife, engaging in domestic activities with kindness and love.

What this means is that the supreme reality is present in all our hearts. It is a wonder that confounds our sense of logic. It is important to note that Narada concluded that Krishna was not a polygamist; that he was only married to one Reality, though its forms may be many. Bhagavan does not conform to our preconceptions. Like Krishna he is not bound by our prejudices. He breaks through all our storehouses

of conflicting desires and fears for the simple reason that he knows they are unreal and that you and he are joined as one.

The folk tales of Akbar, the great Mughal emperor, and his courtier Birbal are legendary and much quoted in India for their humour, wit and sharp intelligence, often at the expense of the envious fellow courtiers of Birbal.

There is a story about how Akbar questioned Birbal why Lord Viṣṇu should himself come to rescue Gajendra? He could easily have sent someone else to rescue the pitiable elephant. As emperor, Akbar had very many courtiers to do his bidding so as not to waste his time with trivial matters. If Viṣṇu was a god why could he not do the same? Birbal replied that he would answer the question but it would take time to explain, and left it at that.

Birbal was responsible for taking care of a beloved child who was the son of Akbar. Birbal watched over the child with loving attention. One day Birbal arranged for a beautiful stone image of the boy to be carved and placed the statue at the edge of a well knowing that the emperor had the greatest confidence in Birbal's ability to protect his son from harm.

In the evening, when shapes were hazy at a distance, Birbal guided Akbar on a walk to the vicinity of the well. Akbar thought he saw his son by the well and called out to him to be careful. Birbal reassured the emperor that there was nothing to fear.

Prior to the evening walk Birbal had organised that someone would be nearby when Akbar arrived, and unobserved, would push the statue into the well when the emperor was watching. This happened and Birbal exclaimed in fake terror that the child had fallen into the depths.

Akbar ran immediately to the side of the well. But Birbal took hold of him and said, "Wait here. There are so many servants who can bring the boy out of the well. Send them."

Akbar was beside himself with anxiety and told Birbal to shut up. Did he not see that his beloved child was in danger and had to be quickly rescued?

Birbal coolly replied that Akbar need not fear, for his child was safe. What had fallen into the well was but a statue. Then Birbal asked Akbar whether he remember the conversation the other day

about Gajendra and Lord Viṣṇu's immediate and personal response to save the elephant?

Bhagavan would laugh at the thought that he had renounced the world when he left Madurai as a boy, for now he had gathered such a large family. The immense love that the Guru holds for his devotees cannot be explained. According to the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, "Sri Bhagavan said, 'I am completely under the control of My devotees. Indeed, I am not at all independent. My heart is controlled by devotees free of material desires. What to speak of My devotee, even those who are devotees of My devotee are very dear to Me.'"¹

Why in our case should Bhagavan be dependent upon us, his devotees? It is clear that the knot of love binds all in an embrace that can never be broken. In this union where is the sense of separation? We would do well to keep in mind that not only is there boundless love if we but dedicate our hearts and minds to Bhagavan, but that he too is ever bound to us and will never desert us in our genuine time of need.



¹ śrī-bhagavān uvāca/ahaṁ bhakta-parādhīno/hy asvatantra iva dvija/sādhubhir grasta-hṛdayo/bhaktair bhakta-jana-priyaḥ. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 9.4.63.

The Flame

Rahul Lama

A match stick is useless unless lighted,
When ignited,
Till the very end of its existence,
It serves itself.

A man is useless unless enlightened,
When enlightened,
Till the very end of his life,
He surrenders himself.

Living With The Master

Reminiscences

Part Four

KUNJU SWAMI

TRANSLATED BY P. RAMASAMY

This is the final extract in the Mountain Path from a new, more complete translation of Living With The Master by Kunju Swami, a close devotee of Bhagavan. The āśram will publish the complete translation shortly.

The Genesis of *Akṣara Maṇa Mālai*

Prior to my arrival, devotees at Skandasramam used to go down the hill daily to the streets of the town to beg for their night meal. Returning with what was thus obtained, they would partake of it with Bhagavan. The food that was left over was put aside to be consumed the following morning. The midday meal was provided by Echammal, Mudaliar Patti, or Kannammal, besides others.

During their nightly rounds, Bhagavan's devotees were in the habit of chanting one of Adi Sankara's hymns (*Śiva Akṣara Mālai*)

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beginning, ‘*adbhuta vighraha amarādhīśvara.*’ Hearing the song, housewives would know that Bhagavan’s devotees were arriving, and would offer them good, wholesome food. Other local mendicants, who came to know of this special treatment, used to start well ahead of Bhagavan’s group, chant the same tune and receive the food that had been earmarked for Bhagavan’s devotees. In this way the food donors were beguiled. Only later when Bhagavan’s devotees arrived abegging, the people of the household would realize that they had been duped. They would feel regretful but were helpless.

Palani Swami, Perumal Swami and others thought of a way out of this problem. They suggested that if Bhagavan composed a hymn they would then go about chanting it, their ‘own’ signature tune, to help donors of food unmistakably identify Bhagavan’s devotees. Bhagavan acceded to their wish and thus *Śrī Arunācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* was born.

Thereafter it became the practice to chant this hymn during their rounds of begging. These daily rounds, however, stopped some months prior to my coming to Bhagavan on account of the outbreak of plague in the township, which was deserted of inhabitants. Consequently the number of inmates at Skandasramam too dwindled, obviating the need for collective begging. After my arrival, with the plague epidemic gone, devotees like Saama Iyer, Iswara Swami and others came back from their ‘exile’ imposed by the epidemic.

Bhagavan’s First Bhikṣā

Bhagavan once reminisced about his first experience of *bhikṣā* (obtaining of food by begging) as follows: “During my stay underneath the *iluppai* tree inside the Arunachaleswara temple premises, a few mendicant *sādhus* were taking care of the temple flower garden. They used to obtain food by going for a *kāvaḍi bhikṣā*.¹ A Reddiar lady by name Rukmani Ammal of Oosambadi village, would at times bring a supply of groceries, cook food in the garden itself and serve a feast to these *sādhus*.

The leader of these *sādhus* once invited me to join this feast. Seeing me observing silence he insisted that either I should join their feast or

¹ A sanctified practice of begging by mendicant *sādhu* for obtaining food or other provisions required for cooking. *Kāvaḍi* = A pole carried on the shoulder by the mendicant with pots suspended from its both ends for collecting food.

go for *bhikṣā*. He also posted by my side one of his *sādhus* to ensure that I did this and did not starve. I rose and pretended to head for the streets as if for *bhikṣā* to shake him off, but this person was following me to see what I was up to. I now had no alternative but to really do it.

So I went and stood in front of a house on Sannidhi Street and clapped my hands. On seeing me a man among those playing cards on the *tiṅṅai* (the raised verandah at the entrance to the house), went in, mixed some cooked rice and curry on a leaf and dropped it into my cupped palms. Only later I came to know that this person was Gambheeram Seshaiyer. His family too were all disciples of Swami Bhagavanta of Cuddalore. That is why, among the group of card players, it occurred to him alone to offer me *bhikṣā*.²

The Fine Art of Frugality

Bhagavan has never been seen lying stretched flat on a bed with a pillow under his head. He used to recline with *tiṅḍu* (cylindrical cushions) supporting his back. Sometimes he would recline, using his hand as a prop to the head. He was never in the habit of sleeping lying down on a bed like everyone else.

We all used a tooth powder prepared in the *āśram* itself, that was kept folded in tiny packets. Bhagavan, after opening a packet, would carefully refold it even if there was only a slight excess quantity of powder left, and hand it over to us. We were expected to preserve it and give it to him the next morning. In case we missed out on this, he would draw attention to our carelessness in matters of thrift.

While in Skandasramam, and even after moving down to the present *āśram*, for several years Bhagavan was in the habit of taking his bath only after applying *pañca karpam*, a medicinal concoction of bath oil and herbal extracts. Later on we started preparing another variety of it: coconut milk from a ripe coconut kernel would be squeezed out and by boiling the milk extracted, its oil was obtained. To this oil was added pepper and *tumbai* flowers,² and this mixture was again boiled. It was then filtered and the extract obtained after

² A tiny wild plant having medicinal properties: *Leucas Aspera*; common name leucas; *chota halkush*, *drone pushpi* in Hindi.

filtration was stocked and used as bath oil. Bhagavan used to rub this herbal oil over his body prior to his bath. It was a fragrant and clear extract. Daily he took a small quantity of it in his palm and rubbed it into his scalp first. By then we would keep the hot water ready for him. He would enter the bath room, take a small quantity of water and rub it into his scalp and create a viscous mixture of the oil and water. Wiping it off his scalp with his palm, he would smear it downwards, coating his entire body with a film of oil.

Repeating this smearing action several times, he would see to it that no portion of his body was left uncovered by a filmy coat of oil. All this from only a minuscule quantity of oil! He would then pour the bath water little by little over his body, then roll the Cuticura soap a few times within his cupped wet palm until it left a thin soapy smear on his palm. With that smear of soap on his palm he would lather his entire body without touching the soap again. His handling of oil, water and soap was a fine art in frugality, a spectacle that never failed to evoke our admiration!

Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni, known to all as Nayana, was staying at Palakothu [at the western side of the present *āśram*]. As usual Bhagavan one day went that way at noon on his daily after-lunch walk. Nayana, after cutting sheets of white paper to the size required for making a note book, had discarded the palm-width strips of excess paper as waste.

Seeing this, Bhagavan suggested that the discarded bits of paper could be utilized by stitching them together into a pocket-sized note book. Viswanatha Swami undertook to do it, and stitching them neatly into a note book, he put a front-cover on it, on which he inscribed a *śloka* (devotional verse). He did the job so as to spare Bhagavan the bother of it.

Bhagavan saw the booklet and said with delight, “Just as I thought! You did a good job of it!” Next day when Nayana entered Bhagavan’s hall, saluted him and seated himself, Bhagavan showed him the note book and told him how it came to be made. Nayana could not help admiring Bhagavan’s skillfulness at converting even discarded trifles into useful objects. Though Lord of all, Bhagavan lived as one who possessed nothing and taught everyone the value of thrift.

Seeing Only the Good in Everyone

Bhagavan's tongue never spoke of the negative qualities of people. When news of someone's death was brought to him he would at once recall the virtuous qualities of the deceased. He had an uncanny gift for detecting the good qualities in people that were generally undiscovered by others. His words would come as a revelation to us about the person concerned, and we would be amazed at Bhagavan's discovery of these virtuous qualities in them. So much so that we used to feel that it would even be worth dying to earn these words of high praise from Bhagavan. Well, I can only say that we were not fortunate enough!

Whenever news came of someone's demise we would rush to sit before Bhagavan to hear what Bhagavan would say of the deceased's virtues. Kandaswami of Tiruvannamalai town, a well-to-do man, was disliked by all because of his offensive manners. Once in a long while Kandaswami came for Bhagavan's *darśan*. His last days were ridden with poverty and ill health and he even had to take shelter at the *maṅṭapam* in front of the *āśram*. He sent word through someone that he wanted to taste some Kerala gruel. Bhagavan asked us to make it and send it to him. We did so that day and on the following day too. Kandaswami's condition worsened. We became curious about what Bhagavan would have to say about *this* person when he passed away. We were particularly eager because the man was devoid of anything worthy of mention. The next day he died.

Reporting the news to Bhagavan we sat down in front of him. We were cocksure that even Bhagavan would not be able to find anything good to say about him. We were in for a surprise. Bhagavan said, "Kandaswami had no match where keeping body and clothes clean was concerned. In this respect, he is next only to Injikkollai Deekshitar. Kandaswami would neither apply oil nor use soap. He would come to the pond at eight and wash his *dhotī* clean by repeated squeezing and wringing, and then thoroughly scrub his limbs and body. And by the time he finished all this, it would be twelve noon. Even his hair and beard were always very, very clean." On listening to Bhagavan's words we had to hang our heads in shame at ourselves. Isn't Bhagavan unparalleled in finding only what is good in people?

The Hospitality of the Seven Virgin Deities

“Once, while at Virupaksha, I [Bhagavan] ate more than my usual quota of breakfast as I had to accept some offerings devotees had brought. I decided to skip lunch that day to give a respite to my digestive system. I left the *āśram* at seven am., as though on my usual morning walk and, unknown to anyone, took the forest track for *giri-pradakṣiṇa*. I was nearing Sona Tīrtham (the holy tank adjacent to the present Kāṭṭu Śiva Āśram) when some womenfolk standing there, accosted me and asked, “Swami! Is there a pond nearby? We want some water.” Showing them the Sona Tīrtham I resumed walking. But they intercepted me, and said, “Oh, Swami! Swami! Happening to see you here has been our good fortune. Do accept a portion of the light meal we have with us.” They then served on a leaf portions of the items that each one of them had brought. The leaf was overflowing with a variety of eatables.

“I had to eat all this since it is discourteous to decline what a host has offered. Each of them had a large gunny sack and they said they had come to gather leaves in the forest [probably for stitching together to make leaf-plates]. They were a group of seven, reminding me of the Septet of Virgin Deities.³

“Walking deeper into the wood I rested and a little past noon went to Solai Pond to drink water, when the same seven women again accosted me and asked, “Swami, is there some place where there is water to drink?” I showed them the pond and started out when they again intercepted me and compelled me to share some of their lunch of mixed rice. Without even waiting for my reply each one of them served a variety of rice dishes as though it was a catering contest! Though they claimed to have come for plucking leaves their sacks seemed to contain nothing other than food bundles.

“Hoping to escape from further ‘onslaughts’, I continued along the forest *pradakṣiṇa* track, reached the shrine of Kubera Liṅgam and rested at the Ezhuthu Maṅṭapam to its west. This place was dense

³ Seven aspects of Parvati, worshipped in villages as the Seven-Maidens – protective angels. They are mentioned in Hindu scriptures and *Devī Māhātmyam*. They are 1. Brāhmī, 2. Māheśvarī, 3. Kaumārī, 4. Vaiṣṇavī, 5. Vārāhī, 6. Indrānī and 7. Cāmuṇḍī. Traditionally in Hindu temples in the villages of India, these Seven Virgin Mothers are consecrated as seven stones and worshipped as formless.

with trees so no one could discover me there. At least that is what I thought. It was now around five in the evening and I wanted to reach Virupaksha before sundown. I came out to take a peep and ran smack into Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer of ‘Śaraṅāgati’ fame! He was beside himself with unbounded delight to discover me there. The reason for his excitement was as follows:

“He had been working at that time in the town of Tirukkivilur [some forty kilometres away]. That day he had made a special delicacy which he knew I relish greatly. He had cooked a few ripe mangos of fine quality in lentil soup. Carrying this delicacy in a container he started out from Tirukkivilur travelling all the way to Virupaksha so as to offer me the delicacy. Finding me absent since morning he reckoned that I must have gone on *giri-pradakṣiṇa*. He rightly estimated that he would reach me sooner if he walked counter-clockwise round the hill, and sure enough, ran into me at the exact moment when I emerge from my ‘hideout’. What to do? I could not refuse what he had brought for me with such keenness and effort. I consumed two whole mangos. Mine was a case of fleeing from the region of mice only to land up in tiger territory!

“At last I returned to Virupaksha. From then on I have neither said ‘I shall have it this way,’ nor ‘I will not have it this way,’ but, unresisting, have drifted along with the tide of events.”

Bhagavan thus reminisced on his past experience and the lesson he drew from it.

Day’s Routine of Bhagavan

Every morning Bhagavan rose at 3.30, went out and returned at four finishing his morning ablutions. He then remained seated on the sofa. Meantime, devotees too, likewise having finished their morning ablutions, would sit in meditation in front of him. At five thirty Bhagavan would rise for his bath and return to the hall at a quarter past six. The breakfast bell was struck at half past six when Bhagavan and all others rose, had breakfast and returned.

After breakfast Bhagavan took a short walk alone on the hill, returned and was seated in the hall by half past seven. Devotees too were seated in silence. This was also the hour when Bhagavan replied to spiritual queries raised by devotees. At eight thirty, the day’s mail

was brought to Bhagavan for perusal. At a quarter to ten, Bhagavan went for a brief walk towards the *gośālā* (cow shed) returning at ten. At eleven a.m. the lunch bell sounded, and after lunch Bhagavan took a walk to Pala Kothu, returning to the *āśram* by one p.m. Devotees would rest after lunch and arrive at the hall by two for *darśan* of Bhagavan.

Coffee was served to all at 2.30 in those days, to Bhagavan first, and then to the devotees, who numbered from forty to fifty. Whenever there was a larger turnout of devotees those served last sometimes got no coffee. Seeing this, Bhagavan insisted that he should be served last. So those serving began to take care to distribute coffee and snacks so that everyone got a share and that some quantity remained for Bhagavan. At the dining hall too he insisted on being served last. Isn't this a rare exception, unheard of anywhere else?

At all the *āśram* or *mutts* known to us, the chief ascetic or the head of the organization has his food prepared exclusively for him, and is the first to be served, in privacy, and that too only by a particular person vested with that duty. On the other hand, our Bhagavan, who was magnificent Mount Meru ⁴ in human form, dined along with all, as the humblest among the humble. What graciousness, and how blessed were we to bask in the delight of dining in the company of the Master!

To the best of my knowledge, in no other *āśram* or *mutt* are the mendicants who are waiting outside served food first, ahead of the inmates. But, here, in yet another instance of the compassion of our Master, the poor, numbering about three hundred, were fed at ten thirty and only after that the *āśram* inmates,⁵ including Bhagavan, partook of their meal. A praiseworthy practice indeed! Even on the day of Bhagavan's *jayanti* this routine of feeding the poor first is followed, in fact on a much larger scale. The practice continues till this day, exactly as it was done during Bhagavan's lifetime. Not only in this, but in every other routine as well, the *āśram* administration

⁴ A sacred mountain with five peaks, venerated in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist cosmology, Mount Meru is considered to be the centre of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes.

⁵ This refers to the *Nārāyaṇa Sevā* or Poor Feeding that takes place everyday at mid-morning at the *āśram*.

continues to adhere to the practices instituted during Bhagavan's time. No wonder that today the *āśram* is acclaimed by all as functioning under the spiritual guidance of Bhagavan.

Another noteworthy practice of the *āśram* is its tradition of sending prompt replies to all letters. Every evening at four the replies to be dispatched by post were brought to Bhagavan for perusal. Bhagavan went through them, pointing out corrections of spelling or grammatical errors. He would rise at half past four for a walk towards the hill and return at five p.m. Sanskrit Veda *pārāyaṇa* then commenced in his presence. Tamil *pārāyaṇa* started at a quarter to seven and concluded at half past seven when the dinner bell was rung.

After dinner Bhagavan took a short walk towards the *gośālā* and returned to his couch by eight. Some devotees would raise queries seeking clarification, while others would sit in silent meditation in his presence. At a quarter to nine, everyone rose and dispersed to their lodgings. Bhagavan would remain on the sofa, reclining, his eyes closed. Those of us attending on Bhagavan slept within the hall itself. When Bhagavan got up at three the next morning and directed his glance at us, we would feel a surge of brilliant light flooding our faces bringing us to wakefulness.

This was an unforgettable experience of mine, as I had the good fortune to be an attendant to Bhagavan. An unforgettable experience indeed. The entire routine outlined above went on like clockwork — but without following a clock. Things seemed to happen of their own accord, impelled by the sheer power of Bhagavan's effulgent presence. ▲



Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Arunachaleswara Temple, 6th February 2017

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty One

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

22nd August 1978

Sadhu Om: Arunachala works by kindling clarity of discrimination (*vivēka*) in our hearts. Therefore even though some people do *giri-pradakṣiṇa* for the fulfilment of worldly desires, the more they do it the more clarity will dawn in their hearts, and hence they will begin to reflect on their desires and ask themselves whether happiness can actually be gained from the fulfilment of any such desires. However, the speed at which such clarity dawns depends on how strong their desires are, because desires for anything other than self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*) are what cloud our mind and thereby obstruct the clarity that naturally shines deep within each one of us.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessoftbeing.com.

Even though many people came to Bhagavan, very few had really intense love to attain *ātma-jñāna*, because their ability to discriminate and recognise that true happiness lies in nothing else was hampered by their other desires and attachments. Therefore the speed at which each devotee developed true love for *ātma-jñāna* was inversely proportional to the intensity of their desires and attachments. However, anyone who has come into contact with Bhagavan and his teachings, whether in his bodily lifetime or since then, will thereby certainly gain a steadily increasing clarity of discrimination, even if it does not manifest immediately or even in their present lifetime.

Bhagavan's teachings and the power of his presence in our life are like a seed sown by a diligent gardener. Having sown the seed in our heart, Bhagavan will water it, fertilise it, protect it and nurture it until it grows into the mighty tree that bears the precious fruit of *jñāna*. If the soil he plants it in is already rich, fertile and deep, it will grow and bear fruit relatively quickly, whereas if the soil is dry, barren, stony and shallow, more time will be required to enrich, fertilise and deepen it in order to allow the seed to germinate, grow and develop strong and deep roots.

However, whatever may have been the condition of our heart when Bhagavan sowed his seed in it, we should not think in terms of the time it might take for his seed to grow into a tree and eventually bear fruit, because time is just an illusion created by our deceptive mind. What seems to be a hundred years in one state may seem like ten minutes in another state. This is why it is said that *brahman* is neither near nor far. As Bhagavan says in verse 781 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*:

“Thinking ‘When will I become one with *yōgānanda* [the happiness of union], which is the state of self-abidance?’ do not be distressed [or disheartened]. There in the real state of self-knowledge, which is always one [single, non-dual and unchanging], any place [or time] that is far or near does not ever exist.”

Like everything else, time and space are a creation of our mind, and the very nature of our mind is to deceive us. In its ability to do so, the mind is indeed an *atiśaya śakti* (an extraordinary and wonderful power), as Bhagavan says in *Nāṇ Yār?*, but it is not real, so if we diligently investigate what it is by vigilantly observing the ego, the thought called ‘I’, which is its fundamental and essential form, we

will find that there is actually no such thing, as Bhagavan teaches us in verse 17 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

When one investigates the form of the mind without forgetting, [it will be found that] there is not anything called ‘mind’. This is the direct path for everyone.

25th August 1978

Sadhu Om: Real *sādhus* are very rare. Once there was a *sādhu* called Buddha, and after a few hundred years one called Jesus, and then another one called Sankara, and more recently one called Ramakrishna, but in this century the one real *sādhu* came and told us: “I am not this body. I am the one real awareness that shines blissfully as ‘I’ in the hearts of all living beings, beginning with God.” In this unique embodiment of his, Bhagavan revealed many subtle truths like this in a fresh and refined manner.

Previously we used to believe that *sādhus* such as Buddha, Jesus and Sankara each lived in a limited time and place in the distant past, so they are no longer with us. Since we believed that *sādhu-saṅga* (association with a *sādhu*) meant being in the bodily presence of a *sādhu*, we thought that we could not have *saṅga* with any *sādhu* whose body was no longer alive. But now we have no reason to believe this, because Bhagavan has explained to us that he is not a body but is always present within each one of us, so to have his *sat-saṅga* all we need do is to turn within and see that he is always shining clearly in us as ‘I’. Since he is not limited to any time or place, his *sat-saṅga* is available to us always and everywhere.

Question: Is that the significance of saying that *jñāna* can be attained just by thinking of Arunachala from afar? Does it mean that wherever we may be, just by our attending to Bhagavan shining in our heart as ‘I’ he will root out our ego?

Sadhu Om: Yes, in the first verse of *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* he indicates that Arunachala is ‘I’, and whatever he says about Arunachala applies to him also, because he himself is Arunachala, so at any time wherever one may be, the best way to have *sat-saṅga* with him is to attend only to ‘I’. Therefore what he implies in that verse is that if one meditates deeply on ‘I’ alone, he will root out one’s ego. This is his assurance to us.

Question: But what if we think of Arunachala or Bhagavan as other than ourself, as they seem to be? Is such *anya-bhāva* (meditation on God or guru as other than oneself) also *sat-saṅga*?

Sadhu Om: Yes, that is also *sat-saṅga*, and it is more effective than merely being in the physical presence of Bhagavan yet thinking of other things. Being in his physical presence is physical *sat-saṅga*, whereas thinking of him with love is mental *sat-saṅga*, and as he says in verse 4 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*, what is done by mind is more effective in purifying one's mind than what is done by speech, which in turn is more effective than what is done by body.

People whose attention is habitually turned outwards tend to attach undue importance to outward *sat-saṅga*, because they are unable to see what is happening within. The most important work being done by the guru does not lie in any outward forms, actions or events, but only deep within the heart of each one of us. Shining within us as the clarity of self-awareness, the guru is moulding and preparing us so that we can derive the greatest benefit from his outward *sat-saṅga*, whether in the form of being in his bodily presence, which is still available to us in the form of Arunachala, or in the form of associating with his teachings.

The nature and importance of the vital work that he is constantly doing within us is beyond all human comprehension, but without it no one would ever be fit to obtain any benefit from outward *sat-saṅga*, because it alone can purify and clarify our mind, thereby making us fit to yield to the subtle influence of his physical presence and to absorb and assimilate his outward teachings. If one is not inwardly prepared and ripe, one will not gain so much benefit from any form of outward *sat-saṅga*, but if one's mind is already to a large extent purified and hence clear, one will very quickly gain the full benefit of outward *sat-saṅga*, namely the blossoming of intense love to turn back within and drown forever in Bhagavan, who is the clear light of awareness that illumines our mind.

* * * * *

Sadhu Om: Free will is our real nature. Since we alone exist, what can ever limit our freedom? It is only when we limit ourself as a body that we seem to have only limited freedom, and when our freedom

seems to be limited, we also seem to be bound by its opposite: fate. However, even when our freedom seems to be limited, there is actually nothing other than ourself, so there is nothing that could ever limit our freedom in anyway. Therefore we are always free either to see ourself as one and indivisible, as we always actually are, or to see ourself as many, as we seem to be whenever we rise as the ego.

Therefore neither karmas nor *vāsanās* can actually ever prevent us from experiencing self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*), because self-knowledge is our real nature, whereas karmas and *vāsanās* are just illusory appearances that seem to exist only in the view of the ego that we now seem to be and not in the view of ourself as we actually are. They seem to exist only because having risen as this ego we are now looking outwards, but if we turn back and look within to see what we actually are, the ego will disappear along with all its *karmas* and *vāsanās*, because it is not what we actually are. Since it rises and stands only by grasping outward appearances, it will subside and disappear if it lets go of all appearances by trying to see itself alone, as Bhagavan says in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*:

“Grasping form, the formless phantom-ego rises into being; grasping form it stands; grasping and feeding on form it grows abundantly; leaving [one] form, it grasps [another] form. If sought, it will take flight. Know [thus].”

If we lack discrimination (*vivēka*), we will continue to rise and stand as this ego in waking and dream, and whenever we do so we will project the threefold appearance of soul, world and God. However, since we seem to be this ego and therefore project such appearances only in waking and dream but not in sleep, we are like a foolish person who instead of sheltering from the intense heat of the sun by resting under the shade of a tree, wanders out into the scorching sunshine until he can bear it no longer, then retreats to the cool shade for a while before again wandering out into the sunshine.

However, we have now been drawn to Bhagavan, so if we follow the path that he has shown us, our mind will gradually be purified and thereby we will gain a steadily increasing clarity of discrimination, as a result of which we will become increasingly disgusted with this habit of rising as the ego and projecting this appearance of soul, world and God, and hence we will reflect: ‘Why should I repeatedly wander

out into the scorching sunshine by rising as this ego in waking and dream and then return temporarily to the shade of the tree by subsiding in sleep? Why should I not just remain peacefully in the cool and comfort of the shade?’

When our discrimination thereby becomes clear and deeply rooted, we will turn back within and merge forever in our source, and thus we will discover that we have always been free just be as we are and thereby to stop projecting any illusory appearances. Our infinite freedom was only seemingly limited, and what seemingly limited it was our foolish liking to wander in the sunshine by projecting the appearance of soul, world and God. That is, it was seemingly limited only due to our misusing it to see ourself as many instead of as the one infinite whole that we actually are, so we are always free to stop misusing it and to remain just as we always are. ▲

(To be continued)

Peace

Barbara Croissant

Peace IS
Everywhere, always.
Although 'tis hidden
By the mischief of the mind's restless eye
You can see it in your own backyard
In winter's stillness reflected
And find it
In the quiet recesses
Of the Pure Heart
Shining
Even in suffering
Yet invisible
Beyond birth and death
Indestructible
The Eye of the eye.

KEYWORD

Adhyaropa and Apavada

Prior Superimposition and Subsequent Denial

JOHN GRIMES

Bhagavan Ramana said, “The greatest wonder is that being always the real Self, people are striving to become one with the Self.”¹ Generally, when people hear this, inevitably they wonder, how is that possible? If I am already the Self, why don’t I know it and experience it?

It is well known that Sri Ramana had little interest in the theoretical side of spirituality. Though individuals seek a logical answer to the dilemma of bondage, Sri Ramana’s primary concern was to bring individuals to an awareness of the Self that they already are and always have been. Not often, but occasionally out of compassion, Sri Ramana consented to provide a theoretical reply. In one such response he said,

¹ *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* verse 622 (appendix B, verse 96).

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. in Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

“There is always Consciousness and nothing but that. What you are now considering to be body-consciousness is due to superimposition.”²

There is a time-honoured method in Advaita for teaching the formless, transphenomenal Self.³ This method employs the technique of prior superimposition and subsequent denial (*adhyāropa* and *apavāda*). First, qualities and relations like omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, causality, etc., are superimposed upon the Absolute so as to enable an individual to form some sort of understanding. Then, gradually these attributes are negated as a deeper and deeper analysis is performed. From the familiar one is led to the unfamiliar. From the known, one is led to the unknown. The aim is to provide a means of detachment from the objects towards which one is naturally attracted.

Isn't this the case with virtually every individual who has ever been born? Upon birth, one finds that the world of duality is superimposed by the sense organs upon sense contact. History records only a handful of individuals who have been acknowledged as having been born enlightened. Even in the case of Sri Ramana, for the first fifteen years of his life prior, the superimposition of duality was the case. Then, at the age of sixteen, his enlightenment experience occurred, and a complete and total subsequent removal of duality spontaneously manifested never to return.

Kaivalya Navanītam states, “Vedanta as a whole mentions as a cause of bondage and liberation ‘superimposition’ (*aropa*) and its effacement (*apavāda*) respectively. Bondage is caused by superimposition; liberation by its effacement.”⁴

Adi Sankara said, “All bondage is due to superimposition of the unreal on the real.”⁵ It is the perceiving of a thing on a substrate where it is not. Sri Ramana said, “What really exists is the Self alone. The things of the world, souls, and God (Īśvara) are superimpositions on the Self. Truly speaking, the world, souls, and God are only the Supreme Self.”⁶

² Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§340.

³ See Adi Sankara's commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*.

⁴ *Kaivalya Navanītam*, 1.26.

⁵ Sankara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, Introduction.

⁶ *Pādamālai*, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Muruganar, p. 92, vv. 54,55,56.

To give some examples that Sri Ramana occasionally used to illustrate superimposition regarding the world: a snake upon a rope/ creeper; red color upon a pure crystal; names and forms upon gold; silver upon a shell; the moon in a bucket of water; and pictures upon a screen. Some examples regarding souls: when a person says they are blind or deaf, the Self is wrongly identified with the sense organs; to say one is happy or miserable, the Self is wrongly identified with the mind; when a person says he or she is born female or male, the Self is wrongly identified with the physical body.

Sages like Sri Ramana tell us that the Self is the Reality underlying the world which is incorrectly superimposed upon the Self as existing as a separate entity. It is just like when a rope is mistaken for the snake, the snake obscures the rope, so the world obscures the Self. Individuals superimpose a mirage/water upon desert sand or hot asphalt. In actuality there has never been water there, there is not water there now, nor will there be water there in the future. Sri Ramana tells us that each and every superimposition made upon the Self is not really Real. Merely because a phenomenon seemingly appears does not make it Real. According to Sri Ramana, appearance is not the mark of Reality; invariability, non-sublation, immutability is its mark.

Individuals believe in the world they observe. The popular expression is, ‘Seeing is believing’. Whatever one believes to be real, secures an unquestionable right of entry into the mind. If one believes something is real, it is virtually impossible to deny its Reality. Because an individual believes the world to be real, it becomes impossible to realise the Self until this false belief is given up. The very thing that is obscuring the Self is belief in the reality of the world.

At first glance, it would appear that the veiling of the Self, which the superimposition does, is a totally negative phenomenon. However, Lord Ramana remarked, “You should know that the veiling (*tirodhāna*) that makes *jīvas* forget (the events of past lives) is an act of supreme compassion by Īśvara towards them. If these memories were not absent, individuals will not attain a mature state in which impurities are ready for destruction and the lives of *jīvas* will get shattered and ruined.”⁷

⁷ Ibid., p. 291, vv.3-4.

If individuals remembered all the particulars of their innumerable past lives, those memories would include all the sufferings that they had inflicted upon others as well as the sufferings that were inflicted on them by others. Life would be unbearable if an individual was conscious of all this suffering. Just imagine it. Even the limited memories that one possesses in one's present life, prompting the rising of thoughts about a few incidents from this life, make one miserable.

Bhagavan said about this, "No one knows about his previous birth. People forget, and that forgetfulness is good. In this one life alone, we are sometimes terribly worried over what had happened in the past; could we bear such worries if we knew all about our previous births?"⁸

Isn't this just like Sri Ramana, that he could find something positive and helpful in everything he observed and spoke about! Once, when he was explaining *adhyāropapavādabhyam* (prior superimposition and subsequent denial/elimination), he pointed out that the first term turns an individual inwards to the Self and then one knows that the world is not apart from the Self.⁹

The concept of *māyā*, according to Advaitins, has two aspects or powers: first it obscures (*āvaraṇa*) and then it projects (*vikṣepa*). The Self is (seemingly) obscured and then the world is projected. The unreal is superimposed upon the Real. To be obscured is sad, but to project something other than what is truly there is despicable. Sri Ramana remarked that this superimposition is of two types: conditioned and unconditioned. A snake superimposed upon a rope is said to be unconditioned because, once the truth of the rope is known, the illusory snake is removed forever. Then there is conditioned superimposition, e.g., the water of a mirage in which the mirage does not disappear even after knowing it to be a mirage.¹⁰

In order for superimposition to occur, there must be: 1) a residual impression brought about by the cognition of a real object; 2) a defect in the object of knowledge; 3) a defect in the cognizer; 4) a defect in the instrument of valid knowledge; and 5) a knowledge of the general nature alone of the substrate without a knowledge of its

⁸ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 21st November, 1947.

⁹ Talk§294.

¹⁰ See Talk§315.

particularities. A snake is superimposed on a rope not by a person who has never seen a rope before, but only by a person who has seen a real rope elsewhere. A snake is not superimposed on a shell; nor is silver superimposed on a rope.

Sri Ramana defined *māyā* as that which makes individuals regard as non-existent the Self, the Reality, which is always and everywhere present, all-pervasive, and self-luminous, and as existent the individual soul, the world, and God. Sometimes he would ask an enquirer, “Is the world real? Has it ever come to you and said, ‘I am real?’” It is the mind that has superimposed the world of duality upon the Self. Hearing this teaching, it should become obvious that one should seek the Self and not the information that the mind provides.

When a person sees a snake superimposed upon a rope, one does not see the rope. When one superimposes silver upon a shell, one does not see the shell. When a person superimposes the world, that they believe to be real, upon the Self, one is unaware of the Self. Therefore one should seek the Self. ▲

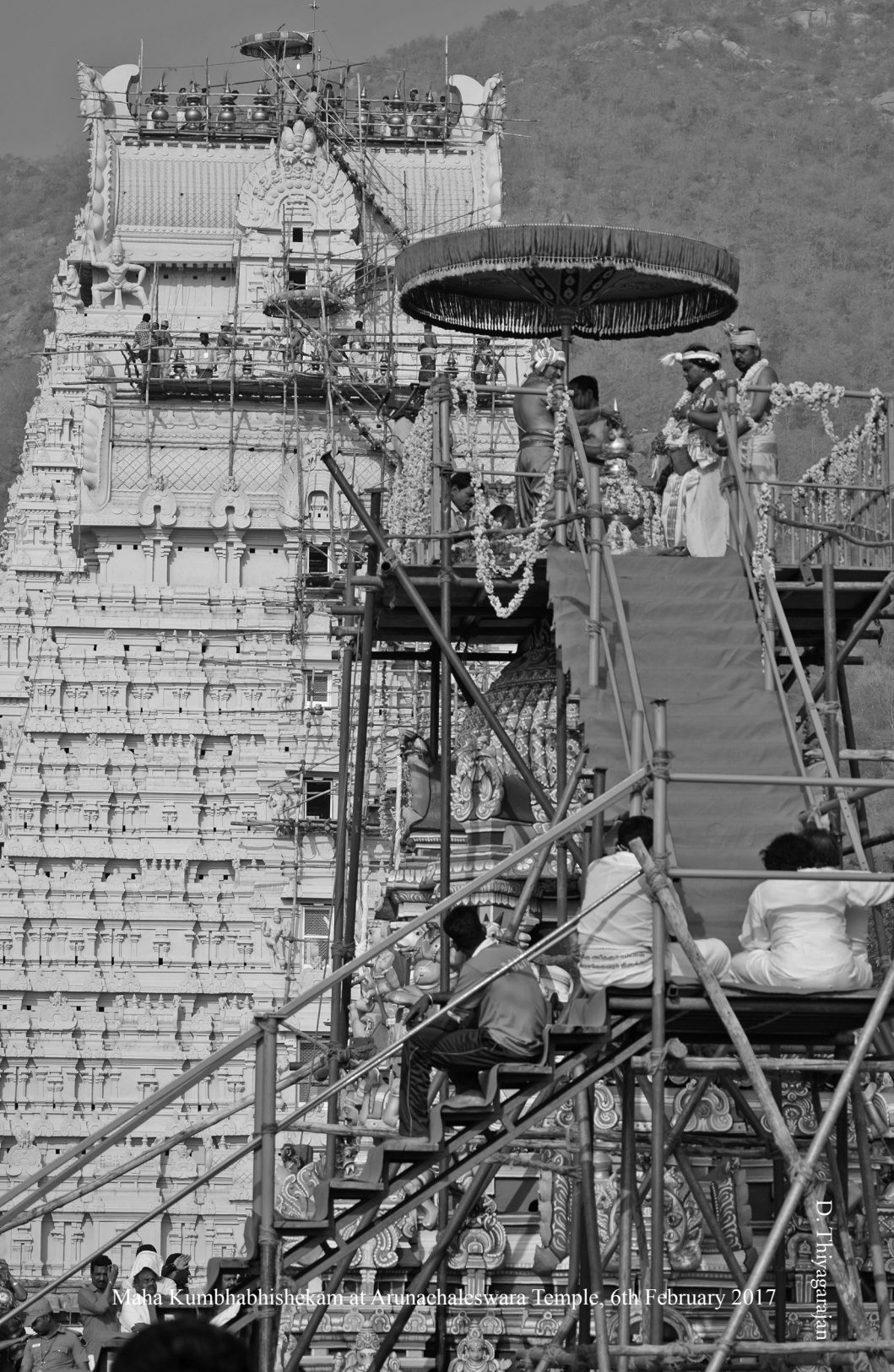
The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Regent of ages,
Mahakaali, your black hands
 cradle the mazes;
 nestling at his golden side,
 she swills from the cup of death.

A morsel only,
Mahagrassaa, to nosh your
 cavernous hunger;
 the stars ablaze she swallows,
 drains the pitch black of the void.

The poems are loosely based on the Japanese tanka form of five lines. A tanka is a haiku with two extra seven-syllabled lines. The lines have 5/7/5/7/7 syllables, in that order.



Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Arunachaleswara Temple, 6th February 2017

Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verses 37 to 40

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 37

Even if the entire world is regarded as a speck of dust and the content of the entire sacred lore is in the palm of their hands, those who fall prey to the wicked harlot of flattery find it impossible to cast off their chains and free themselves from this servitude.

Commentary

In the previous verse, taken from Sadasiva Brahmendra, the nature of the scholar-egoists whose learning has not helped them to extinguish their ego is described, while in this verse wonder is expressed about the great intellectual adept who has mastered all the texts in Vedanta and is also deeply interested in becoming a liberated person, yet falls prey to the charms of the courtesan called flattery.

The learned man through his learning reached the conclusion that the world is illusory and the charms of material life are valueless. Yet

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine *Ramaṇōdayam*, dedicated to Bhagavan.

even he falls prey to the charms of flattery. The subtle pride he takes in learning and being considered superior are very hard to erase. Even if an iota of ego remains, learned ascetics can get beguiled, thinking of themselves as great ones. A *sādhaka* should be very careful about such snares of adulation and be alert enough to discard all flattery as an obstacle to spiritual development. One should be totally indifferent to praise or criticism.

This is illustrated in an anecdote about Swami Ramananda. Once, he was returning from his holy bath in the river Ganges in Kashi. A wicked person deliberately spat on him, expecting him to be provoked with anger. The swami was undisturbed. He went back to the river and took another bath. Once again, on his return, the rogue spat on him. The swami, without a word, went again to the riverside ghat and took his holy bath. This happened several times. Each time the swami returned from his bath, the wicked man spat on him and the swami repeated the routine, totally unperturbed. Finally, ashamed of his own despicable conduct, the rogue went and asked for forgiveness from the swami. The sage said, “Why do you ask for forgiveness from me? You have not defiled or insulted me. On the contrary you have helped me by making me take my bath several times in the holy river. It is indeed a great blessing.”

In the next verse, Bhagavan delineates the state of a *jīvanmukta*. The *jīvanmukta*'s equanimity and poise, as exemplified by Swami Ramananda above, remains unaltered by whatever happens to him. No praise or criticism affects him.

Verse 38

For one who is established in the Self, who else is there apart from the Self? What does it matter what people say about him? What does it matter if one extols or denounces oneself? Without differentiating oneself from others, never swerving or slipping away from one's real state, one should abide ever as the Self.

Commentary

A *jīvanmukta* forever abides in cosmic consciousness. He is awareness alone. As nothing exists for him other than the Self everywhere, there is nothing to impact him either by praise or abuse, either by extolling him or by disparaging him. The words are devoid of relevance

as there is nothing to be referred to as the object of these words. Such a *jīvanmukta* remains ever anchored in the Self. He knows no distinctions between himself and others.

Addressing the disciple affectionately as ‘my son’ Sankaracharya gives a word of caution in the next verse. One must obtain the truth of non-duality from a preceptor and put it into practice through meditation or a specific *sādhana* to realise the non-dual truth. One must be aware that trying to act upon it literally in the empirical world is fraught with disasters.

Verse 39

Meditate constantly on the truth of One-without-a-second in your heart, but seek not to apply the teaching of non-duality to transactions in the empirical world. O my son! Meditate on the truth as encompassing all the three worlds, but do not do so in relation to the guru (who is never our equal).

Commentary

In this verse, Bhagavan points out the dangers of an aspirant who has not yet completely erased his ego and misunderstands the meaning of advaita. Ignorance, as well as the concept of duality, consist in the belief that the non-self, — the body, mind and ego (*cidābhāśa*) — are real. So long as the mistaken identity of the body as the Self is not removed, advaitic experience will not dawn. Given that this is the case, all our mundane activities should conform to the standards of life-in-dvaita (duality). One who has only a theoretical knowledge of advaita and not an actual experience of it ought not to base his worldly actions on that theoretical knowledge. If he tries to do so, as his ego sense still persists, there will be cascading errors. It will aggravate the *dvaita vāsanā* further.

Even the *jīvanmukta* ever established in the Self naturally follows this in his temporal activities. This is indicated by Bhagavan himself in verses 26 and 27. Worldly activities are possible only when there is cognition of duality. While we conduct our daily activities in the cognition of duality, we have to follow the standard of behaviour pertaining to duality. To argue that there is no difference between good and evil, right and wrong, or guru and *śisya* is to misunderstand advaita and can lead to great peril.

Even a *jīvanmukta*, who lives constantly in the non-dual state acts in conformity with the dvaitic attitude of behaviour and ethics. He does not violate the codes of conduct prescribed for the ordinary world. Advaita is the living truth for the *jñāni*; it is the aspirant's tool for meditation.

A special warning is given against failure in showing reverence to the guru, by mistakenly applying non-duality here. Such failure to revere the guru will aggravate the ego of the aspirant, instead of attenuating it, and lead to disasters.

This verse is a translation by Bhagavan of *śloka* 87 of Sri Sankara's *Tattvopadeśa*.

There is a beautiful story told by Sri Ramakrishna in this context. There was a student who misunderstood the meaning of advaita in daily life. His teacher had taught him that 'All is *brahman*'. One day, the disciple was walking along a road when he encountered an elephant. The mahout seated on the elephant asked the disciple to move out of the elephant's way. But the disciple thought, "All is *brahman*. I am *brahman*, the elephant is also *brahman*. How can *brahman* harm *brahman*?" So thinking, he stood right in the middle of the elephant's path. The elephant caught him in his trunk and threw him to the side of the road. Badly injured, the disciple went to the preceptor and complained that the instruction he had received from him on advaita had resulted in grievous injury to him. The preceptor asked him "When *Brahman* in the form of the mahout asked you to move away, why did you not listen to him?"

Just because we see the guru in a corporeal form, we should not commit the unforgiveable mistake of thinking that he is also a human being like us. He is the very embodiment of cosmic consciousness, the ultimate truth. His very glance can perform the alchemy of transforming the impure ego of the aspirant into the pure gold of awareness. He is the great hound of heaven. Those who are caught in the net of his grace can never escape him.

Bhagavan affirms this: "Non-dual idea is advised, but not advaita, in action. How will one learn advaita if one does not find a master and receive instructions from him? Is there not duality then? That is the meaning."¹

¹ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§458.

“Theoretical knowledge of the truth of non-duality does not avail in destroying the primary ignorance and rise to the egoless state where wrong action would be inconceivable. So, till that state is won, ego would be in command of actions and this warning is therefore necessary.”²

Bhagavan concludes the *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu Anubandham* with the emphatic statement that the real state is a state of non-duality transcending the mind, thought and speech. The differences of duality will not survive when one attains the state of advaita.

Verse 40

I hereby proclaim the quintessence of the *upadēśa* that is conclusively established in all the Vedantic texts; when the ego is extinguished in the natural state of Being, and the ‘I’ or the Self experiences identity with Brahman, the Self alone remains as consciousness. Nothing else exists. Know this!

Commentary

Vedanta is the truth in the *Upaniṣads*. Siddhanta is the essence of their teaching. The truth is arrived at not by speculation but by experience. In this experience of the Self, the Self is the sole survivor. All other entities, like mind and its manifestations called the world, God and individual self (*jagat, Īśvara, jīva*), all dissolve in the source along with the creator, the ego. What remains is the non-dual consciousness, sole and whole. That is *Saccidānanda*.

The names and forms (*nāma* and *rūpa*) are unreal. They are subject to change and destruction. The changeless and eternal reality, devoid of name and form, alone remains when the unreal is eliminated. The state of non-duality is attained through the powerful tool given by Bhagavan — the tool of self-enquiry (*ātma vicāra*). This is aided by association with the enlightened (*sat-saṅga*), the grace of the guru, matchless dedication, sharp discrimination between the real and the unreal, and diving into the Heart with the single-minded quest ‘Who am I?’. This will extinguish the ego and lead the aspirant to self-realisation.

This is the essence of the great *Upaniṣad Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* by Sri Bhagavan. ▲

² Sarma, Lakshmana, *Ramanaparavidyopanishad*, p.20.



Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Arunachaleswara Temple, 6th February 2017

Darsanam

ATREYA

The Sanskrit word *darśanam* means seeing. It derives from the root *drś* (to see). The word *darśanam* is used when we refer to our seeing a great man, a saint or sage. The Hindi equivalent is *darśan*. When Meera Bai, the peerless saint-composer of Rajasthan uses the word *daras* to denote a vision of her Lord Krishna, it has a mesmeric effect on us. The only *daras* she knew was that of her Giridhara Gopala, the Divine Cowherd, Lord Krishna. Which *heart* will not melt when Lata Mangeshkar sings Meerabai's line '*daras binā khaḍī duheli*' (there was no *darśan* [of Krishna], I was waiting at the door)?

To Saint Teresa of Avila and Mother (now Saint) Teresa of Calcutta (now Kolkata), the *darśan* worth having was that of Jesus the Christ. To saint-composers Kabir and Thyagaraja, it was Lord Rama. Surdas, the blind composer and devotee of Krishna, who lived in the Mathura-Brindavan area in the 15th-16th centuries and worshipped daily at the Krishna Temple in his town, could describe in his song in minutest detail the decorations being made on the icon by the temple priest.

Atreya has spent more than 46 years in a few *āśrams* and occasional social work. In 1988 he found his *Satguru* in Bhagavan Ramana and is now a resident of Sri Ramanasramam.

Lord Viṣṇu is described as the One who dwells in the heart of the meditating yogi (*yogihṛd dhyānagamyam*) and Lord Śiva (*Hara*) as the One, the Lamp of Knowledge, who shines in the heart of yogis (*cetaḥsadmani yoginām vijayate jñānapradīpo haraḥ*). The ‘heart’ mentioned here is the seat of the Self, the Self itself as Bhagavan Ramana says. Mahatma Gandhi often said that he saw Lord Ram as he plied the *charkha*, the spinning wheel.

The predominant idea behind the crucial role given to *darśan* is that if we really are absorbed, through *darśan*, with the image of the deity, or of the guru or even a sacred site from which emanates a powerful spiritual force, we become absorbed in the deity or guru, and we in turn take on the qualities of the presence which is ‘giving’ *darśan*. We ‘take’ *darśan* and begin to see the world through their eyes. The most powerful physical *darśan* is that when the guru looks directly into the eyes of the disciple and transmits his or her *tejas* (illumination or fire of transformation). We see with the eyes of the guru, whose gaze and watchfulness is straight and continuous. The reason the deities do not blink is that their consciousness is uninterrupted. Who has not gazed upon Arunachala and felt that abiding presence single and unremitting in its intensity? Seeing this mountain is a form of knowing.

Bhagavan Ramana thus apostrophizes his beloved Hill Arunachala: “O Arunachala! Surrendering his mind to You, the yogi sees everything as Your form.”¹ When St. John of the Cross of 16th century Spain, the disciple and friend of St. Teresa of Avila, after nine months, came out of the most primitive prison where his fellow Carmelites had kept him incarcerated, he said that when he was in prison, he was so inebriated with God that, when he came out, he saw nothing other than God everywhere.

These are all instances of *darśan*, seeing with the eye of love, of faith. As William Wordsworth aptly said, “While with an eye made quiet by the power/Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,/We see into the life of things.”² Bhagavan Ramana’s poet-devotee Sri Muruganar said that his eyes had become blind to everything except Ramana.

¹ *Arunachala Pañcaratnam*, v. 5.

² Wordsworth, William, *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*.

All these men and women of total, selfless love saw with their inner eye. To see Arunachala as the ‘Light Mountain’ as Sri Ramana did, we need his luminous eye of perfect love and *jñāna*.

What is the trouble with the human eye? The great Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib wrote: “All through his life Ghalib made this error,/The dirt was on his face,/And he kept wiping the mirror.” The *Upaniṣads* say: “The Creator created the senses outward-looking. Hence they see other things and not the Inner Being, the *ātman*, Self.”³ Sri Ramana assures us again and again that if only we turn our gaze inward in quest of ourself we are sure to learn to see (the Self). The Self is the true, all-seeing Eye, what Lord Ramana calls the Infinite Eye.

Bhagavan advised devotees that they should see a *jñāni* as he sees himself, not as the material body, for one day the so-called person referred to as Bhagavan will depart. People deceive themselves if they think that the external, transient manifestation of Bhagavan is real.

In verse 20 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, Bhagavan says, “God is seen by him alone who sees the Self and one who has lost the ego and seen the Self is none other than God.” In the next verse, he asks, “How may one see the Self? As the Self is without a second, it is impossible to see it. And how may one see God? To see Him is to be consumed by Him.”

The scriptures say, ‘*īśvaro guru atmeti mūrtibheda vibhāgine*’, that is, God, Guru and *ātman* are one; only the forms are different.⁴ If, therefore, to *see* God means to become the food of the Divine, we cannot claim to have *seen* the *Satguru* till our ego has melted away in the fire of love and knowledge. There is a statement in the Bible, “‘But’, He said, ‘You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live.’”⁵ No one who has really *seen* Bhagavan can retain his ego.

Sri Kunju Swami, an old *āśramite* who joined the community of devotees of Bhagavan at Skandasramam in 1920, used to say, when devotees regretted that they had not had *darśan* of Bhagavan, “We too have not seen Bhagavan, for he had no body. He had no body then and is not in the body now. He is ever there.”⁶

Who has, therefore, really *seen* Bhagavan the Divine Master? There is no denying that those who saw Bhagavan when he was in the

³ *Kāthopaniṣad*, 2.1.1.

⁴ *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stōtram*, Prefatory verse, Adi Sankara.

⁵ Exodus 33.20.

⁶ Heard by the author in Bhagavan’s Samadhi Hall in 1989.

body were undoubtedly fortunate people. A mere look from Bhagavan miraculously transformed lives; some instances are known, but, one can be sure, many are unknown. Many writers, both from India and abroad, devotees and visitors, have given ecstatic accounts of their *darśan* of Bhagavan. His eyes and smile have been termed the most beautiful, and as out of this world. The peace that he radiated has been hailed as unique. The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Āsram, Puduchery, once said after he departed, when people came there in quest of peace, she sent them to Ramana Maharshi. Then when Ramana Maharshi was not there, she sent them to the Himalayas. He was a Himalayan wonder!

However, the fact is that Bhagavan Ramana is ever the Inner Guru and he has to be found in the cave of our Heart. Jalaluddin Rumi, the Sufi poet-saint of Persia, was desolate when his spiritual Guide, Shamsuddin Tabriz, was killed by jealous people. Rumi wrote in his *Divan-e-Shamz-i Tabriz* that he looked for him everywhere but could not find him. Finally he ‘looked within his own heart’ (*nigaah kardam dil-e andar havishtan*) ‘and there I found him’ (*dar aan jaash didam*), ‘he was never elsewhere’ (*digarjaa na bood*). The *Satguru* can always be seen in the depths of the Heart with the eye of *jñāna*. And when we see him, we see our own true Self.

Is it not strange that we see the *Satguru* as a body, which he is not, while he always sees us all as the luminous Self, though we identify ourselves with our bodies? The great siddha-poet Tirumoolar, writing a few millennia ago in Tamil, asks: “O fools, who see with the eyes on the face, when will you see with the inner eye? What will we see when we use the inner eye? The Self itself!”⁷

The *Satguru* is the supreme eye specialist. When he opens our true eye with the ointment (*anjana*) of *jñāna*, we see *tat padam* (that Supreme State). We see God, the *Satguru* by being the Self, the Inner Eye, the Infinite Eye, the false ‘I’ having ceased to be. The phenomenal world, which is a projection of the mind – the ego – vanishes. The wandering mind gone, gone too is wandering in the dream-world. Major Chadwick, Bhagavan’s British devotee, footloose in his earlier days, asked, “Where else can I go after coming to the wonder of

⁷ *Tirumandiram*, v.2944, Tirumoolar.

wonders?” The Major did taste the plenary bliss of Selfhood in his *āśram* room. He ran to Bhagavan and exclaimed: “Bhagavan, is this that?” Bhagavan nodded, smiled and said: “This IS That.” “Is it so simple, Bhagavan?” “It is that simple.”⁸

Bhagavan says in verse 26 of his *Upadēśa Sāram*: ‘Abiding as the Self is the *darśan* of the Self (to be oneself is to know oneself).’ He says that Self-Knowledge is as easy as can be, because it means just being oneself. What can be easier than being oneself?

The German poet Friedrich Schiller got it right when he said: ‘Do you want to see me?/Look into yourself.’⁹ There is only one Self. To know, to see the *Satguru*, I have to see myself. How can I see him with the false eye of flesh? He is Spirit. Bhagavan asks in his *ātma vidya* (Song of Self-Knowledge): “What else remains to be known when one has known oneself? When one does not know oneself, of what avail is knowing everything else?” To see one’s own Self by being the Self is to see the *Satguru*. To be the Self, the mind, the ego has to be finished.

Once, the great poet-devotee Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni, when he saw some devotees of Bhagavan meditating with their eyes closed in the Old Hall in front of Bhagavan, wondered why, when Bhagavan, the object of their meditation, was sitting before them, they closed their eyes. He was right and so were the devotees, for Bhagavan is much better seen with the inner eye in the depths of one’s heart. Nayana was right too, because his eyes were different.

One who is not a true devotee may spend a lifetime with the Guru and not be any the better for it. Bhagavan Mahavira Vardhamana had a disciple by the name of Gautama. Not having understood the depth of the guru’s teaching, the disciple told Mahavira, “Bhagavan, I left everything thirty years ago to come here and be with you. But what have I got [in return]?” Mahavira said, “Now, leave me.”

A true devotee, wherever he is, is ever in the presence of the *Satguru*. After the famous *darśan* that Nayana experienced in Bhagavan’s presence in 1907, when he climbed up to Virupaksha cave and asked the question ‘What is *tapas*?’ , and had his eyes opened to a

⁸ Ganesan, V., *Ramana Periya Purānam*, Chapter on Major A.W. Chadwick.

⁹ “Willst Du mich Sehen?/Blick in Dir selbst”

profound understanding of the true purpose of *japa*, Nayana remained physically close to Bhagavan for many years, but one day he left for North India never to return.

However, he did not leave Bhagavan. He constantly lived in Bhagavan and wrote him letters in Sanskrit, soaked in devotion addressing him as the Lord of the Universe, the Primal Cause of the Universe, the Embodiment of Compassion, the one who plays Divine Sport, and so on. Maurice Frydman, the Polish devotee, wrote to Bhagavan, “Bhagavan is with me when I think of him. He is with me even when I don't think of him. Otherwise, how can I be?”¹⁰ There were many devotees, like Sivaprakasam Pillai, Echammal, Mudaliar Granny, Annamalai Swami, Sadhu Natanananda, Professor K. Swaminathan, Dr. K. Subrahmanyam, and a great many others who lived away from the *Āśram* or Tiruvannamalai are shining exemplars of devotees to whom Bhagavan and his teachings were their very life-breath. Even Mastan Saheb, the Muslim weaver of Desur, whom Bhagavan called ‘the ripest fruit’ which fell by his mere look, was not a permanent inmate of the *Āśram* but through that intimate connection of *darśan* remained ever fixed on Bhagavan, so much so that time and space were irrelevant to him.

Mahatma Gandhi said that he made a few attempts to visit Sri Ramanasramam and have the *darśan* of Ramana Maharshi, but it did not come through. He did, though, send his followers to Bhagavan now and then to have some respite from hard work and to experience peace and repose in the Maharshi's presence. In February 1934, Mahatma Gandhi was at Tiruvannamalai and addressed a public meeting in the open space not far from the *Āśram*. It is said that on his way back, his car stopped in front of the *Āśram* gate for a while and then moved on.

It had been expected that Gandhiji would visit the *Āśram* to have the *darśan* of Bhagavan Ramana. His immense regard for Bhagavan was well known. A few conjectures have been doing the rounds since then among Bhagavan's devotees in this regard. Some felt that as Gandhiji was fighting the British rulers of India and as it was not politically correct to host him, Gandhiji's followers like Rajaji, wished to avoid any embarrassment to the *Āśram*. This is a very

¹⁰ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §74..

unlikely reason. Another view was that as both Gandhiji and Rajaji were Vaishnavites and hence Visishthadvaitins, they were hesitant to meet the supreme Advaitin, Bhagavan Ramana. This too is hardly credible for, as Vinoba Bhave, the great Gandhian, has said, he and Gandhiji milked Advaita from the Gita Cow.

There is another possibility which seems far more plausible. As Gandhiji was spiritually very highly advanced and as his professed goal in life was not so much India's freedom as Self-Realisation, Rajaji and his other followers felt that if Gandhiji came under the direct spell of Bhagavan Ramana, he might delegate his political activities to his trusted lieutenants and plunge into full-time spiritual *sādhana*.

It is quite possible that Gandhiji, who was the humblest of humble men, felt that he was not spiritually ripe enough to come very close to Bhagavan. A dialogue on the following lines may have occurred in that car between Gandhiji and Rajaji: "G: Raja, I wonder if I am yet ready to meet this very high Being. R: Bapu, you are ready, you were always ready, but the country, destiny, we, the people of India, are not yet ready for that. Let us just move on this time."

Gandhiji was inwardly ever in tune with Bhagavan. He spoke of him to his close followers and sent some of them, like Babu Rajendra Prasad and Jamnalal Bajaj, to him. Once, Bhagavan referred to Gandhiji's writing in the *Harijan* where Gandhiji wrote, 'How mysterious are the ways of God! This journey to Rajkot is a wonder even to me. Why am I going, whither am I going? What for? I have thought nothing about these things. And if God guides me, what should I think, why should I think? Even thought may be an obstacle in the way of His guidance. The fact is, it takes no effort to stop thinking. The thoughts do not come. Indeed there is no vacuum – but I mean to say that there is no thought about the mission.'

Sri Bhagavan remarked how true the words were and emphasised each statement in the extract.¹¹

Gandhiji was a deeply inward-looking person. A swami, known as Vamsi (Flute) Baba, who lived in Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand in the Himalayas, whom I met a few months before he passed away in 2003 at the age of 103, told me that Gandhiji was in the state of *samādhi* (ve

¹¹ Ibid., Talk§646.

samādhi mem the). This swami had lived at Gandhiji's Sabarmati *Āśram* many years earlier with Gandhiji and then went away to the Himalayas with Gandhiji's consent to lead the life of a *sannyāsi*. He was a highly advanced soul and was considered by many *sādhus* to be Self-realised.

A highly spiritual being like Gandhiji could feel the presence of a Master like Bhagavan Ramana even if physically not close to him. Bhagavan used to say that the Guru does not see what his devotees do or don't do. He only sees whether they are free from the sense of doership. It is well-known to Gandhians that he followed the formula 'I = 0 is everything', namely, that the highest goal of human life is to erase one's ego.

If one, like Gandhiji, could have *darśan* from anywhere because *darśan* is to see with the eye of the spirit, then there may have been people who were physically in the presence of Bhagavan but who missed *darśan* by seeing him solely with the eye of flesh.

B.V. Narasimha Swamiji (BVN) was a very successful lawyer at Salem in Tamil Nadu. He was active in the Home Rule movement of Annie Besant which strove for the freedom of India from colonial rule. He had been brought up in a deeply pious and dharmic family, was unusually intelligent and precocious as a child, and later renowned for his philanthropy, strong sense of service and application of social justice. In spite of his very busy professional and public life he performed pujas devotedly several times a day. He was highly learned in Hindu scriptures and Western literature.

In a tragic accident of drowning in a well, he lost two of his children, and his grief-stricken wife died the following year. Heart-broken and distraught, he resolved to renounce everything he had been connected with till then. He left his home and his profession and ultimately came to Sri Ramanasramam. He took up residence in the adjoining Palakottu area, where a few devotees of Bhagavan lived, and spent his days in the presence of Bhagavan, doing *sādhana* assiduously. As he was keen to learn Advaita Vedanta in depth, Sri Bhagavan himself taught him the Tamil Vedantic classic *Kaivalya Navanītam*, verse by verse, the instruction being completed within a week. According to the venerable *āśramite* Sri Kunju Swami, Sri Bhagavan later remarked, "The traditional Mutts teaching Vedanta through Tamil poetic works do so only after some years of *manana*



(the memorizing of the verses) by the student. However, where is the need for this process when it comes to persons of sharpened intellect, like Narasimha Swami?"¹²

BVN worked hard in collecting authentic information about Bhagavan's life and in 1929 his acclaimed biography of Bhagavan, entitled *Self-Realization*, was published first by the Higginbotham's and later in 1931 by the *Āśram*. All later biographies of Bhagavan drew substantially from this excellent book. As a former advocate, he was a great one for checking the veracity of information and he went to every place connected with Bhagavan, met everyone possible who knew him and methodically gathered details about his early days.

BVN was innately more predisposed to the path of devotion than of Self-enquiry. As a householder he used to compose and lead bhajans regularly and he continued to attend *kīrtan* wherever it was held. However, he was disappointed that his bhakti was not growing as he had hoped, and with Bhagavan's permission and blessing he went away on a pilgrimage to West and North India, visiting several holy spots, doing severe *tapas* and gaining *darśan* of great saints and *siddhas*.

Earnest and totally dedicated, he underwent extreme hardship in his quest, eventually settling at the *Āśram* of Upasani Baba in Sakori, a village in the Ahmednagar District of Maharashtra, about 5 kms to the south of Shirdi. With characteristic thoroughness he delved deep into the life and teachings of the Maharaj, and his short biography *The Sage of Sakori* was published in 1936. However, there were aspects of Maharaj's life that were not in accordance with his own teachings, and after three years there, BVN decided to leave.

Weary and despairing of ever attaining his goal, BVN resolved to give up his search and return to Madras. As he was quietly walking away from the Sakori *āśram*, he was accosted by a rather mysterious person who suggested he go and take *darśan* of Sai Baba's *samādhi* in Shirdi. At the time BVN believed that a saint no longer in the physical body would be of no use to him and was reluctant to make the detour to Shirdi, but the stranger insisted. BVN did go and it was an ecstatic experience. Finally the *darśan* occurred that revolutionised his life.

Not only was BVN's own life transformed, but, spurred by his torrent of devotion and his urge to share the treasure he had found,

¹² Swami, Kunju, *Enadu Niṅaivuga!* (My Reminiscences), p.366.

he became the instrument that galvanized the entire Sai Bhakti movement. He dedicated the remainder of his life wholly to the service of Shirdi Sai Baba, travelling the length and breadth of India, establishing temples and Sai satsang associations throughout the country, preaching tirelessly, and writing prolifically on the life and teachings of his *Satguru*, including a meticulously researched four-volume biography.

He wrote later that while at Sri Ramanasramam, where he wrote the biography of Ramana Maharshi, while pursuing the study of Vedanta he lost the fervour of bhakti which he had when he practised law at Salem. Though he recognised the greatness of Sri Ramana, BVN understood that he was not ordained to be Bhagavan's disciple. The unique *darśan* that was meant to be, and which would radically transform him would happen elsewhere, and would result in him being the instrument for the spiritual influence of Sai Baba throughout India.

BVN wrote that at the tomb of Shirdi Baba he had finally arrived into the unmistakable presence of his Master. Once transformed by Baba's *anugraha*, he proceeded with his usual vigour and intelligence to propagate the life and message of Shirdi Baba. In his case, the ultimate *darśan* led not to retirement from the world but to an engagement with it that was to benefit countless seekers. Very few transcend the phenomenal world by constant abidance as the Self, some are in the world but not of the world.

Both Bhagavan Ramana and Shirdi Sai Baba taught their devotees to see the Divine in everything. Bhagavan explicitly counselled devotees to see the seer. Baba sometimes said, "I am Allah, I am Krishna," but he also said he was honoured by his devotees' *darśan*. Bhagavan once commented that when anyone entered the Old Hall, he mentally prostrated to them. He emphasised the *Mahāvākya* '*Tat Tvam Asi*' (You Are That), and drew devotees to the Inner Guru, the *antaryāmi*. Shirdi Baba sometimes said, "Who are we? Think on it night and day." Bhagavan Ramana, while pointing out that siddhis happen automatically without conscious effort, taught that they belong to the realm of mind and are not conducive to one's peace of mind if obsessed with.¹³ Great siddhas, like Sadasiva Brahmendra and Shirdi

¹³ *Forty Verses on Reality, Supplement*, v.16.

Sai Baba, may have displayed amazing siddhis, but these siddhis were not central to their teachings. As Bhagavan often said, they probably were not even aware of them. Once we are linked with a genuine guru after that initial earth-shattering *darśan*, our lives are spontaneously guided and protected by their automatic divine action. *Darśan* is rarely the end of our search, it is usually the very beginning of the true search for the realisation of Truth. All that preceded it was but preliminaries, however painful they may have been.

In Bhagavan's Old Hall, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians and Parsees were equally at home and sensed the origin and confluence of all religions in the Self. Shirdi Baba too became the shining symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. He was a Brahmin yogi to some and a Muslim fakir to others. He lived in an unused masjid and called it Dwarkamai. He was equally at home in the Gita, the *Upaniṣads* and the Holy Qur'an. Soon after his *Mahāsamādhi* in 1918, and with the advent of another man of God, Mahatma Gandhi, the country's air began to resonate with the words '*Raghupati Rāghava Rājārām, Patīta Pāvana Sītārām/ Īśvar Allāh Tere Nām*'.

Kaviyogi Shuddhananda Bharati, author of *Ramana Vijayam*, the Tamil biography of Bhagavan, who had *darśan* of the living Sai Baba in Shirdi, once said that when a group of devotees started singing a hymn beginning with *Ekam akṣaram* (one letter), Baba said, "Stop there. Just see what that *ekam akṣaram* is." When a devotee showed his notebook to Sri Ramana and requested him to write something, "at least *oru akṣaram* (one letter)," Bhagavan later wrote in Sanskrit, "The one imperishable [*akṣaram*] which is the Heart at all times is luminous. How can it be written?"¹⁴

In his *Aruṅācala Stuti Pañcakam* (Five Hymns on Arunachala), Ramana hails Arunachala as '*Oḷi Malai*' (that is, Mountain of Light; in Persian this is '*Koh-i-Noor*'). We devotees believe that Ramana is the human manifestation of that Koh-i-Noor. It is not given to all to see the Hill of the Holy Beacon, nor do all see Lord Ramana, the Beacon of Self-Knowledge as the White Radiance of Eternity. However, as he is the Inner Reality, one may walk away from him here in this form and yet find him in another form. He is formless and therefore, he is all forms.



¹⁴ Nagamma, Suri, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, p.104.

The Concluding Exhortation by The Lord in the Bhagavad Gita

VISHALAKSHI VISVESVARAYA

The *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* opens with Arjuna grieving at the thought of killing his relatives, elders, teachers and other respected people. At this juncture, the Lord teaches him what the right course of action is from the spiritual point of view. After offering him a full treatise, he concludes with the following verse.

sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja |
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ || 18-66
(Relinquishing all *dharmas* take refuge in Me alone. I will
liberate you from all sins; grieve not.)

This exhortation by the Lord has two distinct parts. The first is ‘Give up all *dharmas*’, and the second is ‘Surrender to Me alone’. He Octogenarian Vishalakshi, a post graduate in Economics (Bombay University), a Kovid (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan), & a social worker; has been a devotee of Bhagavan and a student of Vedanta for a long period; was President of 10+2 school with 2500 students and charity organizations. She is presently a trustee of Abhinava Vidya Bharati & Sustainable Urbanism International.

is the Self of all, the Lord who is ‘*acyutam garbhajanmajarāmarāṇa vivarjitam*’, meaning, ‘I who is undiminishing, beyond conception, birth, old age and death. That am I, the Absolute.’

This exhortation of the Lord is exemplified in the life of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

How is it that the Lord is asking Arjuna to give up all *dharmas* and then surrender to Him alone. Surely the Lord who is guiding Arjuna on the path to ‘*moksha*’ or ‘liberation’ could not have asked him to give up all *dharmas*, as it is clear from the earlier statements of the Lord in the *Bhagavadgītā* itself, and from the *sāstras*, that *dharmas* should not be given up because the knowledge of the Self cannot be attained without following the *dharmas*; for instance the *Katha Upaniṣad* clearly states:

nāvirato duṣcaritānnāśānto nāsamāhitaḥ |
nāśāntamānaso vā’pi prajñānenainamāpnuyāt || 1-ii 24

(One who has not desisted from bad conduct whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not peaceful, cannot attain this Self through knowledge.)

In order to bring the senses under control, to make the mind concentrated and to be peaceful, one has to perform *karmas*. All righteous and unrighteous deeds are executed through *karmas* only. So when Krishna says, relinquish all *dharmas* it means ‘give up all *karmas* after bringing the senses under control and training the mind to concentrate and be peaceful’. The ultimate is reached only when one has achieved a state of non-action, that is *naishkarmyasiddhi*. The declaration ‘give up *dharmas*’ therefore means give up both righteous and unrighteous deeds and attain freedom from action.

However, in the *Gita* the Lord has commended both *karma* and *jñāna*, as is clear from the following verse:

loke’smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha |
jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām || 3-3

(In the beginning of creation, O sinless one, two kinds of disciplines were given by Me to this world; the path of knowledge for the meditative, and the path of action/work for the active.)

Further, in the *Gītāsāstra*, Lord Krishna has also spoken of four *yogas* for attaining ‘*moksha*’ or ‘liberation’ — *karma yoga*, *jñāna yoga*, *dhyāna yoga* and *bhakti yoga*. Even though there are four *yogas*, in effect, they boil down to two *yogas*, namely *karma yoga* and *jñāna yoga*. For practising *karma yoga* one has to have *bhakti*. *Karma yoga* is doing one’s duty or other actions, mundane or religious, without expecting to reap any fruits. Whatever the outcome of the action, it is accepted as the ‘*prasāda*’ of the Lord. Such accepting thoughts arise only when one has *bhakti* and faith in the Lord. Therefore, *karma yoga* operates in conjunction with *bhakti yoga*.

Jñāna yoga cannot be practised without *bhakti*, because *jñāna* is not mere knowledge of the scriptures; it refers to the wisdom that is consequent to the proper understanding and practice of *śāstras*. This *jñāna* can be acquired only through *dhyāna* and *dhyāna* cannot be practised without *bhakti*.

Thus, in actual fact, the only paths available are *karma* and *jñāna* and both are implied in the concluding exhortation of the Lord as stated above. The question is, in order to be able to come to the stage of ‘Give up all *dharmas*’ and ‘Surrender to Me (the Absolute)’ and thus reach the ultimate goal of *moksha*, is it *karma* that helps more or is it *jñāna*?

Śāstras say both are required as part of *sādhana*. But ultimately it is *jñāna* which predominates. Sankara says, ‘*Kevala jñānena kaivalyam*’ i.e., the state of bliss or *moksha* is reached only through the means of *jñāna* or knowledge. But, to reach that stage *avidyā* (ignorance) has to be removed and *citta suddhi* (purification of mind) has to be achieved. *Karma* helps in achieving these. Not knowing fully the truth of *ātma* is *avidyā*, and inculcating mental discipline and preparing the mind to gain knowledge of *ātma* is *citta suddhi*. We will now look at *karma* in some detail to understand its role in achieving this goal.

There are three types of *karmas*: (i) *nitya karma*; (ii) *naimittika karma*; and (iii) *kāmya karma*. *Nitya karmas* are obligatory *karmas* which have to be done throughout life. The non-performance of *nitya karmas* entails sins of omission and leads to going (to hell) down the spiritual ladder. Thus, if in the process of giving up all *karmas*, *nitya karmas* are given up, then one will not be able to attain emancipation.

Some people say that *śruti* does not speak of the fruits of *nitya karmas*. They say that the pain caused by performing *nitya karmas* is itself the result of sinful deeds done in the past life. This stand is not correct. It is not possible for all past deeds to yield fruits in this life if they have not begun to work out their effects. This is because all past deeds do not fructify in this life. Also there will be a variety in the evil deeds done at different times. How can it then be said that the pain undergone in performing *nitya karma* is the result of past evil deeds in general because different evil deeds would produce different fruits?

The fact is, the pain involved in performing *nitya karma* is the result of the effort put in. It is unreasonable to suppose that it is the result of past evil deeds.

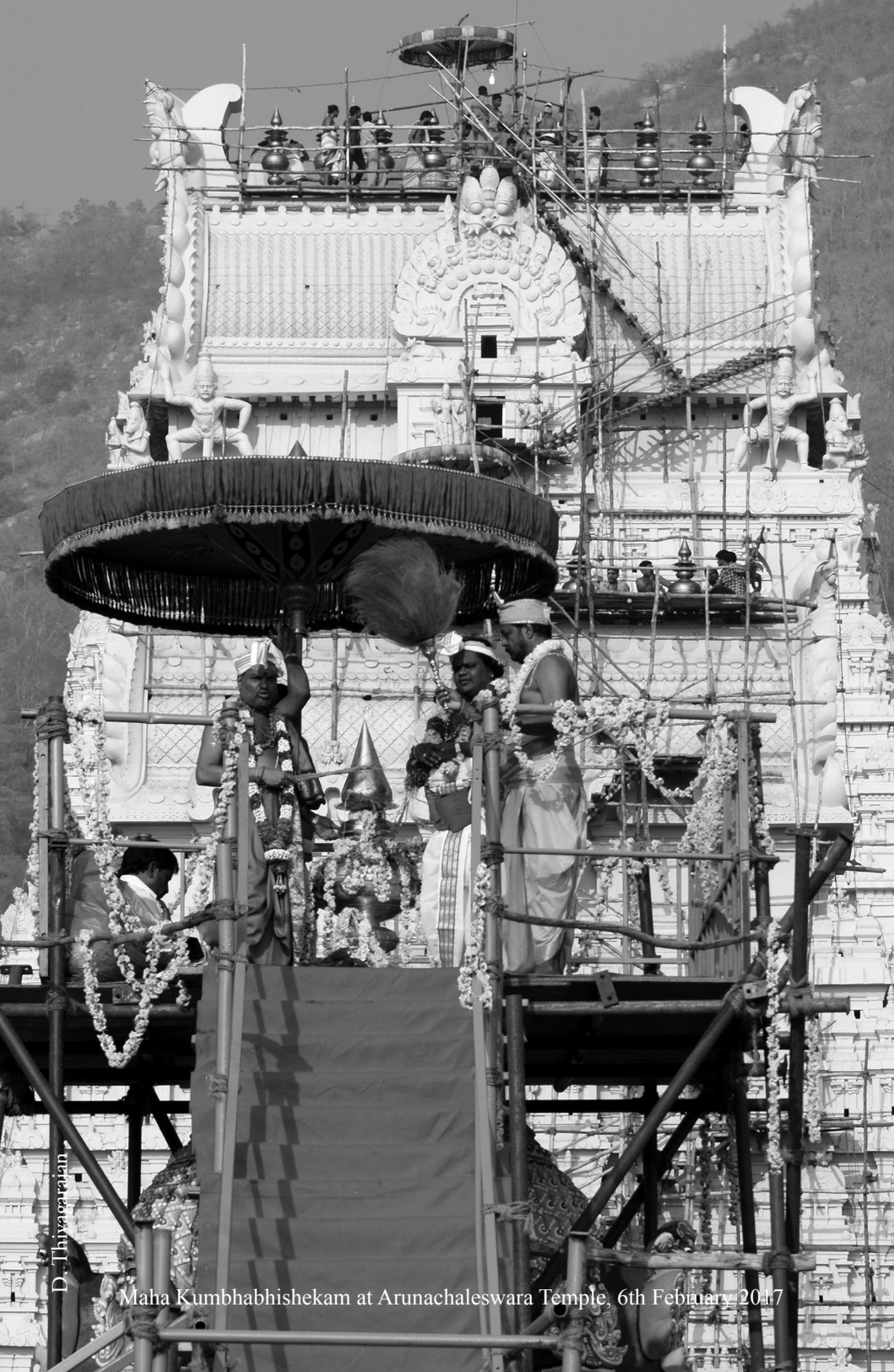
In performing certain *kāmya karmas*, *nitya karma* is also there, as when *kāmya agnihotra* is performed *nitya agnihotra* is also done simultaneously.¹ In this situation, if it is said that *nitya karmas* do not yield fruit, and that the trouble undertaken in performing them is itself its fruit, how can it then be explained that the same *agnihotra* which is *kāmya karma* and *nitya karma* can lead to such a result as *swarga* (heaven). This is not reasonable.

The real status of *nitya karma* is that it yields its fruit in future by way of taking devotees to higher regions after death; it is not meant for the eradication of sins. *Śruti* prescribes various *karmas* so that a person's mind is purified (*suddhi*) and he is thus led to higher thinking on the subtle aspects of truth.

As regards *kāmya karma*, it is performed to achieve a specific purpose, for example 'putrakāmeshti' for getting a son. *Naimittika karmas* are obligatory rites on special occasions such as death anniversaries, eclipses, etc.

The question that arises is, if *jñāna* ultimately leads to moksha, then why does the Lord ask Arjuna to fight (to act)? This is because for one who has body consciousness i.e. *dehābhimān*, there will also be *dehābhimān* and *bhokṛtva bhāva* (enjoyer or experiencer feeling) The actions have to be performed without attachment and expectation

¹ *Kāmya karmas* are rituals performed for the fulfilment of desires; *nitya karma* are obligatory rituals; *kāmya agnihotra* are obligatory rituals involving specific offerings, literally 'fire sacrifice'; and *nitya agnihotra* are obligatory rituals enjoined on all twice-born persons (*dvija*).



D. Dhyanraj

Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Arunachaleswara Temple. 6th February, 2017

of specific results. One should have *vairagya*, which can be attained by practising this attitude. By doing actions in this manner, one's devotion to the Lord also becomes intense. How one's devotion to the Lord ideally ought to be is described in the *Gīta* thus:

maccittā madgataprāṇā bodhayantaḥ parasparam |
kathayantaśca mām nityaṁ tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca || 10-9

(With their minds wholly in Me, with their senses absorbed in Me and enlightening one another and always speaking of Me, they are satisfied and delighted.)

Again in another verse, the Lord speaks of the highest type of *bhakti*:

mayyeva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhiṁ niveśaya |
nivaśiṣyasi mayyeva ata ūrdhvaṁ na saṁśayaḥ || 12-8

(Fix thy mind on Me only, place thy intellect in Me; then thou shalt no doubt live in Me ever after.)

Then the Lord describes how he blesses those who have unstinted devotion:

teṣāmevānukampārthamahamajñānajaṁ tamaḥ |
nāśayāmyātmabhāvastho jñānadīpena bhāsvatā || 10-11

(For such devotees, He, out of mere compassion, will destroy, by the luminous lamp of knowledge, the darkness, abiding in their hearts, which is born of ignorance.)

This shows that only by the Lord's Grace can one be blessed with knowledge to attain realisation.

Regarding *karma*, the Lord has said, that by following the dictates of the three Vedas diligently, only desires are fulfilled. The performance of *karma* does not contribute to the breaking of the birth-death cycle.

te puṇyamāsādyā surendralokamaśnanti divyāndivi devabhogān |
te taṁ bhuktvā svargalokaṁ viśālaṁ kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṁ
viśanti || 9-20

(‘Te’ refers to those who, knowing the three Vedas and performing sacrifices, etc., having accumulated merits, reach heaven. Reaching the holy world of the Lord of the devas, they enjoy the divine pleasures

CONCLUDING EXHORTATION BY THE LORD IN THE GITA

of the *devas*. Having enjoyed the vast *swarga* world, they once again enter the mortal world on the exhaustion of their merits).

evam̐ trayīdharmamanuprapannā
gatāgataṁ kāmakāmā labhante || 9-21

(Thus abiding by the injunctions of the three [Vedas], desiring desires they [constantly] come and go.)

In regard to *karmas* what the Lord has said is epigrammatically conveyed by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi (who advocates *jñāna marga*) when he says in his *Upadēśa Sāram*:

kṛtimahodadhau patanakāraṇam
phalamaśāśvataṁ gatinirodhakam || 2

Action (*karma*) is the cause for [a person to] fall into the vast ocean of further actions. The fruits of the actions are limited [temporary] and can be an obstruction to [knowledge which is the direct cause for] liberation.

One may be led to wonder, why does *śruti* prescribe these sacrifices etc., if they do not lead to *moksha*. Should we go by *śruti* as the authority for doing karma then?

It is not that *śruti* is not an authority in the matter of *karmas*. It cannot be that *śruti* is the authority for Brahma Vidya, nor is it for karma. *Śruti* has a purpose in prescribing certain karmas. As said earlier it is for *citta suddhi*, and for inculcating mental discipline and preparing the mind for gaining knowledge of *ātma*, which is the subtlest of the subtle knowledges.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi says the same thing in his *Upadēśa Sāram* when he says:

īśvarārpiteṁ necchayā kṛtaṁ |
cittaśodhakaṁ muktisādhakam || 3

As regards *jñāna* or ‘knowledge’ referred to above, it is not merely sastric knowledge that is referred to, but it is also the wisdom which is born of experiencing the ultimate truth. This the Lord terms as *vijnanam*. Speaking of this knowledge, i.e. *vijnanam*, He says:

jarāmarāṇamokṣāya māmāśritya yatanti ye |
te brahma tadviduḥ kṛtsnamadhyātmaṁ karma cākhilam || 7-29

Those who, taking refuge in Me, strive for deliverance from old age and death fully know the *Brahman*, the Self, and all manner of *karma*.

The destruction of *avidyā*, i.e. nescience and the dawn of knowledge, are simultaneous. Like the cutting of a log resulting in two parts, the destruction of nescience, is the removal of a veil. Thus moksha is not produced either by work or by knowledge but only when the veil of darkness is removed.

What precisely is nescience? Nescience is ignorance about the *ātma*. That is *avidyā* of *svarūpa* of *ātma*. This results in '*adhyāsa*', i.e. the superimposition of *ātma*'s attributes on the body-mind complex and the attributes of the body-mind complex on the *ātma*. For example, a person says 'I am tall' or 'I am fat'. These are qualities of the body superimposed on *ātma* by the *ahaṅkāra vṛtti* of the person. The individual has '*mā abhimāna*' also. When a person says, 'my house', 'my son' etc., he exhibits '*mā abhimāna*'. These are also superimpositions.

So also *chetanatva* (sentience) of *ātma* is superimposed on the body-mind complex. The *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti* is the working of the mind complex, i.e. mind, intellect, sense of I and consciousness. The mind complex by itself is inert and incapable of illumining objects like pot, cloth, etc. But it is able to illumine the objects because of the *cidśakti*, that is, the power of consciousness belonging to *ātma* reflected in the mind. Thus we see superimposition of the qualities of *ātma* on the body-mind complex and vice-versa. This is called '*itaretara adhyāsa*'. Sankara says nescience leads to *adhyāsa*, i.e. superimposition in the above mentioned ways. This '*adhyāsa*' is removed only with the dawn of knowledge (*jñāna*).

Having said Knowledge leads to liberation, one has to know the nature of the object of Knowledge. The Lord talks about it in this verse:

jñeyam yattatpravakṣyāmi yajjñātvāmṛtamaśnute |
anādimatparam brahma na sattannāsaducyate || 13-12

(I shall [now] set forth the knowable by knowing which one attains immortality, i.e. the supreme *Brahman* without the beginning, said to be neither existent nor non-existent.)

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Thus the thing to be known and experienced is the supreme *brahman*.

What happens when the nescience is destroyed by knowledge? This is very nicely described by Sankara:

kriyākāraka phala bheda buddhiḥ avidyā ātmani nityapravṛttā asya
nivartakam

ayaṁ ahamasmi kevala akartā akriyā aphalaḥ na matta anyaḥ asti
kaścit

(The sense of difference among actions, and among the means adopted for doing actions and reaping fruits is nescience. Its dispeller is self-knowledge whose content is ‘Here I am alone’, a non-agent without action/work of any kind or fruit result; there is none other than me.)

A person works to fulfil his/her desires. He/She makes use of accessories to do the work. She/He works and expects results. This is done only while one is under the spell of nescience. Once one realises, one has no desire to fulfil, one does not need the assistance of accessories, nor is there the need to expect results. One has become ‘*āptakāma* and *ātmakāma*’ and this results in his/her being *akartā*, *akriya* and *aphala*.²

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi conveys the same idea when he says in his *Upadēśa Sāram*:

dr̥śyavāritam cittamānmanah
cittvadarśanam tattvadarśanam || 16

One’s mind withdrawn from perception is the appreciation of Awareness (one’s real nature), which is the appreciation of Truth. Perception involves a ‘seer’ and the ‘seen’. But on realisation this duality is removed and there is only pure ‘awareness’. This is ‘*ātmakshatkara*’ As one progresses on the path of knowledge one reaches a stage where one realises everything is *brahman*. There is a verse in the *Bhagavadgita* in *Jñānakarmasāṁnyāsayoga*, i.e. ‘The way of renunciation of action in knowledge’, which says,

² *āptakāma* is a state of satisfaction in one’s self that needs nothing external for fulfilment or gratification; *ātmakāma*’ is one who loves only the Self; *akartā* is one who doer-less, not an agent; *akriya* is one who not bound by any rites or duties; and *aphala* is one for whom action is performed without desire for results.

brahmārpaṇaṁ brahma havirbrahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam |
brahmaiva tena gantavyaṁ brahmakarmasamādhinā || 4-24

(The process is *Brahman*, the clarified butter is *Brahman*, offered by *Brahman* in the fire of *Brahman*; by seeing *Brahman* in action he reaches *Brahman* alone.)

Sadasiva Brahmendra proclaimed ‘*sarvaṁ brahmapāyāṁ*’ – this is when one comes to understand that ‘*ayaṁ ahaṁ asmi kevalaḥ na mattaḥ anyaḥ asti kaścit*’ — ‘Here I am alone, there is none other than me.’

One is led to wonder, do only some people have *avidyā* or ignorance? The answer is no. All people, even those who are experts in different fields have *avidyā*. This *avidyā* is common to all people. *Avidyā* concerns the ‘*ātma*’. It is *naisargikah*, i.e. natural to all people. What it means is that generally people have some knowledge of *ātman* but not full knowledge of it. Not knowing fully the truth of *ātma* is *avidyā*, i.e. nescience.

The removal of *avidyā* is, in other words, the attainment of knowledge. Since the knowledge is not worldly, to acquire this highest knowledge of *ātma* one has to have devotion too. In the following verse this is clear:

bhaktiyā māmabhijñānāti yāvānyaścāsmi tattvataḥ |
tato mām tattvato jñātvā viśate tadanantaram || 18-55

(By devotion he knows Me in reality what and who I am; then having known Me in reality, he forthwith enters into Me.)

Thus, though finally knowledge alone leads to liberation, devotion is also very necessary. But even with knowledge and devotion one cannot succeed in realising. Along with devotion, study and meditation, the Lord’s Grace is absolutely necessary. For this one has to surrender completely. He says *māmekam śaraṇam vraja*. If one surrenders completely, the Lord promises to redeem one, as said to Arjuna:

manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru |
māmevaiśyasi satyaṁ te pratijāne priyo’si me || 18-65

(Occupy thy mind with Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me. Thou shalt reach Myself; Truly I promise this

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unto thee (for) thou art dear to Me.)

Here again we have the Lord asking Arjuna to surrender wholeheartedly in order to attain the highest.

tameva śaraṇaṁ gaccha sarvabhāvena bhārata |
tatprasādātparāṁ śāntiṁ sthānaṁ prāpsyasi śāśvatam || 18-62

(Take refuge in Him with all thy heart and soul, O! Bharata; by His grace thou shalt attain supreme peace and the eternal abode.)

Further He says that to be liberated, one has to give up all works, constantly think of him and the path of knowledge.

cetasā sarvakarmāṇi mayi samnyasya matparaḥ |
buddhiyogamupāśritya maccittaḥ satataṁ bhava || 18-57

(Resigning mentally all deeds to Me, having Me as the highest goal, resorting to *buddhi-yoga*, do thou ever fix thy mind on Me.)

We see in this verse all the requirements mentioned to reach him, namely, renunciation of works, having Him as the goal, with the mind intent on Him, and resorting to *buddhi-yoga*, meaning knowledge. For renouncing works, one has to be unattached; but one cannot be unattached, unless, one is intent on the Lord; but one cannot be intent on the Lord unless one has his mind absorbed in Him. But this is not all, one will have to completely surrender to Him, giving up all *ahamkara*, ego. Then by His Grace one can reach the goal.

What is said in the above three verses is beautifully brought out in the concluding verse of the treatise, with which we started. ▲



Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Arunachaleswara Temple, 6th February 2017

Loneliness: A Curse or a Gift?

SEAN CAMPBELL

This article first appeared in the Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK Newsletter in June 2015. It touches upon an important subject many devotees inevitably experience, particularly those who live in the West.

One of the singular paradoxes of modern times, particularly in the West, is that whilst the possibilities for communication between people increase exponentially, the incidence of loneliness amongst them also seems to grow towards epidemic levels.

At the heart of the endless chatter on the Internet and on smart devices, there often lies a deep core of fear and pain. Fear of being alone and pain whenever loneliness is experienced. It seems that the more people communicate with each other, the more they suffer when a hiatus in that exchange occurs. It is as if a reduction in exposure to personal loneliness actually makes things worse whenever it does resurface.

The author first visited Ramanasramam in 1996 after being prompted to do so by Mother Meera. He felt Bhagavan's presence instantly and overwhelmingly (doesn't everyone?), and knew that he had come home. He was a litigation lawyer before discovering some sanity and becoming an acupuncturist in London.

It is also evident that in reaching out to our fellow beings on all matters as we are now wont to do, we turn away from reaching in to ourselves, into our inner depths. In this twenty-first century of instantaneous contact, it seems as if introversion is becoming obsolete and that only extroversion is valued.

So it becomes even more important that we remember that Ramana taught that the entire external world, indeed the entire universe, is a product of the mental projection of the unrealised individual. Absolutely every object that one relates to is a projection of the ego/mind, which leaps into being in the first micro-second after we awake each morning, and this includes every other human in Creation.

This world of objects springs into existence when the 'I' thought first appears. And we know that simultaneously with the 'I' thought comes the ego/mind which is what creates the world of objects. Conversely, when the 'I' thought disappears, so does the ego/mind, and so does the world of objects. So it follows that this World is birthed anew each day as we awake from deep sleep, and is annihilated again each night as we slip back into it.

This entire process happens within each one of us every day, without reference to any external prompting. It is within in each of us that the World finds its origin, and its dissolution. So why is our focus therefore ever more exclusively upon the external phenomena? How real is a world that dies each day? And can loneliness even exist in a non-dualistic world? Or can it only arise when there is a subject to relate to an object?

As we know there is a greater and broader truth that flows like a vast, silent river of consciousness beneath the shallows of our egoic limited awareness and, in order for us to perceive this, Sri Ramana gave us the twin paths of surrender and self-enquiry. He enjoined us to look deep within ourselves, wherein the origin of all Creation, and of all the disharmony in Creation, can be found, and to investigate whether any phenomenon or situation is real, or merely another projection of the ego/mind in a changing world. He told us to discover what is really true, as opposed to what is apparently true, and to do this by self-examination. To find out who and what we really are, by setting out upon a long journey of introspection; a journey into the heart of our being.

It follows that if we fasten our attention upon always looking outward – focussing only upon people and objects in the external world – we will end up looking in precisely the wrong direction. And the result will be that we will just empower and strengthen the clouds of illusion that occlude our ability to see what is really going on. We will continue to see ourselves as separate from one another, moving in a world of clear boundaries and sharp edges, and we will sustain the fantasy that we are alone. When we believe this version of existence that we have created then we will continue without pause to scour the world without, for solutions that can only be found within.

This is not to decry our innate drive to relate to the various people and objects in our external reality. There is genuine value in such relationships for, as we feel oneness with one or more aspects of this reality, we are – unwittingly – on a circuitous path back to the Self. Ironically every urge to reach out from ourselves is birthed originally in an unconscious yearning for union with that Self. So all of these relationships carry the potential to nudge us into a more conscious, a more self-aware way of being. Every one of them can, conceivably, turn us back towards introspection and closer to realisation.

But because it is impossible to relate to anything more than a minute fraction of all the countless billions of objects in our world, such progress can only ever be unimaginably slow. And because, in the unrealised state, we always relate from the standpoint of our individual ego/mind, it will be for ever like trying to understand the Moon by poring over its reflection in a puddle.

Hence the value of self-enquiry. As we take up this practice, and begin to flex our spiritual muscles of self-awareness and introspection, we begin quite quickly to see that the people and situations and objects that we encounter (and feel drawn to – or repulsed by) are all telling us something about ourselves. As aspects of our self-created world, they mirror back to us hidden parts of our ego/mind that we are unaware of, and they point us back to ourselves as their creator.

Gradually we can come to recognise them as grace, and to see that we have the opportunity to treat each encounter, each movement outward, as an invitation to grow in self-knowledge. With Ramana's guidance we can see that in all the reactions that are elicited, and in all the feelings that are produced in us, the 'I' thought sits enthroned

at the heart of them. These responses, these interactions, are the basic fodder upon which self enquiry can feed, supplying us with endless opportunities to sharpen and refine our practice – to uncover ‘I’ – and to uncover the source of all these movements outward.

Even so, none of these triggers are quite as powerful as when they are all absent, and we are just left alone with ourselves. When we are not distracted by one stimulating object or another, we simply have to sit with whatever is going on inside. This is when loneliness can appear, and appear very powerfully. It can manifest in any number of ways, from a subtle sense of inner unease right up to a tidal wave of anxiety, and heart-squeezing pain. It can come in many guises – possibly as feelings of vulnerability, or inadequacy. It can feel as if the World is vastly indifferent to our own existence. It can be perceived as a lack of love, of caring, as an absence of meaning.

In truth all of these feelings and thoughts are none other than urgent cries from our ego/mind to immediately plunge back into the distractions of the world of form, and into the stimulation that other beings and objects provide. Anything to avoid having to face what lies within; to face what we do not wish to face and are afraid of.

For what does lie within is nothing less than the origin of all manifestation, good and bad, dream and nightmare. To uncover this lotus in the mud – the Self or the *ātman* – we must mine down through the deep veins of our ego nature. This is a lengthy and often unpleasant process, which our ego/mind will do almost anything to avoid. The *vāsanās* (our egoic habits and accretions) in all their various forms that emerge when we begin this process, are like separate droplets which together create clouds of deception covering the Sun. They obscure and hide our inner light and it feels as if we are lost in an endless fog.

Of course we know them so very well as our issues, our predilections and preferences, our prejudices and fears. They cluster thickly in our past conditioning, they come in battalions from our past lives, and they manifest in our particular desires and appetites. If left unexamined they drive us ceaselessly to satiate our cravings, to fill our empty spaces and ever to seek new distraction, fresh novelty and more stimulation. Pain and negativity lurk in their shadow and their fruit is ultimately more suffering for us.

And, arguably, the greatest *vāsanā* of all is the firm belief that we all have in our own separateness, our uniqueness. The belief that the ego/mind is all that we are and that it is the ‘I am’ – the source of all. This mistaken conviction – which is anchored so deeply in our psyche – is that we are alone and apart. And this sense of profound separateness leads us on to feelings of incompleteness; an uneasy sense of emptiness inside. This is the true meaning of unholiness, which really just means unwholeness. Our ego/mind knows dimly that it is neither the highest nor the most complete expression of consciousness possible, and this is not an enjoyable feeling. So it.....we..... look for ways of escaping the discomfort it brings, and we look outside of ourselves for that relief. Believing that we are alone is painful.

But we are not alone, we are never alone. The Self that is the overarching consciousness behind the veil of *Māyā* has, in its infinite wisdom, given us Sri Ramana. With his guidance the unique pain, that is the signature of loneliness can, in an instant, become the invitation to enquire who and what is alone. This is the gift within the pain for surely forgetfulness and sloth are the scourge of all spiritual practices, and it is not possible for any of us to ignore this deepest of wounds, the wound of being separate.

So, when loneliness appears, it can and should be welcomed, as a prompting from grace to turn within, and to face what is calling for our attention. The temptation to immediately reach for the phone or to fire up the laptop should be resisted. Instead, with an attitude of gratefulness, it is good to take a moment to observe our fear of aloneness. It is good to allow ourselves to experience the discomfort it arouses. Because this fear, like any other fear, will not harm us. This fear is nothing other than a resistance to accepting whatever grace has presented in the moment. And if it is possible to say ‘yes’ to the fear of being alone; ‘yes’ to feeling lonely; ‘yes’ to experiencing separateness, then transformation can begin to happen.

Acceptance of ‘what is’ is a door to liberation. Acceptance of whatever comes to one is alchemical in its power, and it can set one free. It is how Sri Ramana faced his cancer, and how Ramakrishna faced his. And it is what Jesus Christ did not once but three times over faced in the garden at Gethsemane. It is surrender to the highest power. All of these beings knew that, however a person comes to it,

he or she must, in the end, accept that it is not a case of my will...but of Thy will. Not as the ego/mind proposes but as the Self disposes. In that moment of affirmation, of saying 'yes', all personal boundaries can dissolve and both wills can be seen to be one, and to have always been one.

And there is also self-enquiry. Never mind that loneliness arises time and again – on every occasion face the feeling of loneliness, and interrogate it. Ask who is lonely, and what is alone. Uncover the 'I' of the ego/mind telling itself tales of loneliness, and hunt it back into dissolution; into the inclusive all-embracing silence – not of aloneness – but of 'all-oneness'.

Ultimately no illusion, no self-deception is immune to self-enquiry. Even the conviction that each of us is separate, which is so strongly embedded within us all, is just another story told by the ego/mind. Find out who is telling the story and uncover the lie at its heart.

It is helpful to recall some words from Rajini Menon (when she attended our UK Ramana Satsang). She observed that weak people are not drawn to the path of Ramana Maharshi, but rather that it takes a stout heart and a clear focus to undertake this journey. It is a path requiring courage, and all who commit to it sincerely are warriors of the spirit. Loneliness is simply, and no more than, a worthy opponent for *sadhaks* of this maturity and dissolving loneliness into the Self is something that all of us, eventually, will achieve.

The truth is that we are all whole and that we are all complete, and that it is out of us that worlds and universes spring into being, and not the other way round. The Truth is that out of us spring all the answers to all the questions that can ever be put, and that each of us has created a Sri Ramana outside of ourselves in order for us, in time, to reclaim him back into our hearts as our own. We are all the unbroken Ocean of Bliss in one endless and timeless manifestation. No one is ever alone, we are all-one..... eternally. ▲

Sri Sivabala Yogi

GURPRASAD

Sri Sivabala Yogi was a great saint of modern India. Though fairly well known in India and the West, readers of the *Mountain Path* are unlikely to have heard much about him and his teachings. The readership of a few books published on his life and teachings has not extended beyond his educated devotees. Sages of Sri Sivabala Yogi's stature ought to be known to a much wider audience across the world; not that they seek fame or money (unlike the god-men and god-women who thrive these days!) but to acquaint aspiring souls with the divine word revealed by them. It is only divine knowledge that, if put into practice sincerely and diligently, leads to the removal of the worries and stresses caused by the competitive living which is such a marked feature of modern life. The more discriminating aspirants seek a much higher goal, i.e., complete freedom from ignorance to attain Self-Realisation.

Gurprasad is a veteran of the Indian Army. He had spiritual leanings from his young days. His quest for divine knowledge fructified when he was initiated into meditation by Sri Sivabala Yogi in 1977. The Guru then, over a period of a few years, revealed to him the divine knowledge given in *Laghu Guru Upaniṣad*. The author can be contacted at gurprasad38@gmail.com

Sri Sivabala Yogi's life story, specifically the severe tapas that he undertook, has many lessons for serious aspirants (*sādhakas*). Similarly, his teachings, practised faithfully, offer hope to many to achieve their desired end; that could be the lower aim of living a peaceful and happy life sans worries or striving for the highest state of knowing the Reality.

Sathyaraju, the childhood name of Sri Sivabala Yogi (an appellation given by his guru, Shankar Bhagwan) was born on 24 January 1935 at Adivarpupetta, a small village in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. It is about 25 kilometres from Kakinada, a coastal town on the Bay of Bengal. The area is well known for its rice cultivation and the village is set amidst paddy fields with high bunds [mud banks] to retain water for crops. The climate is hot and sultry for most of the year except for a short winter. Sathyaraju was the youngest of four children, the others being an older brother and two sisters. The family was poor and belonged to the weaver caste, like most of the other villagers. His father, Sri Bheemanna, died in 1937 which forced his mother, Srimati Parvathamma, to begin living with her father, Sri Goli Sathyam, in the same village.

Sathyaraju had to give up his studies after class two because of the impoverished state of his family. He began to work at the looms, weaving cloth, at the very young age of eight. Despite the family's tribulations, he had a fairly happy childhood; he was strong for his age and also good at village games. Like other young boys, he too had a propensity to pick a fight quickly. There was thus nothing remarkable about Sathyaraju to mark him as a great yogi of the future.

There was hardly anyone in his family or in the village who was deeply religious or had more than rudimentary scriptural knowledge. There was not even a temple in the village. Sathyaraju, like other boys in the village, had no formal education and no spiritual leanings. But all this was to change, due to a divinely inspired event that took place, suddenly and inexplicably, on 7 August 1949.

It was a Sunday and the young boys were indulging in playing pranks and games. Sathyaraju had been playing a game of marbles since the morning and at about 2 o'clock decided, along with a few friends, to go for a swim in the small Godavari Canal on the outskirts of the village. Enroute, laughing and joking, they strayed across to



a palmyra grove. As they got close to it, three fruits fell from a tree and some boys rushed to collect them. They were equally distributed amongst the twelve of them and the boys walked on to the canal. All of a sudden Sathyaraju's body began to shake and he saw a brilliant light emerge from his share of the fruit and heard the blissful sound of Omkara emanating from it.

His body became still and his confusion was replaced by wonder when he beheld an 18 inch black stone *śivaliṅgam* (the symbol of Shiva) in his hand instead of the fruit. Then the exceedingly beautiful form of a divine yogi, made of light, emerged from the *śivaliṅgam*. He was over seven feet tall, young-looking and with matted hair tied in a knot on his head. This awe-inspiring divine figure then commanded Sathyaraju (in Telugu) to sit in *padam āsana*.

On being informed of his ignorance about it, the divine guru taught him how to adopt it. The divine guru then touched his *brikuti* (the space between the eyebrows) and Sathyaraju immediately entered *sahaja samādhi*, the highest state of Self-Realisation. It was in this unique way that a fourteen year old boy, who had neither previous knowledge of spiritual matters nor any desire to seek any spiritual goal, was initiated into the discipline of Tapas Yoga.

Sathyaraju did not even know who his divine guru was. The latter's identity was revealed by the divine guru himself, twelve years later (in 1961), in response to a query Sathyaraju raised. He was Sri Shankar Bhagwan, the Lord Siva, who is guru of all yogis.¹ It is difficult to relate in full the fascinating story of Sathyaraju's *tapas* that began on

¹ Shankar Bhagwan (also known as Lord Siva) is the divine embodiment of the omnipotent, formless and pure Consciousness. The entire creation in its myriad forms (i.e. causal, subtle and gross or physical) is a manifestation of the universal consciousness. In the same way, Shankar Bhagwan appears in a physical or subtle body in response to the prayers of those who seek divine knowledge and Realisation. Shankar Bhagwan in His subtle body was seen by Sri Sivabala Yogi on 7 August 1949 and He looked like a wandering mendicant that the latter had seen in his village. A divine manifestation can assume any form, big or small, and communicate in any language. Shankar Bhagwan spoke to the Yogi in Telugu; this phenomenon is akin to the experience of visions in meditation or of dreams in which a normal conversation takes place.

Bhagavan Ramana is the manifested form of the same divine Consciousness, as mentioned earlier.

7th August 1949 in this strange and dramatic fashion and ended on 7th August 1961. Yet it is essential to know what transpired during these long years to appreciate Sathyaraju's stupendous spiritual feat, that transformed an uneducated village boy into a yogi of the highest class.

As Sathyaraju sat on the canal bank in *samādhi*, his friends thought he was either playacting or was possessed by a spirit and roughly tried to wake him up. They failed to do so. They then informed his family, who tried taking him home without success. After a couple of days he moved from the canal bank to sit under a *bodhi* tree at the end of the village street. There his mother cried her heart out for him to return home, but it was his grandfather who persuaded her to let him continue with his *tapas*. Some kind-hearted villagers built a thatched roof over him.

But he was faced with a new problem: he was taunted and made fun of by boys who harassed him in every way, including beating him with sticks. Once a burning cloth was thrown at him by some malicious boys. All this had no effect on Sathyaraju's resolve to carry on with his *tapas*, because he had lost all bodily consciousness after the first hour of his practice. Sathyaraju then moved to the village's burial ground on 18th November 1949 to escape from his tormentors. This burial ground was to become Sri Sivabala Yogi's *tapas sthāna* (sacred place where *tapas* is done) and he sat there in *tapas* continuously till 7th August 1961.

An āśram has now been constructed there. Sathayaraju may have escaped from the human trouble makers, but was now faced with even worse perils: he now faced annoyance and attacks from rodents, mosquitoes, large ants and snakes including cobras. All of them had a field day as he sat in continuous *tapas* year after year for eight years till 7th August 1957 without any sleep. He permitted himself a half hour break every night from 11.30 pm to midnight to have a bath and for other bodily functions, and also to partake of a glass of milk. Even this was discontinued for many months at a time.

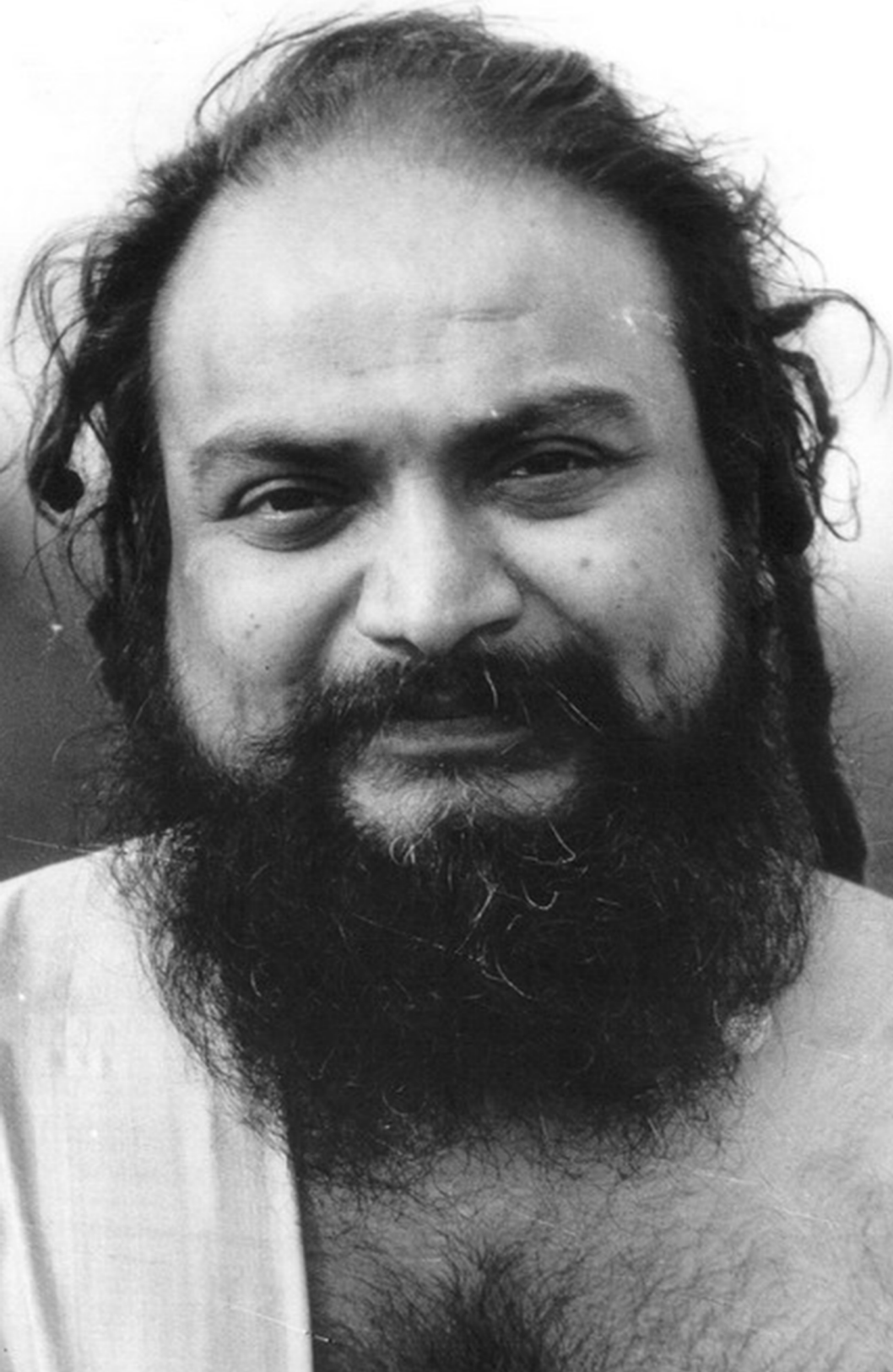
As the years rolled by, Swamiji's body became weak. His matted hair, with bird droppings in it, grew to his waist. Many a time Sathyaraju suffered intense burning sensations all over his body, excruciating stomach pains and, for almost three years, lost control of his limbs. He was bitten by snakes (including four cobras) at least ten times. He survived all these ordeals due to his divine guru's grace.

His divine guru had also given him a mantra with which to neutralise the venom of snakes. All these painful incidents took place because of the hostility that a sincere yogi faces from the hostile powers that operate from the northern, eastern and western directions. The power that dwells in the southern direction is peaceful and neutral. This phenomenon may be better understood by a simile. Imagine that an average individual's mind is agitated and uncontrolled because it moves in a clockwise direction. To bring it under control, the motion in the mind must move in the opposite direction, i.e. counter-clockwise. That is bound to be resisted and that is why it is so difficult to stop the flow of thoughts in the mind. A guru's grace is a must to do so. A yogi earns this power for a large number of aspirants and therefore encounters major obstacles.

Sathyaraju began tapas facing the east till October 1953; for the north, it lasted until August 1955; for the west and south, it was completed in June 1956 and May 1957 respectively. The last four years (August 1957-August 1961) were spent doing tapas facing the east again. During this period, he was enjoined by his divine guru to sit for tapas for twelve hours a day (4 am to 4 pm). The rest of his time was to be utilised for rest, sleep, bath, meeting devotees and initiating them on the path of yoga.

Then, on the 1st of August 1961, the divine guru, Sri Shankar Bhagwan, proclaimed him a yogi and named him Sivabala Yogi. The divine guru instructed him to re-establish *dharma* (i.e. the predominance of virtue over evil) and awaken latent spiritual power in all those who sought his grace. Further, he could grant salvation and initiate devotees on any path including that of Silence.² After the completion of tapas, Swamiji travelled across India and established

² That a guru is a must for Self-realisation is very well established in the Indian spiritual tradition. It has been specifically stated by many saints; for example, Guru Nanak, Kabir and Namdev. Bhagavan Ramana may not have said this in so many words. The reason for this is that the path of self-enquiry does not accept the concept of duality (guru and disciple) in its teaching. Outwardly, Bhagavan Ramana did not acknowledge that he was a guru, yet in practice he admitted that he was so. In a discussion on the importance of a guru, he once told Major Chadwick, "Do you want in writing [that I am your guru]?" when the latter in despair asked, "Have I wasted all these years here if you are not my guru?"



centres for meditation (*āśramās*) at a number of places including Bangalore (his headquarters where he spent most of his time), Hyderabad, Sambar Lake, Dehradun and so on. He visited the USA and the UK in the late 80s and early 90s. He shed his body on 28 March 1994 at Adivarpupetta after his diabetes took a turn for the worse in 1991. He was interred in the *āśram* there on 2 April as per the local custom for holy persons.

Swamiji taught in Silence; many gurus of the highest calibre do that but his uniqueness was that he taught in absolute Silence, a path that is usually associated with the celebrated sage of very ancient times, Sri Dakshinamurthy.³ Swamiji clarified all doubts by the power of Silence. Thus, his emphasis was on practice (*sādhana*) and on practice alone, because no degree of verbal instructions could ever purify the mind and prepare it for its destruction. To teach in absolute Silence in this dark age is Swamiji's greatest contribution to India's rich spiritual heritage.

Swamiji's teaching was simple; it was to make the mind silent (totally free of thoughts) through the practice of meditation. Apart from making an occasional cryptic statement on spiritual issues, his reply to any question was to do more meditation in order to know the answer. Many got their doubts removed this way.

Though Swamiji initiated devotees on all paths by infusing them with the power of Silence, his primary stress was on the path of yoga that stresses meditation (*dhyāna*) to control the mind. He taught the path of *ātma dhyāna* (meditation on the individual 'I'). After initiation, students were told to concentrate on the *brikuti* (space between the eyebrows) while ignoring the flow of thoughts. This practice was meant to continue till one finally experienced the 'I' current in the Heart.

This is the preliminary experience that makes the mind ready for its final annihilation. Swamiji emphasised that in this age of ignorance (*kaliyuga*) the practice of any spiritual discipline fructifies faster if it is combined with the repetition of a divine name and with service (*sevā*). He insisted that every inmate in his *āśrams* did service of some kind.

³Undoubtedly, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi also taught in Silence. No other name has been mentioned except that of Sri Dakshinamurthy because the latter is considered the first teacher of the path of Silence.

What are the chief lessons for an earnest aspirant from Sri Sivabala Yogi's *tapas*? First: Desirelessness. Swamiji often told his devotees that he had no desire to do tapas; he only followed his divine guru's directions to attain success. It is not easy to give up desire but even a sincere attempt to do so earns much more divine grace than one's efforts warrant.

Second: Self-Surrender. This is very difficult to execute in practice. One must follow every yogic discipline in a spirit of self-surrender, just as Swamiji did, by offering all that he achieved in tapas to his guru.

Third: Determination. This is the crux of one's practice, especially for beginners. Most people are lethargic and look for excuses to postpone their practice. Even those who do practice get frustrated after some time, due to what they perceive as their lack of progress. What needs to be borne in mind is that one must press on regardless of one's fears and doubts. This is the true measure of devotion to God and Guru, and to achieving Realisation.

Swamiji's message should inspire all aspirants to never give up their spiritual practice, no matter how discouraged they may feel. No devotee is ever likely to face the enormous perils that Sri Sivabala Yogi endured. Yet he carried on, despite life-threatening opposition from many evil spirits, and he vanquished them all in the end. ▲

Further Reading on Sri Sri Sri Sivabalayogi Maharaj

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Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Arunachaleswara Temple, 6th February 2017

D. Thiyagarajan

Sufism and Jnana Yoga

Part Three and Four

Japam and Dhikrullah; Ma'rifa of the Nafs, or Atma-vidya

CHARLES UPTON

III: Japam and Dhikrullah

On one occasion Ramana Maharshi said, that whoever practices *japam* gets realisation.¹ The Hindu method of japa-yoga is strictly equivalent to the Sufi *dhikrullah* and the Christian Hesychast *mnimi Theou*, both of which mean 'remembrance of God'. The practice is to invoke the Absolute Reality by the constant pronunciation (sometimes vocally but more often silently) of a Name of God.

The Invocation of the Name of God usually begins as a simple recognition of God's reality on the part of the devotee, combined with the ongoing work of dispelling the habitual distractions that veil this recognition, and consequently interrupt the Invocation. It may also

¹³ Venkataramiah, M., (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§413.

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take the form of a petition directed to God, a prayer that He unveil His Presence, that He grant his devotee the Beatific Vision of His Face.

This level of Invocation is based on the perception of God as He (in Sufism, *Hu* or *Huwa*) and the devotee as I; it is built upon the common assumption that ego is real, and that this ego – humbled, purified, fervent, but still assumed to exist – can witness God, at least partially and intermittently. Whatever ‘God’ the ego sees, however, is inseparable from the ego; this is what Ibn al-‘Arabi calls ‘the god created in belief’. It is a projection of that ego, and consequently a veil, but it is also the beginning of the realisation that there is *something* more real than the ego, *something* that does not depend upon the I-sense or exist in relation to it, *something* that continues to be real whether the I-sense appears or disappears. Consequently the worship of God with form (*saguna brahman*) is usually an indispensable prelude to the realisation of God beyond form (*nirguna brahman*); this is the inner meaning of the saying of Jesus, “None come to the Father but through Me” [John 6:44].

Dhikr or *japam* encompasses both *bhakti* and *jñāna*. On the *bhakti* level, I invoke God’s Name, hoping He will unveil His presence. On the *jñāna* level, God speaks His own Name within me. And in the course of the Invocation of that Name, the inversion of subject and object described by Frithjof Schuon may take place – if, that is, the *dhākir* (the *japa-yogi*) is destined to attain the station of *baqā’*, of Subsistence in God, by virtue of the unveiling of the Self, the Absolute Witness.

From the standpoint of that Self the devotee is not I but He; the Self is the Witness and the human form the thing witnessed; the psycho-physical individuality is fully objectified before the Eye of the Heart. Here I am no longer striving to remain aware of God’s presence or petitioning Him to unveil that presence.

I am not invoking God; rather, the Self within the Heart is witnessing the Invocation of itself as God; this is the true meaning of the traditional formula ‘God and His Name are One’. The human form itself is God’s Name in a certain sense; through the Heart of the human being who remembers Him, and is consequently remembered by Him [cf. Q. 2:152], God names all things in manifest existence as Names and signs of Himself.

In the Vedanta, this transition from *bhakti* to *jñāna* is presented in terms of four stages of realisation:

i) The universe is unreal, *brahman* is the Real. Here the universe includes the human subject, which still ‘exists’, though it is recognised as illusory – in Buddhist terms, devoid of self-nature, in Sufi terms, too ‘poor’ to claim self-existence.

ii) There is only *brahman*. At this point both the human subject and the universe it perceives are annihilated; this is the esoteric meaning of the first part of the *shahada*, *La Illaha ila Allah*, “There is no god but God.”

iii) I am *brahman*. The ‘place’ vacated by the human subject is now ‘occupied’ by the Witness, Allah as *Al-Shahid*, the *ātman*. This is the station Mansur al-Hallaj was speaking from when he declared “*Ana l’Haqq*,” “I am the Truth.”

iv) All this is *Brahman*. Here the Witness witnesses all things as Itself; as the Sufis teach, “Allah sees only Allah.”

Seen from one perspective, this development from *bhakti* to *jñāna* is a motion from duality to Unity, but it cannot thereby be strictly considered as a motion from Love to Knowledge. Rather, it is a motion away from the illusion of separation between Love and Knowledge and toward the realisation of their intrinsic Union. Ramana Maharshi, sometimes distinguished between the method of surrender, *bhakti*, which begins with a sense of duality between the devotee and the Object of devotion, and that of self-enquiry, *jñāna*. Nonetheless he repeatedly emphasised that *bhakti* and *jñāna* are, in essence, one. Self-enquiry is the attempt to locate the I-sense until one realises that the I-sense cannot be located, at which point the virtual ‘I’ dissolves and only the Self remains. Likewise, self-surrender is the practice of surrendering the I-sense to God until only God remains. And the in absence of the I-sense, no distinction between God and Self can be found.

Dhikrullah can be understood as combining the way of Surrender and the way of the Witness. Though *dhikr* takes many forms in Sufism according to which Name of God is used, the most common – and, according to the teachers of my lineage, the most spiritually effective – is the first part of the *shahada*: *la illaha ila Allah*. With *la illaha*, “there is no god”, the *dhakir* releases attachment to and identification

with all the ‘idols’ – not just the lower passions, but every variation and incarnation of the I-sense, including even the highest conceptions of God, seeing that these are still related to the I-sense as projections of it, and that the conception – the ‘god created in belief’ – is not the Thing Itself.

This is the way of Surrender. Then, with *ila Allah*, “but God”, the very Presence of the Absolute Reality is invoked and recognised: necessarily so, since “God and His Name are One”. And to the degree that the entire self-concept is surrendered, leaving no sense of ‘me’ behind, no limited subject that could pretend to know God to any degree, God necessarily becomes the only Knower, the Universal Witness.

Dhikr/japam recollects the mind so that it becomes able to ask the question recommended by Ramana Maharshi: ‘Who am I?’ The answer to this question is not any of the imaginable replies, not even ‘I am the Self’ – since to affirm ‘I am the Self’ is simply to produce one more idea, one more refinement or modulation of the I-sense. The only true answer to ‘Who am I?’ is: I am the One presently asking this question. And who but God can really ask this, and answer it?

IV: Ma’rifa of the Nafs, or ātma-vidya

The ego – in Sufi terms, the *nafs* – is most often considered to be a veil of ignorance concealing the reality of God. Yet Sri Shankaracharya teaches that the essence of the ego, the habitual feeling ‘I am myself’, is also a sign of the *ātman*, of the presence of God within the spiritual Heart. As the Sufis of my lineage express it – at least according to my own understanding of their teachings, and I am certainly open to correction – the dissolution of the ego-as-veil relates to the *ma’rifa* of Allah, while the recognition of the ego-as-sign relates to the *ma’rifa* of the *nafs*.¹

The perfection of the *ma’rifa* of Allah is *fanā’*, annihilation in Allah as the Formless Absolute; in Vedantic terms, this is undoubtedly

¹ *ma’rifa* lit. ‘knowledge’. Its equivalent in Hinduism is *jñāna*. *Ma’rifa* is the metaphysical knowledge attained through direct experience of the Truth (*ātma sakshatkara*), rather than from revealed or rationally acquired knowledge.

equivalent to *nirvikalpa samādhi*. In what sense is the *ma'rifa* of the *nafs* a higher station even than this? As long as the human person remains self-identified, immersed in the I-sense, the *nafs* appears in one of the two states: the *nafs al-ammara bi'l su* ('the soul commanding to evil') or the *nafs al-lawwama* ('the accusing soul').

The first is the ego as the familiar 'lower self' that teaches us to totally identify with our impulses and do our best to live them out; the second is the ego as the troubled, but impotent, conscience. In both cases the *nafs* is still 'me'; it is the very incarnation of the I-sense. But when the I-sense is transcended, when self-identification comes to an end, when the human person is objectified before the face of the Absolute Witness, then the *nafs* is transformed into something else entirely. All the familiar human faculties continue to operate, but they do so without identification, without in any way constituting 'me'. This is the station of *baqā'*, Subsistence in God.

In the *ma'rifa* of Allah, the human form disappears; all is Allah, no longer veiled by His manifestation on lower levels than the Formless Absolute, but revealed in His naked Essence – even though there is no longer anyone there to witness It.

In *ma'rifa* of the *nafs*, however, all these lower levels of manifestation come back again; the difference is that they have lost the ability to veil the Absolute, but now fully manifest It, on all levels, and in a single form: the human form. This is the esoteric meaning of the second part of the *shahada*, *Muhammadun rasul Allah*, 'Muhammad is God's prophet', which alludes to the *ma'rifa* of the *nafs* – though we must always remember that, in Islamic terms, the Prophet is the site of the manifestation of Divinity not because his humanity has become literally Divine, but strictly by virtue of his annihilation in Allah.

In his poem *Auguries of Innocence*, the English poet William Blake describes the difference between the *ma'rifa* of Allah and the *ma'rifa* of the *nafs* both accurately and succinctly, by presenting the Human Form in the light of God as the most complete manifestation of the Divine:

God appears and God is Light
To those poor souls who dwell in night,
But does a Human Form display
To those who dwell in realms of Day.

The complete unveiling of the *ātman*, with the Human Form as the site of this unveiling, is the essence of the spirit of Guidance, whose name, in Hinduism is *Satguru*, and in Islam, *Murshid*. The Guide who has transcended self-existence exists only to guide others to this same Transcendence. He has no form of his own, but – like a perfect mirror – he takes on the form of the one contemplating him, according to the precise outlines of that person’s state, while remaining entirely free of any identification with it. He does this – or to be strictly accurate, this occurs – so as to demonstrate the fundamentally illusory, apparitional or *māyā*-like nature of the form so reflected.

Once again, in the words of Ibn al-‘Arabi,

The recipient sees nothing other than his own form
in the mirror of the Reality. There is nothing higher.

That form may dissolve and pass away in the state of *fanā*’; it may also return, in the state of *baqā*’, so that it seems to exist once again on the basis of its own self-nature. This, however, is not the case; such ‘seeming’ is merely an apparition of the All-Merciful, for the sole purpose of extending the Mercy of Allah to all who contemplate it. *La illaha ila Allah*; there is no god but God; there is no self but the Self. ▲

Not Bound

Michael Hornum

Not bound to any nature to prevent being all,
And not bound to any nature to be changed by being all,
Not modified by any sort of relation,
As never other, even when otherness appears,
So, free from difference even in every difference,
Experiencing every difference as freedom from difference,
Nevertheless, not excluding any difference,
As freedom from difference is not itself a difference,
Yea, since the One is not anything at all,
It is freely each and every thing.

The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Message Today

RAMEN MITRA

Every day when we read the newspaper or watch the news on TV we notice that all the news is negative. Positive news is very rare. I think the reason is the absence of the spiritual from the minds of people and their ignorance of the Oneness of Soul (or of Consciousness/Awareness) of all human beings which the *Upaniṣads*, the Bible and the Koran all expound.

One hundred thirteen years have elapsed since Swami Vivekananda visualized and prophesied the solutions to these negative minds of the people.

To label him merely as a religious leader is an injustice to his profound sense of practicability and penetrating knowledge of human nature. Like a scientist he dissected the malady of modern civilization and what is more he offered a very viable solution in his own unique

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way. The world as a whole will remain the same with its balance of good and evil. We neither want freedom for ourselves nor do we want to grant freedom to others. According to Swamiji freedom (not political freedom) is the first condition of growth.

Vivekananda's influence on the world of thought started in 1893 at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. He wanted people to make a difference in the world. He explained, "Fill yourself with the ideal; whatever you do, think well on it. All your actions will be magnified, transformed, deified by the very power of the thought. If matter is powerful, thought is omnipotent. Bring the thought to bear upon your life, fill yourselves with the thought of your almightiness, your majesty and your glory."¹

Every thought and action that is selfish weakens the mind and does not build a good character. When thoughts and actions are unselfish the strength of the mind grows. The mind, however, is the first obstruction and according to Swamiji it can be remoulded through proper efforts. In most cases the mind is untrained, fragmented and restless. He said, "We must have life-building, man-making assimilation of ideas."²

To educate the mind we require a teacher. Swamiji says, "The only true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through the student's eyes and hear through his ears and understand through his mind. Such a teacher can really teach and none else. All these negative, breaking down, destructive teachers that are in the world can never do good."³

On the student's side in order to facilitate the manifestation of divinity, strength and knowledge, he or she should cultivate the spirit of *shraddha* (conviction) regarding faith and respect for the teacher. It creates a favourable environment for learning. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* instructs, '*ācārya devo bhava.*' (Let your teacher be a God unto you).⁴ Such a teacher-student relationship based on respect and mutual trust is a fundamental principle in Swamiji's scheme of education. In the Vedic

¹ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Volume II, p.302.

² *Ibid.*, Volume II, p.302.

³ *Ibid.*, Volume IV, p.183.

⁴ *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, Siksha Valli *śloka* 1.X1.2



D. Thiyagarajan

Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Arunachaleswara Temple, 6th February 2017

age, teachers and pupils prayed together before starting the lessons so that they would mutually be strengthened by the process. Vivekananda called his countrymen to confess, and vow “This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone – that which I created I can demolish; that which is created by someone else I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore Stand up; Be bold; Be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves. Therefore make your own future. Let the dead past bury its dead.”⁵

Swamiji said that intellectual education alone is not sufficient as it does not take care of the heart and it makes people selfish. He was very critical of heartless intellectual people and appreciated the person of heart. He said, “When there is conflict between the heart and the brain let the heart be followed because intellect has only one state, reason, and within that the intellect works and cannot get beyond. It is the heart which takes one to the highest plane which the intellect can never reach.”⁶

Vivekananda’s great mission was to preach about our divinity and how to make it manifest in every moment of life. He saw divine potentiality in everyone. This consciousness of inner divinity constitutes spirituality. To Swamiji the essence of all ethics is the perception and feeling of being one with the universe. He said, “Behind everything the same divinity is existing and out of this comes the basis of morality. Do not injure another. Love everyone as your own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another I am injuring myself; in loving another I am loving myself. From this also springs that principle of Advaita morality which has been summed up in one word – self-abnegation.”⁷

He said, “Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy – by one or more or all of these – and be free.”⁸

⁵ Op. cit., Swami Vivekananda, Volume II, p.225.

⁶ Ibid., Volume I, p.412.

⁷ Ibid., Volume I, p.364.

⁸ Ibid., Volume I, p.124.

We generally put all the blame on others and say it is our fate. But Swami Vivekananda said that we are responsible for what we wish to be. We have the power to make ourselves. He taught “Our thoughts make things beautiful and our thoughts make things ugly. The whole world is in our minds. Learn to see things in the proper light. First believe in this world – that there is a meaning behind everything. Everything in the world is good, is holy and beautiful.”⁹

He observed, “Those that blame others – and, alas, the number of them is increasing every day – are generally miserable with helpless brains; they have brought themselves to that pass through their own mistakes and blame others, but this does not alter their position. It does not serve them in any way. This attempt to throw the blame upon others only weakens them the more. Therefore blame none for your own faults, stand upon your own feet and take the whole responsibility upon yourselves.”¹⁰

Swamiji noticed that our habit of putting blame on others is basically due to physical and, especially, mental weakness, i.e lack of strength. All the time he hammered on the word ‘Strength’. He says, “As soon as you say I am bound, I am weak, I am helpless, woe unto you; you rivet one more chain upon yourself. Do not say it, do not think it . [For] I am He, I am He; and so art thou. I am pure and perfect and so are all my enemies. You are He and so am I. That is the position of strength. It is weakness, says the Vedanta, which is the cause of all misery in the world. Weakness is the one cause of suffering. We became miserable because we are weak. We lie, steal, kill and commit other crimes because we are weak. We suffer because we are weak. We die because we are weak. Where there is nothing to weaken us there is no death nor sorrow. We are miserable through delusion. Give up the delusion and the whole thing vanishes.”¹¹

Vivekananda was a religious, or rather spiritual teacher who held the conviction that the faith of each person should not be interfered with. Religious freedom is what helps religion to grow in all its diverse aspects. On the other hand, Indian society is stunted due to

⁹ Ibid., Volume I, p.441.

¹⁰ Ibid., Volume II, p.225.

¹¹ Ibid., Volume II, p.198.

many sectarian and dogmatic social rules and regulations. Swamiji wanted the social chains and fetters to be removed so that the society could grow. These religious conflicts and repressions have been like stumbling blocks to the development of humankind for the last thousand years and even to date. He wanted each society to preserve its own ideal and at the same time to expand and incorporate the best ideals of other societies. This would create a better world.

Swamiji also believed that religions are not merely harmonious but they also supplement and compliment one another. What is lacking in one's tradition of faith may be found to be the dominant feature of another. He explained this theory in terms of the spirit of a religion without which it would not survive. For Christianity it is – 'Purify the heart and Prepare yourself for the kingdom of Heaven'. For Hinduism – 'Renounce all in order to realise God'; and for Islam – 'It is Universal Brotherhood'.

Nowadays we notice great confusion and fanaticism arising in the name of the practice of religion. We want to force our beliefs on others. Swamiji condemned this misdirected approach and said, in one of his speeches in the Parliament of Religions, "Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. The seed is put in the ground and earth, and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or air or water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth and the water, converts them into plant substance and grows into a plant.

"Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth."¹²

Vivekananda was aware that religious narrowness gives rise to intolerance leading to hostility towards others. On 11th September 1893, in his response to the welcome at the World's Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda said, "Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful

¹² Ibid., Volume I, p.24.

earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be now far more advanced than it is. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism; of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.”¹³

Today there is much discussion about intolerance. Lack of tolerance in every sphere leads to communal disharmony over petty matters. Damage is done to a society at large. Swamiji's idea on tolerance is worth pondering. He rejects the idea of mere tolerance.

He stated, “Our watchword then will be acceptance and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for so called toleration is often blasphemy and I do not believe it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go the Mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's Church and kneel before the Crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu who is trying to see the light which enlightens the heart of every one. Not only shall I do all these things but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future.”¹⁴

I cannot resist here quoting Swamiji's sarcastic remarks made at Manamadurai: “Our [Hindu] religion is in the kitchen. Our God is the cooking pot and our religion is ‘Don't touch me. I am holy.’ If this goes on for another century every one of us will be in a lunatic asylum. It is a sure sign of softening of the brain when the mind cannot grasp the higher problems of life.”¹⁵ He also said, “The religion of India at present is don't-touchism!”¹⁶ And, “As long as

¹³ Ibid., Volume I, p.4.

¹⁴ Ibid., Volume II, p.375.

¹⁵ Ibid., Volume III, p.167.

¹⁶ Ibid., Volume V, p.222.

‘touch-me-not’ism is your creed and the kitchen pot your deity you cannot rise spiritually.”¹⁷

Swamiji’s advice was to kick such customs out. He states, “Through fanaticism and bigotry a religion can be propagated very quickly no doubt. But the preaching of a religion is firm-based on solid ground only when it gives everyone liberty to his opinions and thus uplifts him to a higher path, though this process is slow.”¹⁸

In the name of religious practice some try to exclude socio-economically weaker sections of the Indian society – such as Dalits – from participation in social activities. On this Swamiji said, “Unless the blood circulates over the whole body has any country risen at any time? If one limb is paralysed then even with the other limbs whole, not much can be done with that body – know this for certain.”¹⁹

Not long before he left his mortal body he said, “It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body – to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men [human beings] everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God.”²⁰ This is the message Swamiji has given us and it is a message for today, tomorrow and for all the ages to come – to know that we are one with God.

Swamiji insisted that we must expand our vision and, most of all, expand our hearts. He advised, “Believe in the omnipotent power of love. Who cares for these tinsel puffs of name? I never keep watch of what the newspapers are saying. Have you love? You are omnipotent. Are you perfectly unselfish? If so, you are irresistible. It is character that pays everywhere.”²¹

To conclude, let us note his words well: “All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is therefore the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying. Therefore love for love’s sake, because it is the only law of life, just as you breathe to live. This is the secret of selfless action.”²² ▲

¹⁷ Ibid., Volume V, p.267.

¹⁸ Ibid., Volume V, p.267

¹⁹ Ibid., Volume VII, p.246

²⁰ Ibid., Volume V, p.414.

²¹ Ibid., Volume V, p.51.

²² Ibid., Volume VI, p.320.

Moments of Bliss Revisited

Part Four

Padma Seeks Bhagavan's Advice on Meditation

PADMA VENKATARAMAN
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

Bhagavan's advice to Padma is not something one would normally expect him to say. His usual advice would be to maintain one's attention firmly on the subject (*dr̥k* – the seer, the 'I'), which is the link to the Self, until the objective world (*dr̥śya* – the seen, the objective world) disappears. If this focus is maintained for long enough, the 'I' will be drawn into the Self and the mind permanently destroyed, resulting in realisation. How are we then to understand Bhagavan's advice here:

“You should remain as the object. Remaining as the object, you should curb [the thoughts] by annihilating the one (the subject) in the other (the object). When you are the subject, if you are the subject, [thoughts] will get even stronger. Remain as the object.”

Could it be that Padma has got it wrong, and has reversed the terms 'subject' and 'object' in her account? This is not at all likely to be the answer, because Bhagavan would never have said, 'be the subject.' The following is from a dialogue in Talk§25:

“Transcend the present plane of relativity. A separate being (Self) appears to know something apart from itself (non-Self).

That is, the subject is aware of the object. The seer is *dr̥k*; the seen is *dr̥śya*. There must be a unity underlying these two, which arises as ‘ego’. This ego is of the nature of *cit* (intelligence); *acit* (insentient object) is only negation of *cit*.

“Therefore the underlying essence is akin to the subject and not the object. Seeking the *dr̥k*, until all *dr̥śya* disappears, the *dr̥k* will become subtler and subtler until the absolute *dr̥k* alone survives. This process is called *dr̥śya vilaya* (the disappearance of the objective world).”

What Bhagavan is saying here is that, although the ego, the ‘I’, is ultimately false, it arises out of the Self and the only sensible course therefore is to seek, or investigate, that subject, the ‘I’. In v.23 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, we read:

“This body does not say ‘I’. And no one says, ‘When I am asleep I do not exist.’ After the ‘I’ arises, all else arises. Investigate with a keen mind whence this ‘I’ arises.”

Therefore Bhagavan would have said, ‘Seek the subject’, or something along those lines, certainly not ‘Be the subject.’

The answer may be that Bhagavan was phrasing his advice to suit Padma’s individual needs, as he was well known to do in many cases. He perhaps saw that the path of self-enquiry was ill-suited to her at her stage of spiritual development at that time. Indeed we know from what she has said previously that the desire to devote herself to her guru and Lord had possessed her from her early years, and that intellectual concerns over the nature of the Self would have played little part in this.

Bhagavan was probably therefore advising the path of surrender to Padma, referring in this context to the ‘I’, the ego, as the subject and perhaps advising, ‘If you remain as the subject, the personal ‘I’, there will be no end to thoughts. Rather should you allow yourself to surrender and become the object of the Self, seeing all your actions as those of the Self, and thus allowing no scope for those personal thoughts.’ In other words, he would have been guiding her gently away from the path of *vicāra – enquiry* on to that of *vairāgya – renunciation*, with the emphasis on devotion and surrender rather than investigation.

The state of not seeking that which is other [than one’s Self] is renunciation (*vairāgya*) or freedom from desire (*nirācai*); not letting

go of the Self is knowledge (*jñāna*). Actually both are the same thing. (*Who am I?*, para.11)

Interestingly Bhagavan terminates his advice with the metaphor of the fort that he used in the ‘Who am I?’ essay, but now gives it a different slant. In the essay he said:

“If one maintains an unbroken remembrance of the Self until one attains that Self, that alone will be enough. As long as there are enemies in the fort, they will keep on coming out. If we keep on cutting them down as they emerge, the fort will fall into our hands.”

Now, nearly half a century later, he says:

“...if our enemies are standing in the gateway of the fort and we are told to kill them, how will we be able to kill them if we are not ourselves inside the fort?”

In the earlier version we are outside the fort and our task is to win it by tracing the enemy thoughts to their root and destroying them. This is suggestive of enquiry. In the second version however our task is to remain inside the fort (ie. the Self) without being tempted to go outside, that is, to give up all desires for external phenomena, which will render the enemy thoughts powerless and eventually lead to their destruction. This is suggestive of renunciation.

When I was in meditation, if Bhagavan looked at me, my mind subsided inwardly ... [there was] a flashing forth (*sphurana*)¹ inwardly

¹ The word *sphurana* refers to the manifestation of a heightened quality of self-awareness that is experienced when the ‘I’ sense comes to dwell purely upon itself, to the exclusion of all external phenomena. The meaning of the Sanskrit root *sphur* indicates a *breaking forth, a bursting into view, a manifestation or coming into being* of some kind. In the physical realm this could mean a *trembling, quivering, flashing, glittering* and so on, but in terms of consciousness, it refers to the inner illumination that arises when the ‘I’ dwells purely upon itself to the exclusion of all external phenomena. This clarity is conveyed in the Tamil expression *aham aham*, which may be translated as ‘I [am] I.’ This *sphurana* can be seen as the forerunner of self-realisation. What Padma is saying is that, even with her eyes closed in meditation, she easily becomes aware of Bhagavan’s gaze resting upon her due to the sudden increase in her ability to maintain her focus on the sense of being, the ‘I’, to the exclusion of all else. For a detailed discussion see, ‘Demystifying the *sphurana*,’ by Michael James, in the *Mountain Path* magazine, vol. 53. nos. 1,2 & 3, 2016.

as ‘I [am] I’. I knew that *sphurana*. I fully understood, thinking, ‘Oho, Bhagavan is fixing his glance of grace upon me.’² I do not know what example I might give to express Bhagavan’s grace. One day I had a very bad headache. I was afraid to speak to him (Bhagavan) directly whilst I was sitting there meditating [in his presence].

So I asked Muruganar. ‘Should I tell Bhagavan about it?’ To me Bhagavan and Muruganar were entirely one. Bhagavan and Muruganar were that much alike for me. He [Bhagavan] was very much like him [Muruganar].” On that occasion, when I asked him, he [Muruganar] said, ‘Certainly you may tell Bhagavan,’ which left me thinking about how exactly I was going to tell him.

At that time there was a devotee called TP, Ramachandra Aiyar,³ a lawyer. He was known as ‘TPR’. On a few occasions I would tell him, and he would, on my behalf, tell Bhagavan what I had asked, if I had some kind of doubt. He told [him], he told Bhagavan. ‘It will gradually get better,’ he (Bhagavan) said. That same evening my whole body was convulsed with nerve pain. I would never go to the doctor. I would not consent to go, anywhere, to anyone, for whatever reason, even if he (my husband) told me to. Whenever he tried his best to take me, every time [I would say that I needed only] Bhagavan’s grace. He would give up and leave. He would miss his train.

So...*āśram* ... [unclear] ... when Bhagavan said.⁴ It was only with his help in the beginning that I was able to go to Bhagavan. My... he was born on *Kārttikai* [Deepam] day. He was born on the holy day of *Kārttikai* [Deepam]. His name is Ramani. By coincidence it is the same as Bhagavan’s. Whilst meditating what I experienced in

² Here Padma employs the verb *kadākshai*, formed from the Sanskrit noun *katāksha* – *the outside corner of the eye*. It therefore means ‘to condescend to cast a side glance; to look upon with gracious favour,’ (Tam. Lex.).

³ A short account of the life of T. P. Ramachandra Aiyer was published during his lifetime in the July 1966 issue of the *Mountain Path* magazine. After his death in 1976, an obituary was published in the October 1976 issue. As a familiar of Bhagavan and the *āśram*, there are many references to him in the Ramana Maharshi literature.

⁴ Padma is probably saying that, when her husband missed his train back to Madras, accommodation was arranged for him in or near the *āśram* with Bhagavan’s permission, or after informing him.

one day [was] many different thoughts.⁵ However when I took food in moderation, these subsided. Bhagavan said that they would. Even if food ... [unclear] ... they will subside. However one should not starve oneself, he said, because the body is required for everything that we do.

When Bhagavan was going to the cowshed,⁶ I got the idea of asking someone to ask him about it. At the time – I don't remember who the gentleman was – there was someone else there. I stood at a little distance and as I stood there, he stopped. 'A lady is standing over there. Tell me what she wants to ask, because she will not ask directly in front of any other person,' he said.

Then Bhagavan ... Bhagavan ... what Bhagavan said.... Looking at me like this... (*Padma turns her head to demonstrate that enquiring look*)... he looked at me as if to ask, "What is it?" I said to the one nearby, the one standing next to him, "I can't look at Bhagavan. There is such a radiance." What I did was... "Sometimes, however hard I try, it is very difficult to curb all the thoughts," I said to Bhagavan. [Bhagavan said,] "You should remain as the object. Remaining as the object, you should destroy [the thoughts] by annihilating the one (the subject) in the other (the object). When you are the subject, if you are the subject, [thoughts] will get even stronger. Remain as the object."

⁵ Here Padma employs the term *viṣaya vācaṅkaikāḷ*. These are the subtle tendencies of the mind in relation to objects of sense gratification. Bhagavan uses the term in the essay 'Who am I?' with which, as we know, Padma was familiar. Simply put, thoughts will keep on arising as long as the mind, which hankers after thoughts and experiences, is not brought under control and, finally, abolished. "Although, from time immemorial, the impressions of objects (*viṣaya vācaṅkaikāḷ*) have been arising endlessly like the waves of the ocean, they will all be destroyed as meditation on the Self becomes stronger and stronger. Without giving way to the doubting thought: 'Is it possible for so many residual impressions to subside, leaving only the Self?', one should hold onto meditation on the Self with an unyielding grip." *From the essay 'Who am I?', para. 10, translated by the author.*

⁶ The word 'cowshed', as many readers will know, does no justice to the magnificent edifice that is the *gośālā* at Sri Ramanasramam. For a fascinating account of how it came to be built in such a grandiose style, when, in most other matters, Bhagavan strictly avoided all forms of excess, see the Youtube talk entitled 'Lakshmi the Cow,' narrated by David Godman. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-POLMrAspw>).

“If you practice remaining in this way, it will automatically become clear to you. By the same token, if our enemies are standing in the gateway of the fort and we are told to kill them, how will we be able to kill them if we are not ourselves inside the fort? That is obvious.’ Is that not so? If we are there we ... the enemy ... A profound experience, I experienced a profound realisation when he spoke. It is not possible for me to speak about Bhagavan. You’re asking me, so I am speaking.

(Concluded)



Miraculous Ramana

Arbus

Bhagavan, if you had cured
Incurable ailments all your life
I would have hailed you as a healer
Playing once more your leela,
— nothing more.
If you had even revived the dead
I would have vigorously shaken my head.
Is this resurrection?
Once you had said,
No. It is to die as ego and rise as That,
to which we all aspire.
If you had bestowed to the blind vision
And they promptly sat before a television,
I would have asked you why not open instead
Their inner eye, the Infinite Eye
By ending their sense of ‘I’?
If you had materialized this and that
In glistening steel, silver and gold,
Bringing to the receivers pleasure untold,
That would have left me quite cold.
Ramana, you work miracles incredible
Though, to human eyes they are invisible.
Yet, even if visible, are inexplicable.
They are beyond all the words
Known to the tongues of all the worlds.

SHORT STORY

The Whistle Blower's Son

Sharada Bhanu

Everyone cheats in Sanskrit. Our school has this pundit – no fooling, a real pundit – bald except for his *kuḍumi* – and he's old, really old, he's been teaching here forever. I know that because my mother told me he had taught my Dad when he studied here. Well, his classes are a riot. He's just too gentle. And as for a test, he should know better than to turn his back on us and write stuff on the blackboard.

Sanskrit is my pet hate. It really is. I'm hopeless. And I daren't tell my mother or she'll make me take yet another tuition. I have enough as it is. So I just used the opportunity when old Ramu's (Ramachandra Sastry to you) back was turned and copied the answers to the five Fill in the Blanks. No sweat. Everyone was doing the same. The only risk at times like this is that the group next to you might not know

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the answer either, but I was lucky. He had made us sit in roll number order and I was next to Nita. She pulled a horrid face but let me copy, so that was ok. I would pass and that was all I wanted.

I rang up, just to sort of thank her that evening and we chatted for a few minutes. “Thug, cheat, cheat. You’re a proper crook,” she said.

“It’s only Sanskrit. Everyone cheats. Thank goodness it was you. Four of those blanks were right. Bye...”

I turned round and stopped short. Amma was in the room and she looked strange. She had clearly heard. “Raghu, what was that? Did you cheat in some test?”

I couldn’t lie to her. I just couldn’t. “Amma, it’s just Sanskrit. It doesn’t matter at all. It was just a few fill in the blanks I didn’t know...”

She had a stiff, strained look. “Raghu, it’s no use. You can’t do it. You know it’s not ok.”

“Well, I’ve done it. It’s over.” I turned away, trying to be casual. She took me by the shoulder. “Raghu, you are not going to do this. Do you understand? Your father is an honest man and he’s not here and I’m responsible for you.”

My father works in Tuticorin. Before that he was in Pondicherry. He’s always been somewhere else most of my life. He comes as often as he can manage and we stay with him in the hols but it’s not the same. “Appa’s ok. He’s a great guy, he’ll understand. Amma I won’t do it again, satisfied?”

She sat down and there was such a desolate look on her face that I couldn’t stand it. “Raghu, you’ll have to go and tell the teacher you cheated.”

I really blew my top. “Amma are you crazy? He might do anything. He might take me to the Principal. He might make me an example in the class. Or cane me. Or anything. I’m not going to do something like that.”

“Well, either you do it or I’ll have to come and meet your teacher.” I really yelled then. She just said, “You have to understand that if everyone cheated it would be an awful world.”

“So let it be!” But nothing I said shook her. She didn’t want my father to be ashamed of me. She kept repeating that.

“He isn’t even around!” I nearly said “he doesn’t matter” – I stopped just in time.

She just looked at me. “Yes, it’s because he isn’t around you have to do this.” And that didn’t make sense at all.

In a black mood I dragged myself to school next day. Amma saw me off and waited till I entered the gate. Perhaps she was afraid I would run away. I suppose I might have, if there was any place to run to. I went to the staff room in the lunch hour and asked for the Sanskrit master but they said he was in the Audi helping the KG babies with the fancy dress routine they were putting on for Annual Day. The Audi was dark. Some of the kids were doing their stuff on stage and others had finished and were playing, running down the rows. Ramu Sir was standing beneath the stage, coaching a child who was dressed as Adi Sankara. I went up to him. “Ennappa, Raghu, what is it?”

Better say it before I lost all my courage. “I cheated in the last test.”
“What?”

“I cheated. I’m sorry.” He sat down and now I had to look him in the eye.

“Harish’s son and you cheat?”

“What does my father have to do with it?” I flared up. “Why does everyone preach to me about him?”

“Hasn’t your mother told you?”

An eerie silence stretched between us. What was she supposed to have told me? I didn’t want to know. But I could see he would tell me.

“Raghu haven’t you ever wondered why your father is never more than a year or six months anywhere? He works in a very corrupt department and he is completely honest. Wherever he is posted he refuses to cooperate with those who are stealing. He turns in information about them and they see that he is transferred out. That’s the price he pays.”

A little child was running down the aisle. He was dressed in a police suit. I remembered wearing one myself, long ago, when I was four or five. The master stopped him when he reached us and gently picked up something attached to the shoulder of his uniform.

It was a whistle. “They call people like him whistleblowers now.”

Appa? I tried to understand. “You mean he exposes dishonest people? Do they get punished?”

“Mostly not. They are too powerful.”

“He’s the one who gets punished, isn’t he? No, we are the ones, Amma and I. We’ve had to manage without him for years.”

“Yes.”

“Well, what’s the good of it?” Tears were pouring from my eyes, suddenly. “We have to suffer and the wrongdoers get away.”

“Raghu this is not about punishing the wicked. That’s important but not as important as something else. Because someone like your father exists, who knows how many people who might have turned corrupt, seeing nothing better, would now find the courage and inspiration to do the right thing?”

I could say nothing to that. I went home that day and Amma just silently hugged me. She knew I had done it.

I got a zero for that test. But Ramu Sir said nothing to the class. Nita asked me why I had failed. So I told her. She wanted to know if I had told him that she had helped. “No, he didn’t ask.”

“They always do.”

“Well, he didn’t. We got to talking about other things.”

“Nuts, or what? When a teacher discovers you are cheating, no other topic of conversation turns up.”

I grinned. “I guess this was the odd man out.”

Appa came home that weekend. He didn’t look anything like Julian Assange. He went about as usual, getting chores done; enjoying Amma’s cooking, making time to share a book or some cricket with me. But he would never seem the same again.

Tests too, are sort of different for me now. I just put down what I know. The marks still matter, but not so much. And I’ve begun to notice there are some in the class who don’t cheat at all. They are not always the bright ones. They are not necessarily my friends. But sometimes I think I understand them better than pals. They are a family.

And I can never see a whistle without remembering the day I blew one – on myself. ▲

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Four

The Lord Comes to Kabir in the Form of a Fakir

Part Two

NABAJI SIDDHA

Meanwhile, the illusory fakir reaching Kabir's house and showing the silk-piece to Jijabibi began thus, "O noble woman! Listen to the odd behaviour of your son in the market. Instead of selling the cloth, he was forcing it on a brahmin as charity. When I asked him to give me the cloth, he tore it into two and gave one half to the brahmin and the other to me. He also advised me to come to you for a bigger piece. He told me to act as if I am here on my own. If he accompanied me, you would think that he brought me to you. Wishing his role in this to be kept secret, he is waiting for me in the ramshackle house. O great woman, how fortunate you are to beget such a child with a kind disposition. Though very young, he is noble-hearted. O mother, will you give me a bigger cloth and alleviate my poverty?"

Jijabibi said grimly, “O fakir, I will certainly meet your need of a cloth. But, first show me Kabir’s hiding place.” The shrewd fakir led her to the rundown house, where the boy was absorbed in prayer.

The fakir said, “O mother! Look there, on seeing you enter the house, he has closed his eyes. Though a young boy, he is very clever. He may bolt away through the other door. I will stand guard at the rear. You go through the entrance and catch hold of him.”

The fakir’s behaviour was like running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. He went to Kabir and said, “Hey, your mother is here. Make your escape through the back door.”

Kabir took one look at his mother who was approaching him in wild fury and jumped up in great terror and dashed across the room to the back door. Immediately, the fakir had him in his grip. Catching him by his long hair with one hand, he knocked him hard with the other hand, at the same time shouting, “O mother, catch him. He is trying to run away.”

Kabir implored the priest, “It does not behove you to play this double role. Please let me get away before my mother reaches me.”

“Oh, rogue! Am I going to let you get off that easily? O mother, please hurry up.”

Seizing him by hand, Jijabibi roared in anger, “O scoundrel, how dare you give away the cloth?” When she began to hit him, the fakir aided her by giving her a cane to belabour him hard. Just as she raised her hand with all her pent up anger, Kabir — who in his previous life as Suka was in such a complete identity with all beings in the universe that the entire creation replied, ‘yes, yes’ to the call of his father Vyasa — wailed in terror of pain uttering, ‘Ram, Ram’.

Before another blow could land on his back, lo, the fakir, assuming His divine form, averted the blow and let it land on His back. He embraced Kabir lovingly with consoling words. As if by a magic spell, Jijabibi’s heart mellowed suddenly. She was overwhelmed by deep remorse at ill-treating her own son. Again, looking at the charming appearance of the Lord, her head reeled and she stood frozen.

The Lord started wondering to himself, “Oh, I ended up as gatekeeper at Mahabali’s palace when I went to trick him! Then, I turned into a child in the hands of Anasuya, when I went to test her chastity. I got trapped in stranger situations when I befriended the

Pandavas. I had to become their charioteer and what not! I had to undergo many trials Myself. But, never did I, in the past, have to bear such heavy blows as on this occasion nor did My deceptive play fall away, exposing My divine form as on this occasion! How terribly painful it would have been for the poor boy, if I had not intervened and received this thrashing!”

Turning to Kabir, he said, “O crown-jewel of my devotees, my dearest, did it hurt you much? Driven by fear and pain, how desperately you called out My name, dear child! How narrowly you escaped the deadly blows.”

While the deceitful Lord was consoling Kabir with heart-warming words, Jijabibi bowed at His feet and said, “O Lord! Some, giving up their sleep and food, engage in severe penance to have Your vision. Some, renouncing pleasures of the world, constantly chant Your name with love and yearn to see You. There are others who, rending the veil of *māyā* that clouds higher vision, spend their lives wandering all over, singing Your praises and fall down fatigued without getting Your Darshan. There are yet others who search out saints, serve them, listen to their litanies of the Lord, aspiring for a glimpse of You. In spite of their travails, they remain deprived of Your favour.

“O Supreme Being! Lotus-eyed One! You are not keen to bestow Your favours on those who have renounced the householder’s life, taken to the ascetic way of hardship and rigours of yoga. You overlook those who are lost in ecstasy at the mere thought of You and dance in bliss. You pay no attention to those who long for You with agony in their hearts. You are indifferent to the appeals of *jñānis* who even after attaining the highest Brahman, long for your intimacy. Yet, You have deigned to give me Your vision, who has done none of these.

“O Lord of lords! You are the essence of all the scriptures. The holy Feet in Mecca are verily Yours! These are the same blessed feet that You placed on King Bali’s head! Am I beholding those Divine Feet, which measured the universe in three strides? O Refuge of the weak, Lord of the universe, O merciful-One, son of Dasaratha, Slayer of Ravana, Hero among heroes, how merciful of you to grant me Your Divine vision!”

The Lord looking at her lovingly said, “O noble woman! Whom do you take this boy for, who fled from you in fear and who caused Me

to bear these whiplashes on my back? Understand that this boy who is as dear to Me as My eyes, who holds Me in his heart always, who excels Me, is indeed a *brahmarishi*. If you have any doubt, see if your blows have left any mark on his back. Then look at my back also.”

Jijabibi finding no trace on Kabir’s back, looked at the Lord’s back where she saw the slash marks. Trembling at the sight, she fainted. When she regained her senses, she wailed in remorse, “Oh! I am an accursed one! I have dared to hurt the Divine Lord who was impregnable against the powerful Hiranyaksha, who was unassailed by the mighty weapons of Ravana and the fierce missiles of Indrajit. My sins are going to visit my descendants. O Lord of Vaikunta! How am I going to make amends?” Once again crushed by sorrow, she banged her head on the floor and collapsed.

Nabaji continued, “O Siddhas, listen attentively to the captivating acts of the Lord! The Lord tenderly took her prostrate form in His divine arms and showering torrents of compassion on her, said, “O fortunate woman! O blemishless mother, how can you attempt to kill yourself like this? As you are purity-personified, I put my beloved charge in your care; I made mother’s milk flow in your breast to feed him; and by accepting the blows on my back I proved to you that Kabir and I are not different. Thus I uplifted you along with your husband. From this day, look after this pure child with great care and love. You will reach my Abode at the end of this life and dwell in transcendental bliss.”

Turning to Kabir, the Lord said. “My beloved, fragrant child! Don’t be annoyed with Me and rebuke Me for having disturbed your contemplation and caused you to be battered by your mother! Don’t tie me up like Sahadeva, or reject me like Aravan, or curse Me like the sage Bhrgu!”

Entranced by the sweet words of the Lord, tender emotion welling up in his heart, Kabir fell at the Lord’s feet and said, “You were so merciful as to appear to me disguised as a fakir to bear the assault, embrace me and caress me with Your loving hands. O Lord! Unaware of Your guise, I hurled abuses at You, called You a beggar and got You beaten also. Please look upon my offences as penance and bestow Your grace on me. O Beloved of the *Brahmajñānis*! O Playful One! Lover of butter, Friend of the cowherds,

THE LORD COMES TO KABIR IN THE FORM OF A FAKIR
Darling of Kousalya!” Thus Kabir adored the Lord in many words and becoming ecstatic, jumped and danced and bowed to Him again and again.

The Lord said, “My dearest, even if you don’t remember Me, I am always with you inseparably, but don’t forget me in the excessive bliss of the *brahman*!”

Falling completely prostrate at the lotus feet of the Lord, Kabir begged, “O Lord! Is it possible for me to forget You even for a moment or even in a dream? If such a possibility were ever to loom before me, I would not remain alive. Is it possible that I could fail to remember your holy Name, yet this body could continue to breathe? However, O dear Lord, please be gracious to set my mind at rest on the subject of Personal-Impersonal God. Is it preferable to worship You in the Personal aspect or to immerse myself in Your Impersonal aspect?”

“O Kabir,” replied the Lord, “I will not give you any conclusive view on this subject. The scriptures, common to all, prescribe three ways, namely, *bhakti*, *karma* and *jñāna*, according to one’s spiritual maturity. However, one who lives in complete body-consciousness, taking the transient body as his own self has to engage himself in virtuous action.

“He who thinks he is an individual entity, i.e. a *jīva*, should take to the path of devotion. They please Me with their devotion and perform acts connected with devotion and reach the final beatitude.

“He who takes himself for the soul, i.e. *ātma*, should adopt the way of *jñāna*, by erasing the dual sense of ‘I’, and the ‘other’, and freed of body-consciousness, become absorbed in the transcendental Silence. He contemplates the Impersonal and becomes united with Me, the *brahman*, and attains the fifth state of ultimate liberation, the *kaivalya*, lives as *jīvanmukta* in this world and on dropping the body attains *videha-kaivalyam*.

“Some find the path of knowledge easier and some others find devotion easier. Yet, the ineffable bliss of *brahman* is attained only by those who adore Me and seek Me over numerous lifetimes. Scriptures declare that the state of pure Bliss, of absolute Silence, is rare indeed to attain even in the three worlds!

“The ways of *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna* are like the raw, unripe and ripe fruits respectively. Initially, devotees should please Me with

virtuous acts and earn My grace with devotion. Then by My grace alone, they will behold My subtle Presence in their hearts. Chasing away all doubts, they become absorbed in the Impersonal, immersed in the shoreless ocean of bliss.

“Beware the ignorant who merely mouth truths of exalted *brahman* saying, ‘I am *brahman*’, while clinging to the ‘I am the body’ idea, drowned in worldliness without performing virtuous acts of devotion. They are outlawed from the realm of exalted existence and deprived of the radiant rays of My grace for countless births.

“In addition, non-violence is the singular principle that should encompass all the three paths. ‘Non-violence or *ahimsa* is the supreme *dharma*’, proclaim the scriptures. This austerity or way of living, which enables one to treat every other life as one’s own life is the absolute virtue, which confers the highest prize on one. They who have this kind of equal vision attain Me most speedily, within as the impersonal Spirit and without as manifestation. I become the inexpressible *nirguna* to their subtle vision and blissful *saguna* to their physical vision and thus bestow unceasing joy.

“I grant a vast empire even to the ignorant ones who worship Me with love. Similarly, I am in close proximity to those who rely solely on Me even if their minds are externalized. I am like a mother to those treading the devotional path and protect them from all harm.

“As regards the yogis with strong dispassion, I test their resolve in a number of ways, bearing at the same time all love for them in my heart. I look upon those walking the path of *jñāna* as My equals.

“*Bhaktas* and *jñānis* are like children and the elderly, respectively, to Me and the yogis are like people in between these two age groups. In the children and old, the strength of egoism, the ‘I’ ness is weakened; whereas in yogis the ego is very strong with the sense of doership. That is why the latter are tested by Me severely.

“Devotees, taking Me as the only Refuge, depend on Me solely and remain in ceaseless remembrance of Me. *Jñānis* remain indifferent to the comforts and sufferings of the body, and are unaffected by joys and sorrows, looking upon the vicissitudes of life as ordained by destiny and submit to My will under all conditions. Without being overtaken by egoism, they abide silently in the Absolute. A yogi’s way of life is governed by firm dispassion and that of a *jñāni* by quietude of mind.

THE LORD COMES TO KABIR IN THE FORM OF A FAKIR

“Worship without devotion, yoga without dispassion, knowledge without peace are fruitless endeavours. All Dharma or right living will come to naught if it is tinged with even a trace of self-centredness of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ and violence; all goodness gets totally wiped out in one stroke. Beneficence abounds in the heart through self-effacement and goodwill towards all life.

“O Kabir, after choosing one of the three ways, one should follow it with steadfastness. However, in your case, the harmonious path of devotion is more suitable for you. You must soon find a teacher who is well versed in the scriptures and earning his grace, make speedy progress towards the Ultimate.” The Deluder disappeared with this piece of advice to Kabir.

Kabir was distraught with the pangs of separation, like a calf parted from its mother, a deer from its mate, a faithful wife from her husband, a king from his kingdom, a mother losing her son, or a man losing his sight.

He wailed miserably, “O my Lord, how can You desert me like this, leaving me stuck in doubts and despair? Why do You want me to go and seek a teacher, while I have You for my guide and friend? It is like befriending an enemy, keeping one’s friend close by! How strange are Your ways!”

Kabir called out to the Lord by His endearing Names and was beset with mad agony. Jijabibi became very concerned at his plight. She talked to him with tearful eyes, “My precious son, how blind I was to your greatness. Succumbing to anger, I caused obstacles to your devotion. It is because of you that I was gifted with the divine vision of the Lord and was shown the path for moksha. You have caused auspiciousness to enter my life. Your present plight makes my heart bleed.”

She hastened home along with Kabir and narrated all the happenings to her husband. He reacted with emotion, “How fortunate you are, my dear, to have had the vision of the Lord! You are so blessed; you are such a noble woman; you are very pious! In contrast, I am unfortunate and cursed. I am lowly and crude. I am mediocre and fickle. O darling son, won’t the Lord favour me with His vision? Will he not respond to my plea? By His vision, all my sins will take to their heels, my ignorance will vanish. I must be a vile man to have

been denied Your grace, O Ruler of the world! I must be a terrible sinner to be thus condemned. O Lord, I cannot gauge the magnitude of my sins to be so excluded from Your compassion.”

Slowly coming out of despair, Tamal looked at his son with a new understanding. He was convinced now that Kabir was not an ordinary mortal, but the very aspect of the Lord. He and his wife then looked after Kabir with great love and reverence. ▲

Seed

Ana Ramana

From the wind, I learned about surrender:
how the wheat fields lightly yield
to every passing storm.
From the sky, I learned of illusion:
that dome of roof above us,
the poignant blue at dusk, is little more than dust.
And from the earth, I learned of devotion:
each petal of my foot bowing to each weed
that I grew out of.
And from others,
I learned about possession:
who I wasn't, and by extension,
who I thought I was.
But it was my beloved Master
who taught me the one perfect lesson:
to untie all knots of knowing,
to dissolve into no one, to become again
the innocence that bore
and blossomed all of us.
He offered me in pure humility
this moment brimming with
the faceless, nameless
mindless ecstasy
of never ending Love.

TRANSLATION

Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN
AND ROBERT BUTLER

Chapter 7 Renunciation

The subject of this chapter is tuṛavu – renunciation, in the sense of giving up the world entirely, including marriage and social life, to wander as a homeless ascetic, depending entirely on the charity of others. In contrast, the subject of the previous chapter was viratti (Sanskrit virakti) – indifference to worldly objects, in the sense of being free of attachment to the things of the world, whether they are abandoned entirely in the physical, practical sense, or not.

Those who are caught up in delusion, thriftily hiding away their accumulated wealth, vainly waste the days of a life which cannot

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be extended by a single minute, even if they expend ten million gold coins in the attempt. Those who are free of delusion will renounce those things, knowing them to be unreal. (165)

Having observed [the way in which the friendship of] a brood of sparrows and a litter of kittens, reared in the same house, [soon turns to enmity], it is a wonder that we remain so attached [to our wife, children, family, and so on]. What fools we are! Will those who reflect that even the lives of Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Indra do not last forever, and question whether their own existence amounts to anything at all, fail [to renounce the world]? (166)

Even though they praise Pattinattu Pillaiyar and Bhadrāgiri, those poor fools will not renounce [their family and possessions]. Need we cite the case of the dog who was gnawing on an old dry bone, and growled at the king on seeing him pass by? (167)

Pattinattu Pillaiyar was a famous Tamil saint and poet of *Kāvīrippūmpaṭṭiṇam* whose poems are well-known and much loved in Tamil Nadu. He gave up great riches to renounce the world. At one time he was falsely accused of stealing a necklace belonging to King Patrakiri (Sanskrit: Bhadrāgiri) and was sentenced to be impaled. However, as the sentence was about to be carried out, the stake burst into flames, whereupon the king became the saint's devotee and eventually renounced the world also to follow him. These laudable devotees are contrasted with those who, whilst paying lip-service to them, are unwilling to follow them and renounce the world, even though they have much less to give up than these two, who were formerly a rich merchant and a king respectively.

For those who here and now contrive to be free of their entanglement with the nets and nooses which bind them – country, town, home, wife, mother, friends and relations, cattle, caste, wealth and the attachments of the body – what birth can there be henceforth? (168)

If someone consumes poison whilst in an altered state of mind, the effects will take hold of him, run their course and eventually subside. But the mere thought of gold will not admit of any cure. It is a great evil which, [if one succumbs to it] cannot thereafter be dispelled by medicines or the recitation of mantras. It is a greater evil, even, than the desire for women. (169)

Tirupporur Chidambara Swamigal (TCS) prefaces this verse with a note at the end of v.168 in which he says that the current verse is in answer to the question of what would happen if someone renounced his household and everything else apart from gold or money. The answer of course is that the need to take care of the gold would inevitably lead to the ruin of his austerities and he would end up losing the benefits both of renunciation and of leading the life of the householder which he had previously enjoyed.

The words *unbalanced state of mind* translate the Tamil word *timir*. The basic meaning of *timir* is *numbness, stiffness, paralysis, palsy*. In Sanskrit it means darkness. According to Winslow's dictionary it also has the sense of 'partial suspension of the bodily and mental powers from consternation, taking sweets to excess, etc.' It therefore indicates, in this context, a state in which the balance of the mind is disturbed through intense emotions, such as anger and grief.

If one takes poison, assuming one survives it, it will run its course and eventually subside with or without the aid of medicines or other aids. The desire for gold, however, is a much more dangerous poison, which does not need to be touched or swallowed, but will take effect merely upon the subject thinking about it, and cannot be easily cured once it takes hold.

What need is there to point out that wealth, youth, the body itself, are a mere mirage? It is plain for all to see [that they are impermanent]. Those who are swift to renounce the world, as their discriminating awareness falls away, will not return to the round of birth and death. Or if they do return, will [those attachments] affect [those who are as] Siva? No, they will not affect them. (170)

The last sentence, literally translated, says, *If they return will [those attachments] touch Siva? [No,] they will not touch [Him].* TCS explains, *If they do return due to some defect of jñāna, they will remain in a state of transcendence over those attachments on account of the [pure] vāsanās resulting from their past renunciation and austerities. Will they (those attachments) take hold of and affect them? No they will not... Since, like Siva, they are free from attachment to anything at all, they will not be affected.*

Do we not know, from the way in which trifling pleasures arise and then just as quickly fade away, that supreme bliss is simply the eradication of desire? If we enquire into it and clearly understand that it is like the bamboo container into which insects enter, get stuck and die, desire for the pleasures of the five senses will end. (171)

According to TCS the word *nalikai* is a *ticai-c-col* – provincial word, in other words, a word peculiar to one of the Tamil provinces, a dialect word. The *nalikai* is a hollow bamboo tube, used for dispensing liquids like oil, ghee or honey. It is blocked up at both ends, leaving just a small hole through which insects, such as the *maravaṭṭai* – millipede, might enter. Stuck in this sticky substance and unable to find the way out, the insects are unable to escape.

For those who perform worship to the rising sun, the sun's light shines, effacing all that is within and all that is without. Similarly, is not renunciation to remain free of all association, as when one sees a devoted wife offer herself up on the funeral pyre? (172)

[The most ripe devotees] are like a bell without a clapper, which makes no sound even when you shake it. It will be hard indeed [for those of lesser attainment] to remain in that state. [For them] it will be like measuring with a grain measure, and throwing out, so that they are destroyed, all those unreal movements of consciousness that have [in the past] manifested and grown up [within them]. (173)

The commentary by TCS makes it clear that two grades of seekers are being referred to in this verse. In the first part, those who possess the highest level of ripeness, *tīvirataram*, are compared to a bell without a clapper. Their practice is effortless, since discriminating awareness cannot arise in a consciousness that is entirely still, there being no trace of desire to cause movement in it, just as no sound can come from a bell without a clapper. The consciousness of a renunciant who is unaffected by desire will not be disturbed, however much it is assailed by the mind and senses. It is therefore compared to an *ūmai maṇi* – a dumb bell, a bell which can make no noise even when it is shaken because it doesn't have a clapper inside it.

The other grades of seeker, in whom the discriminating consciousness is still strong, will find it very difficult to attain this state, but they may on occasion do so, employing various forms of spiritual practice, in which they recognise the false with the aid of the divine grace earned through their practice and reject it each time it arises. A *marakkāl* is a grain measure equivalent to eight *paḍi*, 400 cubic inches. The point being made seems to be that, whilst, for the advanced seeker, no effort will be required to abide as the Self, those of lesser attainment will need to be extremely vigilant, rejecting the onslaught of the world on the mind and senses repeatedly as it arises, just as, when measuring a heap of grain, the same measure is filled, emptied out, then filled again many, many times.

Can there be any attachment to house and home if one remains at rest with no thoughts whatsoever arising, free of attachment to the body and all the rest (sensory pleasures, the external world, and the physical, sensory and mental faculties)? [This state] is [one of stillness], like an iron needle placed inside a magnetised pot, or a lighted lamp in a windless place. All the *tattvas* will be alien [to such a one]. (174)

According to the commentary what is meant by 'all the rest' are, in addition to the body itself, *pokam* – enjoyment, pleasure, *puvanam* – the world and *karanam* – the organs of sense and action and the mental faculties, which are all to be rejected as *nān andru* – It is not 'I'.

In the *magnetic pot* metaphor, a needle made out of a magnetic metal such as iron or steel is clearly meant. It is not clear what is meant by a magnetised or magnetic pot. However the main idea is clear: a metal needle on the outside of such a pot would be attracted towards it just as consciousness, when it is outward-turned, is drawn to the world of the mind and senses. Placed inside such a pot, however, it would not be subject to attraction by any outer object at all, just as the inward-turned consciousness is not attracted by the objects of sense.

Once the impure *tattvas*, the organs of sense and action, the mental faculties etc., cease to function, their cause, the pure-impure *tattvas*, will cease to operate, along with their own cause, the pure *tattvas*.

To enjoy the body of woman is akin to a dog greedily licking ghee smeared on a sharp blade, or someone drinking sweet *pāyacam* mixed with poison. It is like trying to quench a thirst with the water of an entirely unreal mirage. Who would not renounce the world, having seen the evidence provided by the *acuna* bird, elephant, moth, fish and flying insect, [each being lured to its death by one or other of the senses]? (175)

The author gives five examples of creatures, each of which is undone by one of the five senses: the *acunam* bird by sound (see v. 144 and note); the elephant by *touch*, being lured into the hunters' pit by its desire for union with a female elephant which has been set up as a lure; the moth by *sight*, being lured into a flame by its bright form; the fish by taste, being unable to resist the bait on the fisherman's hook, and the flying insect by *smell*, being eaten by a predator after alighting on a flower, attracted by its scent.

The life of the family is a boat laden with misery, which as its reward transports its occupants, who are blinded by the defect of the ego, to the seven hells. Will the wise not tremble with fear at the sight of it? When the one source of the five senses performs the six kinds of labour, reality itself is transformed into unreality. (176)

Through attachment to wife and family not only will all kinds of mental and physical suffering be incurred, but also, through the actions performed with attachment in that birth, a never ending cycle of births will follow, leading the householder into the seven hells. Ironically the *kalam – ship* to which he entrusted his salvation will be his undoing.

In order to maintain his household the householder will need to exert himself in some form of work, an endeavour which will keep him from the practice of Siva yoga, which alone can lead him to the Real. The six forms of labour appropriate to the land of India are given as *uzhavu – agriculture, tozhil – manufacture, vanikam – trade, varaivu – marriage, viccai, vittai – arts, sciences, literature, and cirpam – sculpture, architecture.*

Will the wise find family life acceptable? To them it will be like a bear coupling with its mate on a great heap of dirt, surrounded by a tribe of quarrelsome monkeys. Like the Lord of death [trapping him in its noose], like fire [surrounding him on all sides], like the ocean [to a shipwrecked sailor] or like a great mountain [heaped on his shoulders], it will consign him to the hell of future births. (177)

TCS says that *kālan – the Lord of Death* is like the family because, just as Death snares his victims with his *pācam – rope or noose*, the family of a would-be renunciant will follow him, grabbing onto his hands and feet and weeping and wailing until he gives in and returns to them.

The renunciant will leave [his home and family] without any warning, just as a cuckoo, which has been reared with crows, will suddenly fly off. Like Karna, [who was unaware of his true parentage], will he have any awareness of his social identity? Know that such a one will also be the teacher for others who strive to cut off birth. (178)

The Tamil word for *cuckoo* here is *kuyil*, the Indian cuckoo, *Cuculus micropterus*. Like the other members of the cuckoo family it is a brood parasite, laying its single egg mostly in the nests of drongos

and crows. The sense here is that the fledgling cuckoo will leave the host nest before the other crows or drongos hear its distinctive call and attack it, just as the earnest renunciant will leave the family home without speaking to anyone, for fear his family members may attempt to prevent him from leaving.

Karna is an important character in the *Mahābhārata*. He was the divinely born son of the solar deity Surya and of Kunti, before her marriage to prince Pandu. She abandoned him, setting him afloat in a basket on a tributary of the river Ganges, and he was found and raised by Adhiratha, the chief charioteer of king Dhritarashtra, and he thus came to fight against the Pāndavas in the battle of Kurukshetra. The key point here is that he was raised not knowing his true parentage, just as the renunciant, on realising the illusory nature of the world and renouncing it, loses all attachment to parents, family, caste etc. See also v. 78, where the disciple's willingness to abandon the ego is compared to Karna's legendary generosity.

Were someone to wake up in the night, find himself surrounded by fire, or under attack from a great army, and make a dash for the courtyard of his house, would he hesitate for a second, even if someone shouted 'stop'? That would be the action of a madman. The nature of those who do not renounce household life is not other than this. (179)

One who sees the world as it truly is will not give up on his decision to renounce, even if members of his household and others beg him to do so, just as no one in his right mind would stop in the act of fleeing a burning house, simply because someone told him to do so.

Those who renounce will leave swiftly, like a thief whom someone has released from his bonds and set free, like people who run away in fear from a ghost in the dark, or from a battlefield, or like those who escape with their lives from a pursuing army which is trying to kill them. (180)

Will those who are not even aware of what they are wearing know the difference between the town and the forest? Possessed by the

demon [of the Self], will they know anyone, whether relatives and friends, or complete strangers? For those who have let go of everything, just as people will immediately drop anything red-hot placed in their hands, is there any point in their continuing to live where they lived formerly? (181)

To someone living in society and conforming to its rules, the outlandish appearance and behaviour of the renunciant may make him seem like a demon. In other words, he will seem mad, or possessed, but this is only the misperception of those who fail to realise that the ‘madness’ which possesses him is only his true realisation of the illusory nature of the world.

For those who are free of the discriminating awareness, in which pain ever alternates with pleasure, is any place different from any other? Everywhere is the temple of Lord Siva. To appease their hunger, there are alms. [To provide shelter and quench their thirst], there are public places and water sources. It will not even occur to them to speak of such things. Their only desire is to dwell in total solitude. (182)

tikku unṭō means, literally – *are there any directions?* *tikku* means *region, quarter, point of the compass, direction*. Here it is used in the general sense of any one place, as opposed to any other, as reflected in the translation.

The word *akkini*, Sanskrit *agni* – *fire* is used to mean *hunger*. As noted previously, in relation to v. 124, in Indian medicinal systems such as Ayurveda, the element fire, personified in the god Agni, is seen as the force at work in the process of digestion, causing the food to be broken down and consumed. Hence *akkini* – *fire* is used as a synonym for hunger.

The behaviour of worldly society is like the antics of an actor in a masquerade; they are like people who consume poison and find it tasty, or like prisoners who enjoy being in chains. Those who have renounced will have nothing do with this mentality, avoiding it like the plague. They have died whilst still in the body. Thus do they conduct themselves. (183)

To invite those who have gone beyond the *nada tattva* to one's house and so forth is to be like a *hari* (frog) who calls out to Hari (Viṣṇu), who dwells in the Ocean of Milk, saying, 'Come and join me!' To the *jñāni*, the *ajñāni* will appear as do the people of the earth to those who traverse the heavens about the summit of golden Mount Meru. (184)

As mentioned previously *nāda tattva* is synonymous with *siva tattva*. It is the highest of the *tattvas*, and the one from which all the other 35 originate. See also vv 32, 39, 48 and elsewhere.

There is a play on the word *ari*, Sanskrit *hari*, which is a name of Lord Viṣṇu and can also mean frog. In the text the author uses another Sanskrit word, *maṇḍūka*, for frog, assuming presumably that his Sanskrit educated readership will make the connection. Just as the frog erroneously assumes that Viṣṇu is a frog like itself on account of his name, the *ajñāni* falsely assumes a kinship with the *jñāni* since they are both men and ostensibly the same as each other.

Mount Meru is a fabulous mountain said to be situated in the centre of the earth. It is also used in yoga as a metaphor for the six *cakras* – *energy centres of the body*. See v. 1, note 6. To someone flying high above a mountain, the people of the earth will be indiscernible, just as, in the enlightened perspective of someone who has transcended the thirty-six *tattvas*, there will no longer be any individual *jīvas* for him to interact with.

Will the *jñānis* expect anything from the path of devotion, upon which they are worshipped, praised and ensnared in the net of endless bizarre ritual acts of homage? [If you were to suggest that they could at least accept food and other such essentials from devotees, we would reply that] their very greatness, in which they have cut off all desire for food and all the rest, which are only the source of troubles, will cause these things to come to them automatically, even though they don't want them. (185)

The true *jñāni* has no desire to be escorted to the home of a devotee and treated like a god. In fact such things are nothing but a *valai* – *net* to trap him, and draw him back into the worldly existence from

which he has now escaped. The word *upacāram* is used to refer to the external honours done to a deity or holy person, such as burning incense, lighting lamps, offering betel and nut, strewing flowers etc.

The words in square brackets are a rough paraphrase of those inserted by TCS in his commentary, to complete the thought implied by this verse, but not explicitly stated. In the first part of the verse it is said that the *jñāni* will not accept the elaborate honours that devotees would pay to him under the guise of *bhakti*, devotion. This raises the thought, unexpressed in the verse, that perhaps the *jñāni*, even though rejecting all these external honours, might at least go to a devotee's house to accept whatever essentials, such as food and clothing, that he might require for his daily existence. The second part of the verse rejects this implied suggestion, saying that the exalted nature of the *jñāni*'s desire-free existence will of itself draw to him all manner of goods such as food, clothing etc., which he does not even need or want. Why then would he go to a devotee's house to receive such things?

When the fetters of *karma* [*āṇavam* and *māyā*] fall away through the threefold agency [of the guru], his body will seem like a snake, and he a frog gripped in its jaws, or like a firebrand, burning at both ends, and he an ant trapped upon it. It will be as death itself to him. This being so, what [will he think of] those who propose [to pay homage to that body], and [of] the places [that give it shelter]? (186)

According to TCS, the reference to a threefold agency is to initiation by the guru through his look, touch and word. These are three of the six means of initiation, three inner and three outer, mentioned in vv. 75, 76 and notes.

Having taken birth in so many forms, first non-human and later human, and then, having come to know the knowledge which transcends knowledge itself, through the enquiry, 'Who is the "I" who knows everything?' they have now taken birth in the manner of a young hawk hatching from the egg of a fish! Will such as these see the world [that others see]? (187)

The words *ariyā arivai arintu* meaning literally *knowing the knowledge that is not known* have been translated as *having come to know the knowledge which transcends knowledge itself*. This is the pure consciousness of the Absolute, which cannot be known because there is no ‘other’ to know it. Through the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ the enquirer destroys the would-be ‘other’, the ego, by steadfastly turning it inwards towards the Self. Its final destruction signals the loss of ignorance, not some new and improved ‘knowledge’. All that remains is pure knowing, with no knower and nothing known. Hence it is the knowledge which cannot be known.

The image of a fish’s egg hatching into a hawk, and, as one would imagine, leaving the water and flying through the skies is a metaphor for the *jīva* that has spend eons in the ocean of birth, until, transformed by the realisation of the true reality, it takes one final birth in which it merges as one with the open skies of the Self.

Just as, for a king, greatness consists in the amassing of possessions without limit, for these [*jñānis*] greatness now consists in reducing to an atom and eliminating completely all attachment to any existence, even one which surpassed that enjoyed by Viṣṇu and Brahma.

The state beyond the *tattvas* is one of bliss, exceeding even that enjoyed by the gods themselves. However, in the final stage of realisation, the *jñāni* must abandon even this, the last vestige of his personal consciousness. (188)

cariyai is to feel revulsion for the body; *kiriyai* is [the discipline of] knowing oneself; *yoga* is non-attachment [to the mind and senses]; divine *jñāna* is that which cannot be conveyed in words; it is the state of being nothing other [than the Self], the state in which there is no enjoyment even of the lofty state in which supreme bliss neither arises nor departs. (189)

At the start of this verse Vallalar gives alternative, esoteric meanings to the first three stages on the spiritual journey. In the exoteric sense *cariyai* is understood as service to the deity, cleaning the temple precincts, lighting lamps and so on. Here it is stated that for the *jñāni* the greatest service he can do is to reject the body as

the source of all suffering. *Kiriyai* in the outer sense is understood as the performance of rituals in accordance with the rules laid down in the scriptures. Here it is stated that for the *jñāni*, the highest ritual is to know himself through enquiry into the nature of the 'I'. *Yokam* is generally understood as the act of controlling and suppressing the mind and senses through breath control, meditation and so forth. Here it is stated that for the *jñāni*, *yokam* is the practice of non-attachment to the world of the mind and senses.

When the *jñāni* discovers the illusory nature of the mind and senses, their existence ends; he ceases to know objectively, and becomes simply the knowledge which has no 'other' to know; this is *vēru iṇmai* – *nothing other [than the Self]*. It is described as *the lofty state in which supreme bliss neither departs nor arises*. Even unalloyed bliss must have a knower to know it, but the *jñāni* transcends even this, entering the state which is *pēru iṇmai* – *without the enjoyment* of the state of bliss which preceded it. This *jñāna* is not a state as such; it is all that is, and hence is not described by the author, other than to say that it is *kēlā* – *not heard*, i.e. cannot be described in words.

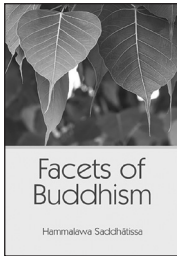


(To be continued)

Ashram YouTube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events including the recent Jayanti celebrations and Nochur talks for free download. Please visit the channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>

BOOK REVIEWS



FACETS OF BUDDHISM by Ven. Hammalawa Saddhatissa Thera, Pub: Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy. 2016. (PB) pp.338, \$7 SLRs.300. ISBN: 978-955-24-0425-2 bps@bps.lk “[W]isdom does not consist in an accumulation of knowledge but in getting rid of ignorance...” observes Venerable Dr. Hammalawa Saddhatissa, a senior Buddhist monk, Abbot of the London Buddhist Vihara, and author

of *Facets of Buddhism*. His words remind me of Sri Ramana’s: “Ignorance supervenes and draws a veil over the pure Self which is Bliss...remove this veil of ignorance which is merely wrong knowledge.”

Venerable Saddhatissa understands that “All true teachings are similar in spirit.” Sri Ramana offered self-inquiry (“Who am I?”) as a universal spiritual teaching toward the falling away of ignorance and the dawning of *jñāna*. The Buddha spoke exclusively about suffering and the release from suffering, whereby “Not longing for anything, he attains to his final release from self.” Indeed, “[T]here is no central ‘self’ which stands at the centre of the mentality,” Venerable Saddhatissa writes. “Such expressions as ‘I am,’ ‘This is mine,’ are expressions of egoism...” Reality shines when the clouds of egoism, of ignorance, blow away.

The blowing away of desires and “being away from the path of rebirth,” are a few of the ways Venerable Saddhatissa depicts liberation or Nirvana. He describes true freedom not only as an absence (for example, of desire and of wrong knowledge) but also as a presence: (i) “complete liberation of mind;” (ii) “bliss unalloyed;” and (iii) “eternal security from death” (among other descriptions). Similarly, in the words of Sri Ramana: (i) “When you probe to see what it is, you find there is really no such thing as mind;” (ii) “[Y]ou are identical with the happiness which is verily the Self;” and (iii) “Once you realize the Self...It is never lost.” Our vocabulary naturally and inevitably will fail to define true freedom: “There is a state where words cease and silence prevails,” Sri Ramana reminds us.

Sri Ramana's invitation to liberation is universal, and Venerable Saddhatissa's understands the Buddha's teachings are applicable to all of humanity. "[W]e sometimes pay excessive attention to such labels as Christianity, Buddhism or Hinduism but none or very little to the teachings which they impart...a teaching is not designed for some and not for others, but is intended for all."

Venerable Saddhatissa (1914-1990), born in Sri Lanka, was a deeply respected scholar who held degrees as doctor of philosophy (University of Edinburgh) and master of arts (Banaras Hindu University). There is a scholarly breadth and depth of treatment of Buddhist philosophy in *Facets of Buddhism* (edited by Venerable Nyanatusita in this 2nd edition to modernize language within the forty-four essays originally published in journals between the early 1960's and the early 1980's).

The weight of scholarship in his essays can hinder a clear, practical expression of the Buddha's teachings. To be sure, the essays are aesthetic at times, and I personally experienced pure joy learning from some of his essays, each averaging seven pages in length. His treatment of 'karma' is refreshing, and his survey of Buddhist history I found captivating. 'A survey of Buddhist meditation' and 'The Meditation on Loving-kindness' appear impractical as meditation guidance. The treatment of 'Impermanence' is unnecessarily theoretical.

A contemporary of Venerable Saddhatissa, Venerable Dr. Walpola Rahula (1907-1997) offers a clearer, more concise investigation of Buddhist philosophy with the authority of a monk-scholar in *What the Buddha Taught*, yet without excess baggage. Buddhist monastics of other lineages – such as Pema Chodron, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Lama Surya Das, among many others – are well worth exploring for their insightful and practical writings. Lay Buddhist teachers – such as Sylvia Boorstein, Jack Kornfield, and Sharon Salzberg, to name a few – have authored highly-regarded works on Buddhist principles and practices.

"Although the goal of Buddhism is supramundane, its practice is down to earth," Venerable Saddhatissa notes. *Facets of Buddhism* is less a down-to-earth approach to Buddhist practice than an often scholarly exposition of Buddhist philosophy. Perhaps additional editing of Venerable Saddhatissa essays may prove worthwhile for

readers seeking a less encumbered expression of Buddha's teachings. Still, among the breadth of forty-four essays, there well may be diamonds for nearly everyone. — Andrew Stern



ANANT by devotees of Bhagawan Nityananda. pp.168. No price mentioned. The compiler, Dr. Gopalkrishna Shenoy has written two books on Bhagawan Nityananda (BN). His first book, *Anant* (The Endless One), he writes about the mysterious leela of BN, as experienced by his family who were devotees right from the early years, covering five generations. There is a photo of the family with Bhagawan from 1933 which shows a young BN sitting in perfect padmasana. Dr. Shenoy's second book, *Shree Sadguru Nityanand Leelamrit* (The Eternal One) appears on a website in which he relates the experiences of several other of Bhagawan's devotees.

According to Dr. Shenoy, BN was discovered as a baby by an elderly woman in dense jungle near Quilandy, Kerala. She named him Ram and while working as a house keeper in the house of a lawyer, Ram was taken into care by Ishwar Iyer who introduced him to scriptures and discourses which were frequent in the family house. At the age of 10 Ram left Ishwar Iyer while on pilgrimage to Kasi and headed for the Himalayas. He returned to Quilandy at the age of 16 when Iyer was on his deathbed. He granted Iyer a vision of his chosen deity Surya Narayana and in ecstasy Iyer declared, "You have brought Ananda to me. You are Nityananda! May you be Nityananda to all!" BN then moved around Kerala and was at the Krishna temple in Udipi for some time. Later he went to Kanhangad where he built a strange ashram in the form of a hill with caves inside and gave responsibility to Swami Janananda who was his most senior disciple. BN then travelled over India to various sacred shrines before staying in Mumbai and finally at Ganeshpuri in the late 1920s and where he attained mahasamadhi in 1961. One of his *sishyas*, Swami Muktananda created a major ashram institution and attained world renown in yoga circles.

The small book is a fascinating account of BN, his life, teachings and contains as well stories of his principal disciples. The book is

available at Ganeshpuri, Maharashtra and also at 'Foto Corner', which is opposite Khar Railway Station, Khar West, Mumbai 400052. No price is mentioned. Their Web Site is <http://www.sadgurunityananda.com/html/aboutus.htm>
— Christopher Quilkey



SAINTS OF SOUTH INDIA by V.S. Krishna. Pub. Amritavarshini E-Magazine, Chennai. amritavarshini2012@gmail.com pp.423, Rs.200. The author is well known to *Mountain Path* readers for his articles on various saints. The author was born in Thrissur in 1940 and has worked and lived in various parts of India. He was brought up in the worship of Murugan and was initiated into *Thiruppugazh* (lit. 'Glory of God'), the devotional songs dedicated to Lord Murugan, composed by Arunagirinathar, the 15th Century Tamil saint born in Tiruvannamalai. He is the author in English of *Thiruppugazh* and *Arut Prakasa Vallar; A Saint of Universal Vision*. V.S. Krishna has written the life stories of 38 saints and sages of south India. The book is divided into six sections: Advaita, Saiva Siddhantam, Muruga Worship, Devotion, Reform Movement and Nama Sangeerthan. The author covers the lives of all the major south Indian saints as well as some modern ones such as Sri La Sri Panimalai Swamigal, Yogi Ram Surat Kumar, Sri Pithukuli Murugadas, Tiru Muruga Krupananda Variar among others and this gives the reader a much broader perspective that shows that even today there are saints who alleviate the ignorance and suffering of people who have devotion. Each chapter gives the reader a general idea of the life and significant teachings of the saint. This book was written by someone who obviously loves his subject and wants to share with others the joys of reading and learning the wisdom of those great ones who have gone before us. For those who wish to read a general comprehensive book for their own knowledge and satisfaction or wish to give a worthy gift to a friend or family member, they need not look further. The author may be contacted at vsk1940@gmail.com You may see his website at www.thiruppugazh.org

— Christopher Quilkey

ASHRAM BULLETIN

137th Jayanti Celebrations

Sri Bhagavan's 137th Jayanti Celebrations began on 10th January, with 'Ramana Music' in Amritavarshini led by Smt. Sakkubai Srinivasan of Bangalore and a vīṇā concert by Ramanan Balachandran. On the 11th there was a vocal concert by Sriram Parthasarathy.

The formal Jayanti celebrations like every year commenced on the morning of the 12th with *Dhanurmāsa pūjā* and *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma pāṛāyaṇa* in the early morning, followed by a Tamil *pāṛāyaṇa* and *Mahanyāsa Rudrajapam. Pūjā* and *abhiṣekam* to Sri Ramaneswara Mahāliṅgam, culminating in *Deepārādhana* at 10.30 am. The afternoon programme included a special *abhiṣekam* and *pūjā* in Sri Bhagavan's Shrine with 'Ramana Music' by Ramananjali dedicated to Smt. Sulochana Natarajan, an ardent devotee, at 3 pm in the library auditorium. The Ashram kitchen served *bhikṣā* to some 10,000 during the celebrations.

The 137th Jayanti of Bhagavan was celebrated reverently by the devotees of Sri Ramana Maharishi Peedam, Colombo, Sri Lanka at Wellawatta on 12th January 2017 under the distinguished patronage of Bramachari Darshan Chaitanya – Residence Archchariyar, Chinmaya Mission, Colombo. The event was organized by the founder and patron of the Peedam Dr. E. Thavarajah. The program commenced with lighting of traditional oil lamp by distinguished guests. This was followed by hoisting of Nandhi flag and *deepārādhana. Sri Arunachala Akṣaramaṇamālai* and devotional songs of Sri Bhagavan were sung by the devotees.

Discourses by Nochur Sri Venkataraman

On 2nd January 2017, Nochur Sri Venkataraman continued from last year the series of discourses in English on Bhagavan's oft-recited *Akṣaramaṇamālai*. The Granthalaya Auditorium was filled to capacity for the eight days of the talks which were filled with stories and anecdotes from Bhagavan's life as well as the lives of the great saints from *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and other *Purāṇas*. The final discourse concluded with verse 34.

Old Hall, Tampa, Florida

On 29th December, 2016, at the commencement of the annual Tampa Ramana Jayanti retreat, some eighty devotees gathered for the *grhapaveśam* (inauguration) of the new Old Hall in Tampa, Florida. Seeing it the first time, all were astounded at the mirror-likeness and attention to detail in this replica of the darśan hall Bhagavan's hallowed for some 20 years. Careful measurements and photographic recording of the Ramanasramam Old Hall aided architects, designers, craftsmen and construction workers in creating a faithful replica, duplicating the floor plan and interior design as well as the Old Hall furnishings such as sofa, wood railing, sofa covering and photo.

During his last trip to the US, V.S. Mani hand-carried an original floor-tile recovered in the wake of the 1986 Ramanasramam Old Hall reconstruction and this was incorporated into the floor of the new building. This wonderful project began as a long-time dream of Srimati Kalyanamathy Rathinasamy who wanted to 'bring Bhagavan to Florida'. It required patience and perseverance with the multiple obstacles along the way, but, by Bhagavan's grace, was fulfilled this year. At the official opening Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan expressed his appreciation to the Tampa Ramana satsang group while Dennis Hartel of Arunachala Ashrama, acknowledged those who worked so hard to produce this 'living monument that will serve to transmit Sri Bhagavan's grace to seekers in North America'.

Obituaries

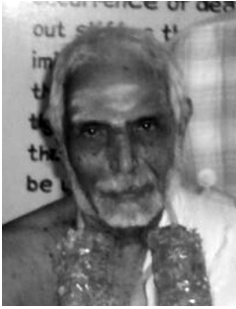
Smt. Hamsa, grand-daughter of Manavasi Ramasami Iyer, attained the lotus feet of Bhagavan on 14th January, 2017. She was 92. Hamsa was married to Sri. Ramaiah, the grandson of Dr. Narayana Iyer, the ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan who helped finance the construction of the Old Hall in 1926. In her youth, Hamsa was fortunate to assist in the Ashram kitchen chores along with Bhagavan and regularly had free access to him. Her family had been long-associated with Bhagavan. Once, when her mother Rajamma and other ladies were engaged in sifting and cleaning raw rice at the ashram she simply put the child Hamsa on Bhagavan's



lap and began to work. Time passed with Hamsa sleeping peacefully on Bhagavan's lap, until the latter called to Rajamma to take the child away as it was time to feed her. A clear case of *sparsa dīkṣā* while she was still a baby! Like her mother, Hamsa was a good painter and also had a sweet singing voice. As a child she used to sing *Kummi Pāṭṭu* in Bhagavan's presence.

On her marriage day in 1943, the newlyweds came to the Ashram. As they entered the Hall, Bhagavan and devotees were just then discussing the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundareswara of Madurai Temple. As the couple entered, Bhagavan turned towards them and spontaneously announced, "Here are Meenakshi and Sundareswara in their marriage attire." These words from the Master's lips on that special day greeted the young couple as a divine blessing, one that remained with them all their lives.

Sri Subramanyan Manalurpettai Sastrigal attained the Lotus Feet of Arunachala Ramana on 11-01-2017, on the eve of Jayanti day of Bhagavan, at the age of 88. He had the good fortune to have *darsan* of Bhagavan and Sri Seshadri Swamigal.



In 41-year teaching career, he refused promotions and preferred to teach thousands of rural children in English, mathematics and real values of life. He was a model teacher.

As a Gandhian, after retirement he never wore shirt and sandals. By choice he lived in a small house for 50 years where once Kanchi Paramacharya kept *caturmāsya vrata* in Manalurpettai village, 30 kms away from Tiruvannamalai.

He learned Yajur Veda from his father and uncle and from neighbour Jayarama Sastrigal and in turn he taught his sons. He regularly did *pārāyaṇa* at Sri Ramanasramam and participated in many koti archanas, and did *pārāyaṇa* of *Sri Ramana Sannidi Murai* more than 1000 times. He was also fascinated by *Akṣaramaṇamālai* which he chanted one lakh times and performed *homa* based on it. On retirement from service, he donated his entire retirement benefits and savings to Ashram for making *Swarnabandhanam* for the Ramaneswara Mahāliṅgam – that was the intensity of this selfless devotion. He is survived by wife, 3 sons and 2 daughters. ▲