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Divine Names of Arunachala

21. ॐ श्री हलालसुन्दराय नमः

om śrī hālāhalasundarāya namaḥ

Prostration to Him who is beautified [by consuming] poison.

‘*Hālāhala*’ is a deadly poison from the roots of the *hālāhala* plant. ‘*Sundara*’ means beautiful, handsome or lovely. Obviously the name is referring to the well-known legend that Śiva swallowed the poison that arose from the ocean when the gods and demons were churning it in the hope of obtaining divine nectar. Wonderful things came up as well as a black mass of poison that darkened the whole universe and threatened to destroy it. Out of compassion, Śiva saved them all, and the poison was stopped at his throat, which is why He is also called ‘*Nīlakaṇṭha*’ or the blue-throated god.

Of course, on an individual level, the ego is poison and must be removed so that one can directly experience and abide in one’s true nature. In verse 21 of the *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, Bhagavan states that to ‘see’ God is to be consumed by Him. The idea of annihilation by consumption occurs several times in *Akṣaramaṇamālai* where, out of compassion, Bhagavan shows us what true surrender is. In verse 103 He says,

*As I thought of you and so got caught in the web of your grace,
you like a spider held me tight and consumed me, O Arunachala!*¹

The great scholar, social reformer and poet Ganapati Muni compared Bhagavan to a cook in his *Catvāriṃśat*, which greatly amused his Master.

*Striking at the ‘I-thought’ of these human beasts, you cook them
and hand them over to the Supreme Śiva as food. (verse 32)*²

Consume these verses, and let them bring you Peace!

— BKC

¹ Translated by Professor K. Swaminathan.

² Translated by S. Shankaranarayanan.

Intention

What makes us think? Is thinking an action we can deliberately invoke or is thinking independent of our control? Is thinking the same as attention? Is attention the same as consciousness? What is consciousness?

These are fundamental questions we all engage with throughout our lives and for the most part, it seems, to no lasting conclusion. Our purpose in life it appears, is to ask ‘Who am I?’ in all its infinite variations, and yet left to our own devices we can arrive at nothing solid or lasting. Each day we begin anew with this task to make sense of who we are and the world we inhabit.

Let us examine thinking. At the most material level thinking reveals itself as a chemical process in our brains. There are nerve strands with their synapses that are fired habitually in certain circumstances. We call them *samskāra*-s. To change our *samskāra*-s is to change the way we think and consequently the way we respond to the world and to people. We become different. This often happens after we suffer a shock, either physical or mental, and realise that our thinking is inadequate or false. The admission of delusion spontaneously alters our thought patterns. We see the world afresh and we behave more intelligently. In short, we become wiser.

Bhagavan described thinking as similar to a radio which picks up signals. We do not store thoughts in our brain as if they were material objects rather our brain is a receptor that identifies thought waves that pass through us. Some patterns or songs we play endlessly,

others we reject. The point is that we do not ‘own’ the thoughts. They happen to us and we are free to accept or reject them. By the use of discrimination we learn to accept what is good for us and conversely reject that which is detrimental.

Traditional spirituality is a well-trodden path described by masters that shows us how to expose the unfamiliar subtle terrain of our minds and to navigate the gross world with its positive and negative force fields that have taken material shape. By listening intently, by focusing our attention on the silent presence of ‘I’ we see the chain of thoughts emerging and disappearing in our consciousness in an endless series of births and deaths. They are bubbles arising out of the sea of consciousness which we take to be real and with which we identify.¹

The more we identify with a thought the stronger it becomes. How then do we break free of this pattern? We can do so by seeing consciously how a thought arises, and to do that we require the power of attention. Like any skill it requires training and repeated practice. This is what meditation is supposed to do: it trains the mind to discriminate between the real and the unreal; the permanent from the transient. Attention is like a convex lens that sharpens the light of consciousness to a fiery still point that burns away impurities. When we see that what we either desired or feared is nothing but a figment of our mind we can let it go. Or more correctly, it loses its potency and evaporates. What is left is that which we slowly realise is always there: a colourless, subtle presence that is ever fresh (*spḥuraṇa*). A consciousness that needs nothing added to it. It is so deceptively simple that we ignore it; so how then do we recognise it and remain established in it?

To do this does not come out of a mere whim. It requires a *saṅkalpa*. An intention; a firm resolve; a commitment. The stronger the *sankalpa* the quicker will the veils of self-deception dissolve.

¹ What is called ‘mind’ is a wondrous power residing in the Self. It causes all thoughts to arise. Apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as mind. Therefore, thought is the nature of mind. Apart from thoughts, there is no independent entity called the world ...when the world appears (to be real), the Self does not appear; and when the Self appears (shines) the world does not appear. When one persistently inquires into the nature of the mind, the mind will end leaving the Self (as the residue)... The mind always exists only in dependence on something gross; it cannot stay alone. It is the mind that is called the subtle body or the soul (*jīva*). *Who Am I?* Section 8. Translated by TMP Mahadevan.

A certain person said to Sri Ramakrishna, “Sir, I have gone through a long course of devotional exercises but everything is as dark as before. They are of no use to persons of my kind.” Sri Ramakrishna gave him a slight smile and said, “Look here. The hereditary farmer does not leave off tilling the soil though it may not rain for twelve consecutive years. While those who do not strictly belong to that class but take to agriculture in the hope of making large profits, are discouraged by one season of drought. The true believer does not give up repeating His holy Name and proclaiming His glory, if even with his life-long devotion he fails to see God.”²

Do we have that commitment, that persistence?

For all of us who are working towards liberation, every moment is an opportunity to correct our thoughts and behaviour. As thoughts arise that are not directly involved with the worldly activity necessary for our sustenance and well-being, we hold onto that sense of ‘I’ without a name or a form. That silent, still moment between two thoughts. We have a choice. When thoughts arise of remorse as to where and when we had acted inappropriately in the past and we would like to change it, we evoke the necessary strength to face our deficiencies and resolve to act differently in the future, thereby not succumbing to their persuasive allure. This is a *sankalpa*.

We mistakenly consider ourselves as *one* complete whole and attribute everything that goes on within us as ourselves. This is a quite wrong idea. We are full of contradictory and conflicting ideas about who we are. One way to disabuse ourselves of this perception is by creating an observer and an observed. To dispassionately observe each and every thought objectively. You do not say ‘I’ to a thought. If you do identify with a thought, then it has power over you. Consider how we justify our negative behaviour because we identify over time an accumulation of grievances with the sense of ‘I’.

Bhagavan teaches us a direct method that we can remain centred in that sense of true sense of ‘I’ created by asking ‘Who Am I?’. It gives us the ability to go to the root of all our thoughts.³ This thought-free

² *Words of the Master. Selected Precepts of Sri Ramakrishna.* Compiled by Swami Brahmananda. Udbodhan Office, Kolkata. 2009. p.56.

³ As long as there are impressions of objects in the mind, so long the inquiry ‘Who am I?’ is required. As thoughts arise they should be destroyed then and there in the

space does not feed on negativity, the guilt, the anger, the anxiety. Just as we resist distractions when we are focused on something important, in the same way if we are fixated on the 'I' awareness, all will flow in a natural progression.

But of course the inevitable complaint arises that we cannot do it all the time. We cannot do it in a crisis or when we are not in the mood. There are all types of perfectly valid reasons why we should not do it or more to the point, cannot do it. Be that as it may, again it all depends on one's *sankalpa*. Nothing is impossible if we dedicate our energy and concentration to it. There are countless tales of people who defied the odds and came through adversity. We all at some point in our lives did heroic acts unsung and unobserved. When people refuse to indulge in the self-pity the clever *ahankāra* indulges in to protect its sovereignty, its habitual patterns, we then can face squarely our shortcomings and accept responsibility for them. Once we do that it is no longer someone else's fault but our own for our ignorance and the suffering we incurred. We all have noticed a magical moment when we do accept responsibility squarely, the knot unravels and we are released from the bondage, the bitter cycle of recrimination and regret.

But these words by themselves will not help you, only your thirst for the truth will. It comes from the shocking realisation that death will sweep away all our fine ideas and achievements. It comes from the comprehension that we need help.

A *sankalpa* is born from twin revelations of the brutal recognition that we are a nobody of consequence and secondly, that there is a path of release from the realm of suffering we endure. Who would not yearn to be free of their limitations? A *sankalpa* is the first step. All else will naturally follow according to one's sincerity.

Whatever I've started, I'll finish.

But the accounts are someone else's headache.

Keep the reward, whatever I do is an offering to the Self.

Wherever I go, my only burden is lightness of step.⁴ ▲

very place of their origin, through inquiry...As long as there are enemies within the fortress, they will continue to sally forth; if they are destroyed as they emerge, the fortress will fall into our hands. Op.cit., *Who Am I?* Section 15.

⁴ I, Lalla. *The Poems of Lal Ded*. Translated by Ranjit Hoskote. Penguin. p.90.

Mini Sermons To Myself

I.S. MADUGULA

Prophets deliver sermons to the masses. Those sermons are powerful, inspiring, and ennobling. But their impact on each individual member of their congregations varies depending on their readiness for advancement and ripeness for evolution to the next level in the cosmic order. There is no way to customize those mass sermons to suit individual temperaments and answer personal questions. The greatest benefit of Bhagavan's Talks is precisely that they addressed each questioner's personal concerns, while also meeting the unspoken needs of those that sat quietly.

Not having been fortunate enough to be a member of those audiences, it seems to me that the next best thing is to distill the essence of his answers to the questions that have haunted me for decades. I need to reconstitute his answers now, so here they are, grouped under various topics. This seems to me to be a valid approach to applying Bhagavan's teachings to my personal situation, much as his live

Longtime contributor to the *Mountain Path*, Dr. I.S. Madugula summarises in this article his understanding of Bhagavan's teachings that have guided his life. His new book on Sankara's *Śivānandalaharī* is currently in press. He lives in Austin, Texas.

audiences did. Of course, Bhagavan neither claimed to be a prophet nor did he sermonize anyone. However, each of his Talks was the ultimate sermon in itself that arose out of the deepest firsthand experience. And what Bhagavan taught through them was the essence of Advaita in practice. In the ‘sermons’ below, I imagine that he is expounding the basics of self-realization to an audience of one — myself.

They therefore take either the natural form of a direct address in the second person or a brief exposition in the third person, sometimes within the same sermon.

Action (Karma)

All action involves effort, *prayatna*. Effort is made by the individual, *jīva*. The Universal Spirit, *Purusha*, makes no effort, does not act. Even so the work of the world goes on as if He is doing it. The *jñāni* does things mechanically without looking forward to the results of his actions and even without paying attention. So he cannot be said to be making an effort. He does not think he is the agent. He does not have the ego that consciously puts forth the effort to trigger the consequences. Action goes on around him with which he isn’t the least bit concerned.¹

One should always perform one’s duties that pertain to one’s station in life. Works should be performed for the sake of the maintenance of one’s own life (*śarīra yātrā*) and that of the world (*lokasaṅgraham*).² Slothfulness is not an option, as long as one is attached to one’s ego. When the ego fades away, then what the *jñāni* does or does not do is of no consequence to him or to others. His very *sattva*, the existential force, spreads all around him like the sunshine.

Note that perfect action, rendered without regard to its fruits, leads to the loss of ego and is beneficial for attaining Liberation. This result cannot be directly obtained by work. Work purifies the mind and makes it a fit receptacle for *jñāna*.³

¹ Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§467. pp.440-1. 10th ed. 1996.

² *Śrī Bhagavadgītā*, III. 8, 20.

³ *Ātmabodha*, 3. Avirodhatayā karma nāvidyām vinivartayet/ vidyāvidyām nihantyeva tejjastimira saṅghavat. Also, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 11. Cittasya śuddhaye karma, na tu vastūpalabdhye/ vastusiddhir vicāreṇa na kimcit karmakoṭibhiḥ; and 7. ... śrutiḥ/bravīti karmaṇo mukteraheturvam sphuṭam yataḥ.

Advaita (Non-duality)

Supreme Truth/Consciousness, Brahman, *Ātman*, *satchidānanda*, the Self, and the Absolute mean the same thing, namely that everything that we see around us through our sense of perception is traceable to just one entity called the Witness.⁴ Who witnesses the world? ‘I’ or ‘you’. Without the Witness, the world is as good as nonexistent to the individual concerned. It doesn’t make any difference that it exists for somebody else. And for that somebody else, it doesn’t exist when they are asleep; it comes to life when they wake up. But what we all share with one another is Consciousness. The entire creation shares that same Consciousness to a greater or lesser degree. There is nothing other than Consciousness, call it the Force or God or, simply, It. It is changeless, genderless, ever-existing. And there is nothing other than that. You are that (*tat tvam asi*), I am that (*aham brahma asmi*), and Consciousness is that (*prjñānam brahma*). This is advaita in a nutshell.

America (My Current Domicile)

“Do you ever intend to go to America?”⁵ asked a curious visitor of Bhagavan. This was a question I would have liked to ask him myself if I had the opportunity, but I didn’t. The answer nevertheless is of tremendous significance to me as one domiciled in the U.S.

Bhagavan’s answer gives me great hope. “America is just where India is.”

In answer to another question, he said, “He [the Master] is within, is in fact the Self. Recognize this truth. Seek within you and find Him there...The message is always there; it is never silent; it can never forsake you, nor can you ever move away from the Master.”⁶

⁴ In Sankara’s *Drgdrśya Viveka*, the very first verse lays out the entire Advaita philosophy in essence. Simply stated, the object is perceived by the eye; the eye is perceived by the mind; the mind and its modes are apprehended by Consciousness, which is self-aware and is not perceived by anything else. So the way to understand how Advaita works is to start at the level of a worldly object and trace its cognition inward until we stop at Atman that is beyond cognition. Who sees the Seer? And who knows the Knower? Since we derive our very existence from that Universal Soul, we naturally share in that Supreme Consciousness and Bliss. A true Advaitin is immersed in that Bliss 24/7/365, because there is nothing else besides that in the universe, when we know where and how to look for it within oneself.

⁵ Op.cit., Talk§480, p.459.

⁶ Op.cit., Talk§503, p.485.

The second questioner was an American who was reluctant to return home after a period of stay at the Asramam. He wanted a message that he could take with him.

This is a perfect answer for me as well, as I continue to be torn between India and the U.S. on several levels. I will not let my vacillation torture me any more. America is in India, and vice versa.

***Aparokṣānubhūti* (Non-Indirect Experience)**

The term *aparokṣānubhūti* attributed to Sankara, like the other famous term popularized by him, *advaita*, makes use of a double negative in order to emphasize the subtle notion that two negatives do not necessarily make a positive. It stresses the certainty that self-realization is a direct experience and need not be obtained through devious means. That is, of course, through self-inquiry, Who am I? Sankara asserts that one should constantly contemplate on the visible, the invisible, and all else as one's own Self.⁷

Bhagavan says haṭha yoga may be used as an aid for mind control in the practice of self-inquiry by those who need it.⁸

Consciousness (*caitanya*)

Absolute Consciousness projects itself as the ego, the mind, and the body. It appears as Cosmic Consciousness or *Īśvara* which illuminates both the individual *jīva* and the world, *jagat*. Consciousness remains unitary but, when associated with various other acts of perception, it appears to assume different forms, such as ego-/ body-/phenomenal-etc. Time and space are embedded in the same consciousness. Individual soul and the Universal Soul are one and the same. It does not make sense to say that there is any essential or irreconcilable difference between the two. Consciousness arising in the body is *jīvātma* whose source cannot be anything other than the Universal Soul or *paramātma*. When all this is the same indivisible Consciousness, how can there be any fracturing thereof? And, according to the *mahāvākya*, the Soul is none other than Consciousness: ayam ātmā brahma (*Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad*, 1.2).⁹

⁷ *Aparokṣānubhūti*, 141.

⁸ Op.cit., Talk§619, p.584.

⁹ Op.cit., Talk§199, pp.165-6.

Now, since Consciousness is unitary and changeless, certain irrefutable statements can be made. For instance, Sankara says:¹⁰

I am unborn, deathless, all-pervading and non-dual. Perfectly pure, having neither cause nor effect and contented with the one Bliss. I am free, yes. ...[T]he body, the intellect and the senses are not myself. Moreover they are unreal like dream objects...As I do not possess a body, I have neither sin nor virtue, neither bondage nor liberation, neither caste nor order of life...I have neither actions nor their results. Therefore I am the Supreme One without a second. Though in a body, I do not get attached on account of my subtleness like the ether which, though all-pervading, does not get tainted... There being no delusion, there is no birth...False conceptions of people such as ‘mine,’ ‘this is so,’ ...etc. are all due to delusion. They are never in Brahman which is auspicious, the same in all and without a second.

Happiness

Everyone wants to be happy, but different people have different notions of what constitutes happiness. Most people seem to settle for a momentary gratification of their desires, imagining they are happy. A few, such as saints, desire lasting and unalloyed happiness. And obviously there are many many shades and degrees of happiness in between. Thus it would seem that everyone wants to be happy in their own particular way.

Based on the kind of happiness one pursues in the material world, one will face consequences. Achieving material happiness through acquisition of wealth and possessions could lead to stress, competition, and undesirable practices along the way, unless it is accompanied by some redeeming purpose such as charity or public service. However, all such efforts are dependent on external circumstances over which we have little or no control. Real happiness, on the other hand, is built into our innermost selves, independent of any and all external pre-requisites. The pursuit of this in-built happiness starts with self-control by which you squelch your wants and desires. If you don't hanker after a possession, you don't care if you have it or not. You will never be disappointed if you don't possess it. In other words, if you

¹⁰ *Upadeśasāhasrī*, Chapter X.

get rid of the ego that demands material satisfaction, you are happy right then and there. This leads to the philosophical understanding that the inner self always remains happy, because that is its nature. It just is, not wanting anything. All wants arise from the ego.

“When there is contact of a desirable sort of memory thereof, and when there is freedom from undesirable contacts of memory thereof, we say there is happiness. Such happiness is relative and is better called pleasure.

“But men want absolute and permanent happiness. This does not reside in objects, but in the Absolute. It is Peace free from pain and pleasure — it is a neutral state.”¹¹

***Jīvanmukta* (Liberated While Living)**

This one sentence epitomizes the essence of the nature of a person who is truly liberated in this very life:¹²

A *jīvanmukta* is one who does not see anything separate from himself.

He may appear to be ignorant, but he is always immersed in the knowledge of the Self. He may be teaching others, but he never claims to be a teacher. If he acts like a mad man, it is because of his divine intoxication and the inability of words to express his true feelings. He may express joy or sorrow in reaction to worldly events, but that is only in recognition of the function of the senses that has nothing to do with the Self. His apparent excitement in the presence of the wonders of the world is an acknowledgment of the phenomenon of superimposition, because there is nothing other than the Self and everything is fully contained in it. The Atman is the wonder of wonders and we are It!

Whether he is angry with or kind towards others, he means well for everyone and desires nothing but their happiness. His actions on the human level are but manifestations of his constant existence in the Self. His very existence is a blessing for humanity, even if he appears not to do anything.

¹¹ Op.cit., Talk§28, p.31.

¹² Op.cit., Talk§449, pp.422-3. Cf. *Śrī Bhagavadgītā*, 13.31. Śarīrastho’pi kaunteya, na karoti na lipyate, “...though it [the Self] dwells in the body, it neither acts nor is tainted.” trans. S. Radhakrishnan.

Liberation (*mokṣa*)

Before you strive to be liberated, learn what liberation is. Obviously, efforts like the worship of a deity help fine-tune the mind to receive omnipresent cosmic signals. No harm in doing that as long as you identify yourself with the body. Your family is in no way an obstacle to your liberation. The steps to pursue the path of liberation depend on the mental make-up and the level of fitness of the seeker. If you are an idol-worshipper, continue with that *sādhana* until you achieve total focus of your entire being. And that total merge into your deep-seated ‘I’ is liberation where your mind is wiped out, taking the pesky *samsāra* with it. It takes practice, won’t happen overnight. But happen it will. Feel free to make use of other helpful practices such as consumption of unadulterated foods, *japa*, breath control, or yogic postures. This eventually leads to the understanding that your individual Self and the Universal Self are one and the same. They just cannot be different from each other by definition.¹³

The most important thing to understand is that *mokṣa* is here and now. It is not something to be acquired from an external source. Just dump the notion that you are bound which comes due to the interference of the mind. When the mind becomes your slave, you are the realized master of your existence. To be is to be happy and blissful.¹⁴

Mind (*manas*)

We can start with *vṛtti*, which may be defined as ‘reflected consciousness’. It is not real consciousness or *svarūpa*. Brahman is the *svarūpa*. Reflected consciousness is associated with the mind that functions on the mundane level.¹⁵

The mind “is only a bundle of thoughts” that arise from the wrong kind of ‘I’-thought, which comes and goes. The real ‘I’ behind it is constant without any modifications and it witnesses the wrong ‘I’ and its antics in the form of thought processes.¹⁶

¹³ Op.cit., Talk§31, pp.37-8.

¹⁴ Op.cit., Talk§359, pp.326-7.

¹⁵ Op.cit., Talk§68, pp.75-6.

¹⁶ Op.cit., Talk§222, pp.185-6. Cf. Sankara’s *Upadeśasāhasrī*, tr. Swami Jagadananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 2015). XIX. 8. “Scrutinized through the reasoning that reality is never destroyed and unreality never born, you have no (real) existence. You are, therefore, oh my mind, non-existent in the Self. Having both birth and death, you are accepted as non-existent.”

***Samādhi* (Total Absorption)**

This is the ultimate loss of individuality in the cosmic Self. When there is no individual to describe the experience, no description is possible, just as deep sleep (high amplitude, low frequency delta wave state) is devoid of individual consciousness. In a manner of speaking, your mind ceases to function in any significant manner at the delta wave level, merging with the universal mind or universal consciousness or the reality behind all appearances. “Samadhi transcends mind and speech and cannot be described.”¹⁷

The concept is further elaborated:

“*Samādhi* is one’s essential nature...If you do not realize your essential nature, your sight remains obstructed...A practiser (sic) gains peace of mind and is happy. That peace is the result of his efforts. But the real state must be effortless. The effortless *samādhi* is the true one and the perfect state. It is permanent.”¹⁸

The Self (Atman, Brahman)

The Self cannot be seen by the eye, but it sees all. It is not a modification of the mind. It is a natural entity that shines forth when all mental perceptions cease. Meditation helps the process of elimination of the intrusive mind and its functions, and leads to pure awareness. When the effort required for meditation ends, *jñāna* arises.¹⁹

The mind is a “projection of the Self” and functions as the ego in its perceptual activities during the waking state. It ceases to exist in sleep, whereas the Self is always present. The consciousness “beyond the ego” is the Self. We cannot investigate the Self, which manifests itself through the elimination of the non-self.²⁰

¹⁷ Op.cit., Talk§110, p.105.

¹⁸ Op.cit., Talk§597, p.553. Cf. Patanjali defines *samādhi* as that state of mind where the yogi loses his individuality by literally identifying with the object of his meditation, ...arthamātra nirbhāsam svarūpa śūnyamiva samādhiḥ (*Yogasūtra*, III.3.)

¹⁹ Op.cit., Talk§449, pp.422-3. Bhagavan describes the state of *jñāna*, as expounded in *Vedāntacūḍāmaṇi*: Though he remains silent.

²⁰ Op.cit., Talk§76, p.79. Cf. *Upadeśa Sāhasrī*, XVIII. 203. “Therefore accept the Self as self-evident which means the same thing as self-knowable. The knowledge of the innermost Self...thus becomes possible when the ego vanishes.”

We are consumed by external objects, sights, sounds, and so on, like reading the print while ignoring the paper on which it appears. We confuse “appearances with reality.”²¹

Every action requires an actor. All thoughts require a thinker. ‘I’ is the name of this actor/thinker. To be that ‘I’ is to abide in the Self.²²

A self-realized man always abides in the Self no matter what external activities he undertakes. His silence is an eloquent expression of non-duality. His grief, when manifested, is an expression of his empathy for the bereaved. If he appears to rejoice at the wonders of the world, he is only amusing himself by the play of *māyā*. His apparent wrath is really a benign method of instructing the people. Whatever he does is for the benefit of mankind, he having no self-interest or attachment whatsoever.

Ordinary folks can never really interpret the words or deeds of the *jñāni*. He is a *jīvanmukta*, liberated while living, who sees nothing that’s not a part and parcel of the Self.²³

Silence

First, we have to get rid of the notion that silence is blankness or emptiness in which nothing happens. Far from it — it is profound. Real silence is a form of communication that is vastly superior to an endless harangue. It is forceful and direct. We have the famous

²¹ Op.cit., Talk§238, p.191.

²² Op.cit., Talk§266, p.222.

²³ Op.cit., Talk§449, pp.422-3. Cp. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 3rd ed., tr. Prabhavananda and Isherwood (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1978): “The man of contemplation walks alone. He lives desireless amidst the objects of desire...He sees the Atman present in all things. Sometimes he appears a fool, sometimes a wise man... Sometimes he is calm and silent. Sometimes people honor him...sometimes they insult him. That is how the illumined soul lives, always absorbed in the highest bliss. He has no riches, yet he is always contented. He is helpless, yet of mighty power. He enjoys nothing, yet he is continually rejoicing. He has no equal, yet he sees all men as his equals.

He acts, yet is not bound by his action. He reaps the fruit of past actions, yet is unaffected by them. He has a body, but does not identify himself with it...He dwells in the body, but regards it as a thing apart from himself...He neither directs his senses nor does he withdraw them. He stands like an onlooker, unconcerned. pp. 123-124.

verse about how Śiva in the form of Dakshinamurti, young himself, definitively answered all the unspoken philosophical questions of much older students without uttering a word.²⁴ The implication is that the highest Truth can only be conveyed through silence and not speech. Bhagavan elaborates:

“Silence is the true *upadeśa*. It is the perfect *upadeśa*. It is suited only for the most advanced seeker. The others are unable to draw full inspiration from it. Therefore they require words to explain the Truth. But Truth is beyond words. It does not admit of explanation.”²⁵

It would seem that, if there were to be a common language in which all religions can express themselves, that would be silence, because otherwise the babel of tongues would result in chaos.

So’ham (That I am)

This concept needs to be properly understood because, without knowing the underlying principle, the mere repetition of the thought is not helpful. And that principle is, “ ‘I’ always abides as Brahman,” and there is no need to repeat it. We must “[R]emain without thinking.”

And, “The Supreme Self will shine forth of itself. No further effort will be needed.”²⁶

To those ‘moderns’ who insist that all investigation be scientific, Bhagavan’s reply is, “To eschew unreality and seek the Reality is scientific,” and he elaborates that the “Self alone is Real. All others are unreal. The mind and intellect do not remain apart from you.”²⁷

Maybe I can distill the essence of all of the above into a single observation, as I ask myself what makes me tick. As I understand it, this is what life is all about at its simplest, finest, and fullest:

Two ‘I’s make you tick as you go about your business in life: one makes you think that you are doing everything and benefiting from the outcomes. The other ‘I’ simply watches all this process unaffected by outcomes good and bad.

²⁴ Companion verse to Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti stotra: citraṁ vaṭatarormūle, vṛddhāśśiṣhyā gururyuvā/ gurostu maunaṁ vyākhyānam, śiṣyāstu chinnaśaṁśayāḥ.

²⁵ Op.cit., Talk§569, p.528.

²⁶ Op.cit., See Talk§202, pp.169-70.

²⁷ Op.cit., Talk§338, p.307.

Now I have had my instruction. It's up to me to see what I can do with it. As I try to understand and apply each of the sermons to myself, a sense of joy engulfs me — not that I can successfully implement them — but that I have this great support from Bhagavan. The pearls are there. If I don't utilize them, I'd be the proverbial swine. ▲

The Dust of Ramana's Feet

Suresh Kailash

When I look back at where I stood,
where I now have reached,
My heart brims over in gratitude
and tears flow down my cheeks.
There's nothing more I have to do,
nowhere else I need to be,
By his grace I now know the truth,
I am the dust of Ramana's feet.

If fear does not wither and fall,
who bears the burden, but he,
What if desire lurks in the dark,
that patient, preying beast,
With my master standing guard,
his sword of knowledge ready,
Why should I be worried at all,
I'm the dust of Ramana's feet.

Fate may deal its hammer blows,
and try to flatten me,
As time carries me with its flow,
one day to the sea,
But I'll be safe on my captain's boat,
protected from the deep,
As he ferries me back to his home,
I'm the dust of Ramana's feet.



Bhagavan Ramana: The Poet Supreme

Part One

S. RAM MOHAN

Bhagavan Ramana is a non-personality of immense dimensions. He is a great *r̥ṣi* in the glorious tradition of *jñāni*-s such as Sukha Brahma Rishi, the son of the sage Vyasa. At a young age like the Buddha and Naciketas, he met death face to face and awakened to the deathless state which remained with him permanently for the rest of his life. He is a great preceptor who, in the tradition of great *ācārya*-s, has initiated aspirants to spiritual awakening through *nayana dīkṣā* (initiation through glance/eyes) and *upadeśa* (advice/teachings). His presence alone was enough to make *sādhaka*-s undergo spiritual awakening. He was the embodiment of *nishkāmya karma* (detached action). He is the summit of *vairāgya* (detachment) who possessed nothing in the world; he who was always in bliss. Like Dakshinamurti, his medium of instruction was mainly *mauna*, (silence), but He also occasionally clarified doubts by answering questions of the aspirants.

S.Ram Mohan, IRAS, is editor of the Tamil journal *Ramanodhayam* dedicated to Bhagavan and is also on the editorial board of the *Mountain Path*.

There is another fascinating aspect to Bhagavan. He is an outstanding poet in the great traditions of Sankara, Thayumanavar, and Sadasiva Brahmendra, to name a few, from whom came great outpourings of poems, both on Advaitic mysticism and devotion. Bhagavan's poetic creations are versatile and all-encompassing. He has distilled for us the entire Advaita teaching in poems like *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*. He has also given us great devotional poems as in *Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcakam*. His great work *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, gives concurrently the raptures of advaitic experience as well as bridal mysticism in the glorious Saivaite and Vaishnavite traditions of the Tamil Nadu. His devotional outpourings thrill our spiritual emotions, and devotional hymns such as *Śrī Lalitā Sahasranāma* have been one of the axioms for our own Arunachala Bhagavat Bhakta's life. Bhagavan taught ways of making the mind free from strain, and how to hone it to become an instrument of subtle inner power.

Let us now see Bhagavan the great poet. When Bhagavan reached Arunachala in his 17th year, he was largely observing total silence. In fact, he was called Mauna Swami. Fourteen years later, suddenly His grace starting flowing through His magnificent poetry. He not only presented the absolute state in His chiseled poetry, he also came down to the level of the ordinary man in the dual state to guide him in the path of *bhakti*.

Bhagavan is a *ṛṣi* in the true sense and in the traditional sense. The *ṛṣi* is the one who has seen the mantra (*mantra dṛaṣṭā*) which are the verbal equivalent of divine vibrations. Rishi or *ṛṣi* is also known as *kavi*. The term *kavi* refers to a poet who has been gifted with expansive vision (*krānta dṛaṣṭā*). The poetry of Bhagavan manifests the highest spiritual attainment. This has also been fully explained in the Tamil grammatical work *Tolkāppiyam*, which dates back to 1500 BC. It refers to the poet as one endowed with clear vision, free from delusion and who has got wisdom to express what he has seen in his vision, and is beyond earthy desires and the shackles of past karma. Our Bhagavan is the perfect example of this. Bhagavan is not merely the *mantra dṛaṣṭā* and *krānta dṛaṣṭā*, he is a living example of *dṛg dṛśya viveka*, the discrimination between the seer and the seen.

When Bhagavan reached Arunachala he was always immersed in the Self. He is not a scholar by tradition or training. However during the initial period when devotees like Palaniswamy were reading

Tamil vedantic texts and misunderstanding them, Bhagavan, out of compassion, read those texts to explain them. He would go to Jadaiswami Ashram and read through the vedantic and shastraic texts there. Interestingly, when the disciples of Jadaiswami asked the Swami to clarify a particular text, Jadaiswami would at times grope for an answer. Bhagavan at once would pick up the relevant book and point out the answer with his index finger. This was on account of his innate comprehension of spiritual texts.

He became a skilled multilingual expert. He had validated the Vedic pronouncement: *Yasmin vijñāte sarvam evam vijñātam bhavati*.¹ After all, he has known ‘that’ by knowing which everything else is known.

Let us see how he started as a poet. During the year 1912, it was Vinayaka Chaturthi day. Somebody brought a terra-cotta image of Ganesha and left it in the cave. Bhagavan was in no need of a personal God, but God needed him, so He came there. The tradition validates this. Many times, the cosmic consciousness came in physical form to visit a *jñāni*, to prompt him to compose verses or songs on Him.

One of the devotees, Easwara Swami stated that all present there should compose a song on Ganesha on that day. Bhagavan also agreed. Thus the great *Piḷḷaiyār cuzhi*² for the compositions of Bhagavan was made on that day.

The poem is a satirical praise on Lord Ganesha. It says because Lord Siva has begotten a son – Lord Ganesha – with a great belly, he himself has to go about as a beggar to beg for food for Lord Ganesha’s sustenance. “You have thus been looking after your belly. Why don’t you look after the younger one (that is me) also like that?” Thus the very first poem of Bhagavan suggests that he is the second son of Lord Siva i.e. Lord Subrahmanya. From this ‘*śuklām baradharam*’³ for his poetic creations, there then flowed a great variety of poems.

¹ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.3. The devotee of the Lord knows everything material and spiritual in relationship with the Lord.

² The traditional written sign of Ganesha [Show Sign] made before any composition.

³ *śuklāambaradharam* means one who wears a white dress. These are the opening words of a verse in praise of Lord Ganesha who is described as One who wears white dress, is all-pervading, bright like the moon, has four hands, has a happy face meditating on Whom all obstacles are removed. Bhagavan’s satirical verse composed at Easwara Swami’s instance served *in lieu* of the customary verse *śuklām baradharam* And lo! verses flowed thereafter.

Bhagavan's poems are not mere semantic creations. They reveal mystic insights, Divine Grace and the Eternal Truth. Bhagavan composed poems both on spiritual devotion and philosophy. He once stated, in responding to a query made by a devotee, that the divine vision stimulated his feelings, the words welled up in his heart spontaneously and compelled expression. He said: "The opening words of the *Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam* came to me one morning, and even though I tried to suppress them, saying, 'What have I to do with these words?' they could not be suppressed till I composed a song that brought them in; and all the words flowed easily without any further effort." A sublime emotional concept stimulated the preliminary feeling which then demanded verbal expression. Since this stimulus is divine and spiritual, his poetry becomes a mystic incantation in praise of the Divine.

Although quite different to prose, poetry plays a great role in awakening the spiritual aspect in man. Rhythm in mystical poetry suggests the hidden life-throb felt by a certain mode of consciousness. For, rhythm is not just a play of ordered sound; it is the thrill of the heart (*sphurana*) translating itself into sound-vibration. Rhythm is the entry gate to understanding the Self, to steer the soul as it echoes the self-experience of the Divine. That is the effect of Bhagavan's poems on the reader.

Bhagavan's poems can be broadly classified into devotional poems, philosophical works and works of translation. The devotional hymns are i. *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*; ii. *Śrī Aruṇācala Navamaṇimālai*; iii. *Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam*; iv. *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam*; and v. *Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam*. Of course these devotional works do also contain great mystic expressions which we can see clearly in *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* and *Aṣṭakam*.

The philosophical poems in Tamil are i. *Upadēsa Undiyār*; ii. *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*; and iii. *Ēkānma Pañchakam*. There are also small poems like *Appalappāṭṭu* and *Ānma Viddai* etc. Then there are also great *Anuvāda*, 'transcreative works' by him – the *Prakarana Grantha*-s of Adi Sankara like *Ātmabodha*, *Guru Stuti*, *Hastāmalakam*, *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, *Dṛg Dṛśya Viveka*, *Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotram*, etc.

Interestingly several Tamil scriptures came into his hands and he brought out beautiful Tamil 'transcreations' of two *Āgāma* works,

Devikālottaram and *Ātma Sakṣātkāra Prakaraṇam* which embody great spiritual truths. What he did was to bring out into the open the deep truths in clear, precise and fresh language which revealed the scriptures in a new burst of relevance.

We have seen that Bhagavan presents himself as Skanda in his first poem, thus validating the opinion expressed by devotees like Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni. At the same time, Bhagavan who manifested himself as *saguṇa avatāra* – an incarnation with attributes like Skanda in the relative level, also revealed himself as the attributeless Brahman, cosmic consciousness, in reply to the poetic query of another awakening aspirant. Let us see that:

An old advanced *sādhaka*, Amritananda Yatindra wrote a question in poetic form in Malayalam and left it on Bhagavan’s seat in Virupaksha Cave. The verse was:

On the Summit of Aruṇācala in a famed cave
 There lives the Sage of Infinite Grace
 Bhavagan Sri Ramana! What is His real form?
 Is He Vishnu? Or the Guru, Siva
 Or is He Vararuchi, the master of letters?”
 Or Sankara, the foremost renunciate?
 I am happy to find the true form of my Guru,
 Who shines in my heart!

Bhagavan beautifully answered this in his own verse, written economically at the back of the original slip of paper. “The cosmic consciousness shines as self-effulgent knowledge in the Heart of all, right from Vishnu to all of creation. Heart-felt joyful existence is Aruṇācala Ramana. Rest your mind through abiding love and establish yourself in the Heart. Then the eye of true knowledge opens up. At that moment everyone will be aware of their true existence as true knowledge.”

Let us now see some details of the enchanting bridal mystic work *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*. The uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan’s Nuptial Garland of Letters, that is, the *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, lies in its being at once a transcendental poem of Self-realisation, a soul-ravishing hymn of passionate longing for Union and merging in *sat cit ānanda*, a mantra to still the mind, while

it embodies prayers for *sādhaka*-s at all levels. It is not so much the ecstatic outpouring of *amṛita anubhava* – ambrosial beatitude beyond words – as Aruṇācala’s rallying to the succour of souls caught in *māyā*, but struggling to be free and hungering for Grace. The Sovereign Saint from whom the verses welled up spontaneously was none other than He, Lord Aruṇācala Śiva.

The verse-form, style and diction of the hymn are rooted in the older modes of Tamil poetry. In spite of the terseness of its diction and brevity of the verses, they carry with them a melody that compels singing. The alliteration running through each couplet, while being a vital part of its music, acts as a mnemonic; so does the alphabetical order of the verses. The refrain, ‘Aruṇācala Śiva’ repeated eight times at the end of each verse, holds down the mind like a mantra.

Of course while chanting, a devotee can be conscious only of the deepest import, the others, remaining in the sub-conscious and enriching the experience like the instruments accompanying a master-vocalist. The phrasing and diction too are laminated with many layers of meanings – which remind us of the *Lalitā Sahasranāma*; the diction by itself, of the *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma*. The grammatical structure – as of many mantras in the *R̥g Veda* – permits of two or three interpretations, and an aspirant can take what appeals to him most. Whenever some of His intimate devotees asked Him to interpret for them any verses they could not fully grasp, Bhagavan answered, “Please interpret them for me yourselves. Like you, I too must first think over the meaning before giving it. If I had any conscious cerebration before writing them I could elucidate them at once. All of a sudden, spontaneously they poured forth”.

The interwoven meanings we have spoken of accompany us from the first verse to the last – why, from the title itself. Just glance at its meanings:

1. A nuptial garland for the Eternal Being.
2. A garland of undying fragrance to the Eternal Being.
3. A nuptial garland, woven of the alphabet, to the Eternal Being.
4. The rosary (*akṣamālā*) of Ramana.
5. Taking the first three meanings simultaneously we have: a nuptial garland of immortal fragrance, woven of letters, to the Eternal Being.

A word often occurs twice or thrice in a verse, each time with a different meaning making the hymn a marvel of verbal economy.

It goes without saying that to take in the full meaning of each verse, we need a commentary. And we have one by Muruganar, an erudite Tamil poet and scholar steeped in the great hymnodies and deeply versed in Vedantic literature who had been for long years one of the intimate devotees of Sri Bhagavan.

The Nuptial Garland belongs, as all know, to a familiar genre of mystic poetry, wherein the devotee prays to God for Grace and Union in the manner of a maiden so imploring her lover.

Many verses of the Nuptial Garland are also cast in the mode of what are called *nindā stuti* – verses that actually glorify the Lord while pretending to be scolding Him.

About twenty verses in the Nuptial Garland celebrate the Union that has already taken place. From this point of view the hymn talks of a consummation that is over – and never over. But all who are on the Path have to yearn for the consummation. So the central theme is a melting appeal for a union yet to be.

Interspersed through the hymn are twenty five verses in which the bride, unable to bear separation from her Lord, piteously entreats him to draw her to Himself and drown her in ecstasy beyond words. Some of these verses cannot be recited without a catch in one's throat. How far are we from feeling that flaming passion which makes the soul cry in agony? "O Aruṇācala, if Thou dost not clasp me so as to make me one with Thee, my frame will melt in unbearable grief and I shall perish in the flood of tears streaming from my eyes."⁴ "If Thou dost not gather me to Thyself with Thy arms of Grace, I shall be lost. Like hail-stones falling on water, dissolve me with Thy Love in Thy transcendent Being."⁵

Grace alone can lead to destruction of ego and release from darkness and delusion, allowing the Lord's Light and Beauty to shine within the heart "The strumpet-mind will cease to walk the streets and distractions cease."⁶ *Ātma-vicāra* needs and presupposes Grace. We have to be ripened for the Great Mergence by the Guru's Look, Thought and Touch of Grace, as prayed for in verse 63: "Grant Thou thy Grace," may be said to be the burden of the hymn. Forty-five verses invoking it directly or implicitly. "Before the venom (of the terrible serpent – *Māyā*) rises to the head, grant the Grace to cling

⁴ *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*, verse 34. ⁵ *passim*, verse 101. ⁶ verse 8.

to Thy Grace.”⁷ Delusion can spring from great erudition as well as from false notions and beliefs (*māl arivu*).⁸ It is hard, too, to resist the spell for the phenomenal world with its ever-changing wonders conjured up by the Great Magician; to be inured against the allure of fame, power, wealth and worldly eminence, “all that beauty, all that wealth ever gave” – what is called *poḍi mayakku* (world delusion) in verse 73. Hence we read: “Enough of all this thaumaturgy, this jugglery of Thine, enough of the myriad delusions of Life, Art and Nature to which we are subjected; disclose now the knowledge of Thee as Thou in essence art.”

The Nuptial Garland is at once Universal Prayer and prayer *ad hominem*, that is, directed towards a specific deity. It addresses itself to all spiritual heights, levels and situations. Many a verse is for the nympholept or one who is in a frenzy of emotion for God, who has to transcend even that state and take a final leap.⁹ The extinction of the ego is the final goal of all *sādhana*. Hence the hymn begins with the supplication on behalf of all aspirants: “Thou dost root out, O Aruṇācala, the ego of those who in their minds ever dwell on their oneness with Thee”.¹⁰ Then follows the interlude for obeisance to the Saint’s parents and striking the keynote of the hymn for harking back to that Event of events, “Aruṇācala breaking into the bride’s home (the Saint’s heart) and making her a prisoner in the Cave of His Heart.”¹¹

“Eluding Thee, who alone existeth, will anyone dare to enter? This must be Thy hoax.”¹² “In Thy Grace, gather me to Thy heart, so that I may not fall under the torment of the hunters who are ever on the prowl armed with sword and snare”¹³ (i.e. the temptations that are on the watch to waylay us, which Ramana speaks about in verse 20).

Don’t some of us feel that our prayers have met with no response whatsoever? Our cry is heard here, and verse 21 implores Aruṇācala to assure us of His Guarding Hand that keeps off all fear. Again, our anguish is voiced: “If Thou, O Lord, didst spurn me, alas, I should be burnt up by my *prārabdha*.”¹⁴ See how Sri Bhagavan in his compassion speaks like one of us, ordinary men. Nothing strange.

⁷ verse 64. ⁸ verse 58. ⁹ verses 66, 80, 86 & 101. ¹⁰ verse 1. ¹¹ verse 3. ¹² verses 12. ¹³ verse 20. ¹⁴ verse 35.

The *jñāni* sees but himself in all beings: *Ātmavat sarva bhūtāni yah paśyati sa paśyat*. “Who sees all beings as himself, he alone sees (is a Seer).¹⁵

The corner-stone of Sri Bhagavan’s Gospel: “Turn within and ask ‘who am I?’, is fixed in a telling context.¹⁶

What is the good of that *mauna*, that so-called silence, in which our consciousness does not unfold so as to be lost in the Ineffable Light? Our inmost longing then is voiced in lines of haunting imagery: “O Sun, whose unimaginable effulgence engulfs the Cosmos, unfold the Lotus of my Heart, Thou art the Food and Sustenance of all beings, but Peace I can have only if I become Thy food. Thou Moon of Grace, with Thy rays most cooling to enfevered hearts open the nectar – mouth of the *nenuphar* (white lily or super consciousness).”¹⁷

So thrilling are some verses that it is hard to speak of their power. “With the black collyrium of Thy Grace Thou didst cure me of my inner blindness and thereon made me in very truth One with Thee.”¹⁸

“Behold! The instant I thought of Thee as Aruna I was caught in the net of Thy Grace. Can it ever fail, O Aruṇācala?”¹⁹

It seems to me that this Nuptial Garland of Letters to the Eternal One towers high without an equal in the hymnody of monistic mysticism as a paeon of accomplished union, as an impassioned song of thanksgiving, as a canticle of divine love, as a prayer for all pilgrim souls, as an incantation against the mind, as a *sādhana* par excellence.

In all his poetry he sings the loss of individual ego and of his complete surrender. In *Akṣaramaṇamālai* for instance, he expresses his absolute faith in the Grace of God and his complete merging with Him: Mountain made up of patience, bear with my poor words. Accept them, if you please. Do as you will, O Arunachala.²⁰

In other poems Bhagavan speaks of surrender and extinction of the personality. His outpouring of *para bhakti* (supreme devotion) is amply exposed in the verses of *Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam* and *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam* praising total self-surrender.

Heaven of my refuge, Let Thy pleasure be mine; There lies my joy, Lord of my Life.²¹

¹⁵ *Canakya Niti*, chapter 12, verse 14. ¹⁶ verse 44. ¹⁷ verses 27, 28 & 29. ¹⁸ verse 84.

¹⁹ verse 102. ²⁰ verse 109. ²¹ *Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam*, verse 2.

“Do Thy Will, my darling. Grant me the good of Love for Thy Feet, Aruṇācala.”²²

Bhagavan’s poetry is not only about Grace but embodies Grace itself. As Bhagavan sings of the Grace Aruṇācala bestowed on him, his poetry at once reveals his love of the Absolute. In another vein, Bhagavan’s philosophical poetry instructs us as to how the ego can be destroyed if one realises Self as God.

Just as all mystics use certain literary devices like a heightened diction, symbolism and imagery to give expression to their unique personal experience, so too Bhagavan’s words, though chaste and simple, are charged with sublime feelings that tend to intensify contemplative love and become a means of making the reader receptive to the bliss of mystical experience. ▲

(To be continued)

²² *Navamaṇimālai*, verse 7.

Wild In Waves

Darryl Richard O’Brien

There is something closer than our heart,
Something closer than the air,
Closer than this now,
Not a thing
An anything that hides in planets
And changes tide.

In this voice to which I listen,
Inside a voice that has no sound,
The silent self,
That's never tamed,
Wild in waves,
To be the quiet,
Asleep in this
To which it came.

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Thirty Six

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

8th December 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om [in reply to a friend who had written about his intense longing to return to Tiruvannamalai]: ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder’. This is perhaps why Bhagavan often sends you back to Hawaii, so that your homesickness for Arunachala, our original home, may increase all the more.

Sadhu Om [in reply to some friends who were talking about someone who had very vivid likes and dislikes]: We cannot say anything to such a person, because we would thereby hurt their feelings to no avail, but if we want to follow Bhagavan’s path we need to avoid likes and dislikes as much as possible. We should try to be indifferent to

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, happinessofbeing.com.

everything: to whatever is happening in our life, to the good and bad qualities of other people, and to everything other than our own self-awareness, 'I am'. Let anything happen as it is to happen, let anyone have any good or bad qualities, what is it to us?

To the extent that we cling firmly to 'I am' and thereby surrender ourself to Bhagavan we will be indifferent to all other things. Such indifference (*udāsīna*) is the hallmark of his grace, and it will unfailingly protect us and lead us to our goal.

10th December 1978

A friend called Ramanachalam told Sadhu Om and me about an answer he once heard Bhagavan giving. Someone had asked him, 'What is the *lakṣaṇa* [indicative quality, mark, sign or characteristic] of a *jñāni*?', to which he replied:

The *jñāni* is like a fan or a veena. If a fan or veena is left untouched, it will remain still and silent, but if anyone waves a fan, it will give a cool and pleasant breeze, and if anyone plays a veena, it will make beautiful music. Likewise, if no one asks the *jñāni* anything or disturbs him in any other way, he will remain quiet, but if anyone kindles him in an appropriate manner, he will reveal many wonderful truths.

Hearing this, Sadhu Om composed a Tamil verse expressing this idea, and then remarked:

The *jñāni* is like a calm pool of water. Left undisturbed, the pool remains still, but if a stone is thrown in it, ripples will begin radiating from the point the stone touches the surface. Likewise, of his own accord the *jñāni* will not say anything, but if he is asked any questions, apt answers will emerge from him.

On a previous occasion Sadhu Om told me that Bhagavan sometimes compared the *jñāni* to a radio. We hear a radio talking or singing, but if we open it we will find no one inside.

Once when Bhagavan used this analogy, a devotee asked him, 'If there is no one inside, then from where do your answers come?', to which he replied: The answer comes from the same source as the question.

Sadhu Om [referring to a story in the *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam* and *Aruṇācala Purāṇam*]: King Vajrangada Pandiyan walked barefoot around Arunachala three times a day for three years, and by doing so

he achieved *citta-śuddhi* [purification of mind]. Therefore, though he started to do so in order to regain his former position as Indra, when his mind was purified he thereby gained *vivēka* [discrimination, discernment or judgement] and *vairāgya* [freedom from desire], so he lost all desire to become Indra and longed only to surrender himself completely to Arunachala. Thus his ego was eradicated and thereby he attained *śiva-sāyujya* [union with Lord Siva].

This story illustrates that *citta-śuddhi* is the benefit to be gained by doing *Aruṇagiri-pradakṣiṇa* [circumambulation of Arunachala].

21st December 1978

Sadhu Om [when asked to explain what Bhagavan meant when he said ‘The answer comes from the same source as the question’]: Bhagavan sometimes used the analogy of a radio to explain the actions of the mind, speech and body of the *jñāni*. We hear sounds such as singing and talking coming from the radio, even though there is no one inside it singing or talking. Likewise, we see the mind, speech and body of the *jñāni* answering questions or writing verses, even though there is no ego inside that mind or body doing anything.

On one occasion when he said this, a devotee asked him, ‘If there is no one inside, then from where do your answers come?’, and it was in this context that he replied, ‘The answer comes from the same source as the question’. That is, even though sounds such as singing and talking seem to be coming from a radio, the source from which those sounds originate is elsewhere. It cannot be found inside the radio but only in the transmitting station. Likewise, even though answers and verses seem to come from the mind, speech and body of the *jñāni*, the source from which those answers and verses originate can be found only in the heart of each one of us.

Though in our view Bhagavan seemed to be a person existing outside ourself, what he actually is is only the bright light of pure awareness, which is always shining clearly in our heart as ‘I am’. That light is the original light, the light that illumines all other lights, because physical light is illumined only by the mind-light, which is itself just a reflection of the original light of pure awareness, which is the *svarūpa* [real nature] of Bhagavan.

He is the original source of all clarity and love. Therefore the clarity and love we saw shining through the person whom he seemed to be originated only from within ourself, and this is why he was constantly turning our attention back towards ourself, telling us that the real guru and God is what is always shining in our heart as 'I am'.

Therefore what he implied when he said 'The answer comes from the same source as the question' is not only that the source of whatever answers he has given us through his written or spoken words lies deep within our own heart, but also that we can find whatever answers we may need just by turning back within and thereby sinking deep inside. The more we turn our attention within to face the original light of awareness, which is always shining brightly in our heart, the more that light will clarify our mind, and in that clarity the answers to all questions will become clear, so much so that the intervening media of thoughts and words will no longer be necessary.

The real answer to all questions can be found only in silence, and that silence can be found only deep within our own heart. This is what Bhagavan meant when he said that the real teaching is only silence. The teachings he gave us in words are only to turn our attention back within, where his real teaching is always shining clearly as the profound silence of pure awareness. Only by looking deep within and thereby knowing what we ourself actually are will we know the one true import of all the answers that he ever gave in written or spoken words.

Sadhu Om [when asked to explain what Bhagavan meant when he asked rhetorically, 'Who can say that the dream passed off of its own accord?', as recorded in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 8-9-45 Morning]: Our present life is one long dream, and in the midst of this long dream we experience many other shorter dreams. Just as a certain *prārabdha* [fate or destiny] has been allotted to us for the duration of this life, a *prārabdha* is allotted to us for each of our other dreams.

Normally a dream will come to an end only when the *prārabdha* allotted for it comes to an end, and when it ends we either fall asleep or begin to dream another dream, whether that other dream be either a continuation of our present life or some other shorter dream within it. Likewise, the dream of our present life will normally come to an end only when the *prārabdha* allotted for it comes to an end, and when it ends we will either fall asleep or begin to dream another dream.

If we fall asleep at the end of this dream or any other dream, that sleep will last only for a limited duration before we rise and begin to dream again, because the dreamer of all dreams is ourself as ego, so we will continue dreaming one dream after another until ego is eradicated, and in the midst of all our dreams we will intermittently find respite in brief periods of sleep, because dreaming is a tiring activity, so we cannot continue dreaming for long without needing rest, which we can find only in sleep or some other such state of *manōlaya* [temporary dissolution of mind].

However, though a dream normally comes to an end only when the *prārabdha* allotted for it comes to an end, we can bring any dream to a premature end at any time simply by turning our attention back within to face ourself alone. How keenly we need to attend to ourself in order to bring our current dream to an end depends upon the strength of our *dēhābhimāna*, our attachment to our current body as ‘I’. Except when we are very sleepy, our attachment to our body in this dream we call our life is generally very strong, so in order to bring this dream to an end we need to attend to ourself very keenly, whereas our attachment to whatever body we experience as ‘I’ in most other dreams is relatively weak, so even a slight degree of self-attentiveness will be sufficient to bring such dreams to an end.

If we bring any dream to an end by means of self-attentiveness, it has obviously not come to an end of its own accord, but when Bhagavan asked rhetorically, ‘Who can say that the dream passed off of its own accord?’, he was referring not only to dreams that come to an end as a result of self-attentiveness but also to those that come to an end in accordance with *prārabdha*. Whatever is to happen according to *prārabdha* will certainly happen until and unless ego is eradicated, but that does not mean that it happens without any effort on our part, firstly because *prārabdha* is a selection of the fruits of actions that we have done in previous lives by our own will and effort, but more importantly because we cannot experience anything happening unless we attend to it, and attending to anything requires effort. Therefore effort on our part is entailed both in the production of the fruit that we experience as *prārabdha* and in our experiencing those fruit, so nothing actually happens without our making effort. If we did not rise as ego, we would not be able to do any *āgāmya* [action done in

accordance with our will] or to experience the fruit of any *āgāmya* that we had done in past lives, and even our rising as ego requires effort, so whatever happens, including the ending of any dream, happens as a direct or indirect result of our effort.

However, it is not sufficient just to bring a dream to an end. What we need to bring to an end is the fundamental sleep of self-ignorance in which all dreams appear, and we can bring self-ignorance to an end only by being aware of ourself as we actually are. In order to be aware of ourself as we actually are we need to attend to ourself so keenly that we thereby cease to be aware of anything else at all.

Self-ignorance is the very nature of ego, so bringing self-ignorance to an end means eradicating ego. Since ego is the dreamer of all dreams, so long as it survives it will continue dreaming one dream after another, and when it is eradicated there will be no one to dream anything. Therefore, since we cannot eradicate ego without attending to ourself so keenly that we thereby see what we actually are, effort is certainly required in order for us to eradicate ego and thereby put an end to the sleep of self-ignorance in which all dreams appear. However, what needs to make the effort to be keenly self-attentive is only ourself as ego, but when we attend to ourself keenly enough we will see that no such thing as ego has ever existed, so there never was anyone making any effort, as Bhagavan implied in his previous answer recorded in *Day by Day*:

Your thinking that you have to make an effort to get rid of this dream of the waking state and your making efforts to attain *jñāna* or real awakening are all parts of the dream. When you attain *jñāna* you will see there was neither the dream during sleep, nor the waking state, but only yourself and your real state.

Therefore effort is necessary only from the perspective of ego and not from the perspective of our real nature, which is immutable and therefore always remains as it is, without ever being aware of anything other than itself. When we know our real nature, therefore, we will see that there never was any ego, so it never dreamed any dreams or made any effort. Until then, effort is certainly needed to eradicate ego and thereby put an end to all its dreams. ▲

(To be continued)

KEYWORD

Avadhūta

Part One

B.K. CROISSANT

Dictionaries tell us that an ‘*avadhūta*’ is someone who has shaken off from himself worldly feelings and obligations, the verbal root ‘*dhū*’ meaning to shake, agitate, cause to tremble or to shake off from oneself. One could further extend that definition as follows:

Avadhūta means a liberated soul, one who has ‘passed away from’ or ‘shaken off’ all worldly attachments and cares and has attained a spiritual state equivalent to the existence of God. Though avadhūta naturally implies renunciation, it includes an additional and yet higher state which is neither attachment nor detachment but beyond both. An avadhūta feels no need of observing any rules, either secular or religious. He seeks nothing, avoids nothing. He has neither knowledge nor ignorance.

B.K. Croissant first encountered Bhagavan in 1993. She retired in 2006 after serving as a senior administrator in the arts and humanities at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Since then *sādhana* has been her highest priority and greatest joy.

*Heaving realised that he is the infinite Self, he lives in that vivid realization.*¹

The notion of such a being in such a state of mystical rapture is the subject of several minor *Upaniṣad*-s of which twenty, composed during the first few centuries of the Common Era, are collectively called the *Samnyāsa Upaniṣad*-s. At a time when monasteries were not yet institutionalized in India, the *Samnyāsa Upaniṣad*-s described the act of renunciation, various categories of renouncers and behaviour expected of them. The *Turiyātūtvadhūta Upaniṣad*, although brief in length, offers a detailed portrait of a *jīvanmukta* or being who is realized while still living.

According to that text, when Brahma asked his Father about the way and state of *avadhūta*-s, Lord Vishnu replied that the supreme ascetic is extremely rare in the world. He is ever pure, the embodiment of detachment, Knowledge incarnate and the personification of the Vedas. He is truly a great man and abides in Him alone, as He in him. He is a hut-dwelling ascetic, a mendicant monk, a *Haṃsa* ascetic, then a *Paramahaṃsa*, in that order. By deep contemplation of his own nature, the *avadhūta* realises the entire world is not different from him, throws into water all possessions, including his emblematic staff, water pot, and loin cloth, terminates all religious and secular duties, gives up all dualities of any kind and becomes free from impurities, such as desire, anger, greed and delusion. For him, the body is a corpse. In gain or loss, he is the same and eats only what comes to him effortlessly. He conceals his true nature and disowns notions of superiority or inferiority. He is firmly established in non-duality, untouched by sorrow or worldly happiness, and has no longings for worldly love. His senses have come to rest, and he does not call to mind achievements attained in the past. He is oblivious to caste and stages of life, dreamless (as night and day are the same) and ever on the move, wandering alone as if he were a child, madman or ghost. He observes silence, constantly abides in his own nature, and abandons his body as he has become one with OM. The text ends with the statement that he has supremely accomplished his purpose in life and done all there is to do.²

¹ *Avadhūta Gītā* (Song of the Free), Translated and Annotated by Swami Ashokananda, Foreward, pp. v-vi.

² My own paraphrase based on translations from the original Sanskrit by Patrick Olivelle and A.A. Ramanathan.

In the *Bṛhad-Avadhūta Upaniṣad*, Sāṅkṛti asked the Blessed *Avadhūta*, Dattātreya, “Who is an *avadhūta*, what is his state, what is his emblem and what is his conduct?” The Sage prefaced his response by breaking the word into syllables. The *avadhūta* is immortal (‘akṣara’ for ‘a’) and most excellent (‘vareṇya’ for ‘va’). He has shaken off the bonds of worldly existence (‘dhūtasamsārabandhana’ for ‘dhū’) and embodies the meaning of ‘Thou art That’ (‘tattvamasyādi-lakṣya’ for ‘ta’). Other verses (there are a total of 36) describe the *avadhūta* as resting constantly in himself, being beyond caste and stages of life, and wandering about freely with or without clothes. There is neither right nor wrong, pure nor impure. There is neither death nor birth and no one who is liberated. Knowing the Truth, he does not study; having no doubts, he does not reflect; having no delusion, he does not meditate; having no distraction, he does not need concentration. The text concludes, like the *Turīyātītāvadhūta Upaniṣad*, that he has achieved everything to achieve and is blessed indeed!³

The brief *Laghu-Avadhūta Upaniṣad*, which may in fact not be an independent text, draws parallels between the state of the *avadhūta* and the well-known eight steps of classical yoga, giving allegorical meanings for each of them. It concludes with these beautiful verses:

Having thus purified his organs, the yogin with his mind free of desires comes to rest in himself, just as a fire when its fuel is spent. When there is nothing to be grasped, a man, free of mind and breath and endowed with steadfast knowledge, becomes dissolved in the pure and supreme reality, as a lump of salt in water. He has torn asunder the web of delusion, and he sees everything as if it were a dream. By his very nature he is supremely steadfast, and he goes about as if in deep sleep. Entering the state of cessation (nirvāṇa), the yogin attains isolation (kaivalya).⁴

Georg Feuerstein, a respected scholar of yoga whose passion for Indian spirituality occurred at a young age when he was given Paul Brunton’s *A Search in Secret India*, associates the *avadhūta* with what he calls ‘crazy wisdom’ and explains it in this way:

³ Again, I am paraphrasing translations from the original Sanskrit by Patrick Olivelle and A.A. Ramanathan.

⁴ Olivelle, Patrick, *Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation*, pp. 288-289.

The phenomenon for which this term stands can be found in all the major religions of the world, though it is seldom acknowledged as a valid expression of spiritual life by the religious orthodoxy or the secular establishment. Crazy wisdom is a unique mode of teaching, which avails itself of seemingly irreligious or unspiritual means in order to awaken the conventional ego-personality from its spiritual slumber.

The unconventional means used by adepts who teach in this risky manner seem crazy or mad in the eyes of ordinary people, who seldom look beyond appearances. Crazy wisdom methods are designed to shock, but their purpose is always benign: to reflect to the ordinary worldling (saṃsārin) the “madness” of his or her pedestrian existence, which, from the enlightened point of view, is an existence rooted in a profound illusion. That illusion is the ingrained presumption that the individual is an ego-identity bounded by the skin of the human body, rather than the all-pervasive Self-Identity, i.e., the ātman or Buddha-nature. Crazy wisdom is a logical extension of the deep insights of spiritual life in general, and it is at the core of the relationship between adept and disciple – a relationship that has the express function of undermining the disciple’s ego-illusion.⁵

The Tibetan equivalent of *avadhūta* is the *lama myonpa* (saintly madman), and the Christian equivalent, the ‘fool for Christ’s sake’. Feuerstein includes as teachers of crazy wisdom the Sage Dattātreyā, Swami of Akkalkot and Neem Karoli Baba in the Indian tradition; Milarepa, his guru Marpa and Chögyam Trungpa in the Tibetan tradition; and St. Simeon, St. Basil and St. Isadora in the Christian tradition. He cites the *Mahānirvāṇa-Tantra* and the *Siddha-Siddhānta Paddhati* as texts that refer to the *avadhūta*, and dates the emergence of the term during the Common Era, which saw the rise of Tantra in various traditions.⁶

⁵ Feuerstein, Georg, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, p. 19.

⁶ For more detail about crazy wisdom, see *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy-Wise Adepts, Holy Fools, and Rascal Gurus* by Georg Feuerstein.

One of the most beautiful and inspiring texts on *Advaita Vedānta* is the *Avadhūta Gītā* attributed to Dattātreyā, an ancient spiritual personality highly venerated through the ages as a Sage or an incarnation of God. It is not known when or where he was born or how long he lived, although he is mentioned in some of the *Purāṇas*, notably the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. There we are told he was born of highly spiritual parents (Sage Atri and Anasūyā), became a great warrior, renounced the world, and then attained the highest state of liberation. The *Avadhūta Gītā*, a 15th-16th century treatise of 271 verses divided into eight chapters, mostly consists of spirited poetry composed in the first person from a state of pure exaltation. The last two chapters, however, describe the signs of an *avadhūta* and interpret each of the syllables of that word. The following five verses were selected from Chapter Seven.⁷

रथ्याकर्षटविरचितकन्थः

पुण्यापुण्यविवर्जितपन्थः ।

शून्यागारे तिष्ठति नग्नो

शुद्धनिरञ्जनसमरसमग्नः ॥

rathyā-karpaṭa-viracita-kanthaḥ

punyaṅpunya-vivarjita-panthaḥ

śūnyāgāre tiṣṭhati nagnō

śuddha-nirañjana-samarasa-magnaḥ

In a garment patched from roadside rags,

walking a path beyond virtue and vice,

The ascetic dwells unclothed in a deserted hut,

absorbed in unbroken bliss, immaculate and pure. (verse 1)

आशापाशविबन्धनमुक्ताः

शौचाचारविवर्जितयुक्ताः ।

एवं सर्वविवर्जितशान्तस्

तत्त्वं शुद्धनिरञ्जनवन्तः ॥

⁷ Author's translations from the original Sanskrit with assistance from Marcia Solomon, an inspired Sanskrit teacher and friend living in Boulder, Colorado. Other translations consulted include those by Swami Ashokananda, Swami Chetanananda, Swami Abhayananda, Janki Parikh and Kannoo Mal.

āśā-pāśa-vibandhana-muktāḥ
śaucācāra-vivarjita-yuktāḥ
evam̐ sarva-vivarjita-śāntas
tattvaṁ śuddha-nirañjanavantah

Liberated from the binding snares of hope,
beyond prescribed religious rites,
Everything thus relinquished, he is peaceful,
at one with Reality, unsullied and pure.

(verse 3)

कथमिह देहविदेहविचारः
कथमिह रागविरागविचारः ।
निर्मलनिश्चलगगनाकारं
स्वयमिह तत्त्वं सहजाकारम् ॥

katham iha deha-vidaha-vicārah
katham iha rāga-virāga-vicārah
nirmala-niścala-gaganākāraṁ
svayam iha tattvaṁ sahaajākāraṁ

How to consider here embodiment or its absence?
Why inquire here about passion or dispassion?
Pure and immutable like the boundless sky,
He is Reality itself as spontaneous being.

(verse 4)

योगवियोगै रहितो योगी
भोगविभोगै रहितो भोगी ।
एवं चरति हि मन्दं मन्दं
मनसा कल्पितसहजानन्दम् ॥

yoga-viyogai rahito yogī
bhoga-vibhogai rahito bhogī
evam̐ carati hi mandam̐ mandam̐
manasā kalpita-sahaajānandam

A yogi freed from practice and its absence,
an enjoyer without enjoyment and its opposite,
Thus he slowly roams at leisure,
in natural bliss from his pure mind.

(verse 9)

धर्मादौ मोक्षपर्यन्तं
निरीहाः सर्वथा वयम् ।
कथं रागविरागैश्च
कल्पयन्ति विपश्चितः ॥

dharmādau mokṣa-paryantam
 nirīhāḥ sarvathā vayam
 katham rāga-virāgaiśca
 kalpayanti vipaścitaḥ

Utterly indifferent to righteousness, wealth,
 pleasure and even liberation,
 What are attraction and aversion to us?

The pandits imagine such things!

(verse 14)

In conclusion, despite the many ways to interpret the term *avadhūta*, in essence it signifies one who has reached the highest level of spiritual achievement. One does not, however, need to become a monk or a wandering ascetic to achieve liberation. Sri Ramana Maharshi accepted all human limitations in His own life and showed us that we can take part in the life of the world aloofly. He adapted an ancient path to modern conditions.

The ancient path of Self-enquiry was pure Jnana-marga to be followed by the recluse in silence and solitude, withdrawn from the outer world. Bhagavan has made it a path to be followed invisibly in the world in the conditions of modern life. He never encouraged any to give up life in the world. He explained that it would only be exchanging the thought "I am a householder" for the thought "I am a sannyasin" whereas what is necessary is to reject the thought "I am the doer" completely and remember only "I am"; and this can be done by means of the vichara as well in the city as in the jungle. It is only inwardly that a man can leave the world by leaving the ego-sense; it is only inwardly that he can withdraw into solitude by abiding in the universal solitude of the heart, which is solitude only because there are no others, however many forms the Self may assume. Indeed, life in the world is not merely permissible but a useful part of the karmamarga inherent in the way of Bhagavan.⁸ ▲

(To be continued)

⁸ Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana-Arunachala*, pp. 41-42.



BOOK EXCERPT

Sri Mahaswami

The Sage with Eyes of Light

SERGE DEMETRIAN

We present the final extract from the manuscript titled Śrī Mahāswami, The Sage with Eyes of Light that relates the direct experiences of the author with Śrī Kāñci Pīṭhādhipati Jagadguru Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Śrī Candraśekarendra Sarasvati Svāmī which took place from 1968 until the mahāsamādhi of Śrī Mahāswami in 1994.

Indica Books of Varanasi has published the complete written record of the author's experiences with Śrī Mahāswami. The price for PB Rs.1095/- & HB Rs.1,500/-: pp.816. ISBN: 978-93-81120-20-0. The book will be available in Amazon and other webpages. If Indica Books is emailed at indicabooksindia@gmail.com they will send the book by post. It will also be available at Bhagavan Arts Bookshop, Ramana Nagar, Tiruvannamalai.

This is an extraordinary book which reveals many previously secret direct teachings between the guru and śiṣya in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. The relationship of the revered Mahaswami or Periyavar of the Kanchipuram Math with the chronicler gives us an insight into the complex and profound spiritual development of the śiṣya. The book will surely become a classic in the field.

Pandharpur, Friday 19th June 1981

Darśan on the river's side

Last night I woke up at midnight after some dreams concerning my family who is in Europe. How strange it is that during ordinary life we choose to retain our miseries, doubts, and fatigue. Why do we not give them away to Shri Mahaswami or to Lord Shiva, to one of them or to both, while they are here, ready to replace us by their own light? All the miseries or the 'non-miseries' should be forever seen as being Shri Mahaswami or Lord Shiva or Brahman-the-Light. This should be applicable to whatever project in which we are involved, to the ideas of the past and to all the fabrications of the imagination.

After this internal statement, which at least had the merit of proving my sincerity, I peacefully went to sleep again.

Next morning, by 8.30 am, I casually looked from my balcony to the river beach when someone called my attention to the other side of the river. From some six hundred metres, I could distinguish Shri Mahaswami who was half-submerged in water and I witnessed the last part of his bath and the rituals connected to it. I followed him with my eyes while he climbed up the steep ravine on his way to the camp building: it was an effortless darśan, directly from the balcony of my residence!

In the evening, I arrived at the camp by 4.50 pm. Shri Mahaswami was alone in the inner yard. He sat with a heap of flower garlands in front of him, calm, benevolent, but full of determination. It was as if he was waiting for me! I prostrated facing east, and then retired at some three metres and stood leaning against a wall. There followed a powerful meditation. To start with, luminous currents were born on the axis of the body and hourglasses of constant light along the vertebral column. Then specific orders and a series of clear pronouncements were perceived internally:

“Think of yourself as Brahman-the-Light... You are Brahman-the-Light... You are Myself-the-Light...”

Truly, 'this one' was becoming more and more transparent. He saw himself shorter, of the same height as Shri Mahaswami, and then, finally, totally changed into him. He stood in two places: sitting with the heap of flower garlands in front of him and three metres away leaning against the wall.

Twenty minutes later, the illusion of separation slid aside the veil of individuality and revealed the unitary, luminous reality. ‘This one’ saw Shri Mahaswami stand up and head towards the river, for, doubtless, he wanted to be alone. I stood back and roamed on the upper bank. Thirty minutes later, because of some sort of internal permission, I reached the river and went down to the base of the steep bank. Shri Mahaswami had come out of the river and was meditating just at the boundary between water and the firm earth. A superb apparition from out of this world, firmly established, without any breathing movement, as if carved into a structure finely gilded, and, to me, entirely ethereal.

Only the left foot moved now and then. ‘This one’ stayed frozen on his right side and felt as if he received light all together from Swamiji’s foot, from the sun and from the reflexions in the water of the solar disc. Nature manifested itself in an unreal calm: the subdued late afternoon light blessed the earth as the great sun slowly fell below the horizon.

Luminous sphāṭika-līngas and little solar balls appeared several times in the centres of the vertebral column and in all the organs and the senses of ‘this one’. When Shri Mahaswami got up, I felt very light, young, healthy and entirely relaxed.

Pandharpur, Monday 22nd June 1981

Lightning-bridge between two hearts

It was a memorable day.

In the morning one hour of meditation passed like five minutes, while I bathed in the sparkling light of the sun which rose exactly at the windows of my apartment. The haṭha-yoga movements went smoothly and were accompanied by a few signs of relief from the digestive worries, which I stoically bore right from the beginning of my present sojourn with Shri Mahaswami.

In the afternoon, I started for the camp by 4 pm. There seemed to be nothing special in view. The door that opened into the interior yard was closed and the assistants were asleep. Quite strong winds blew outside and in the large hall that extended the entire length of the ground floor of the central building repairs were being undertaken. However, from

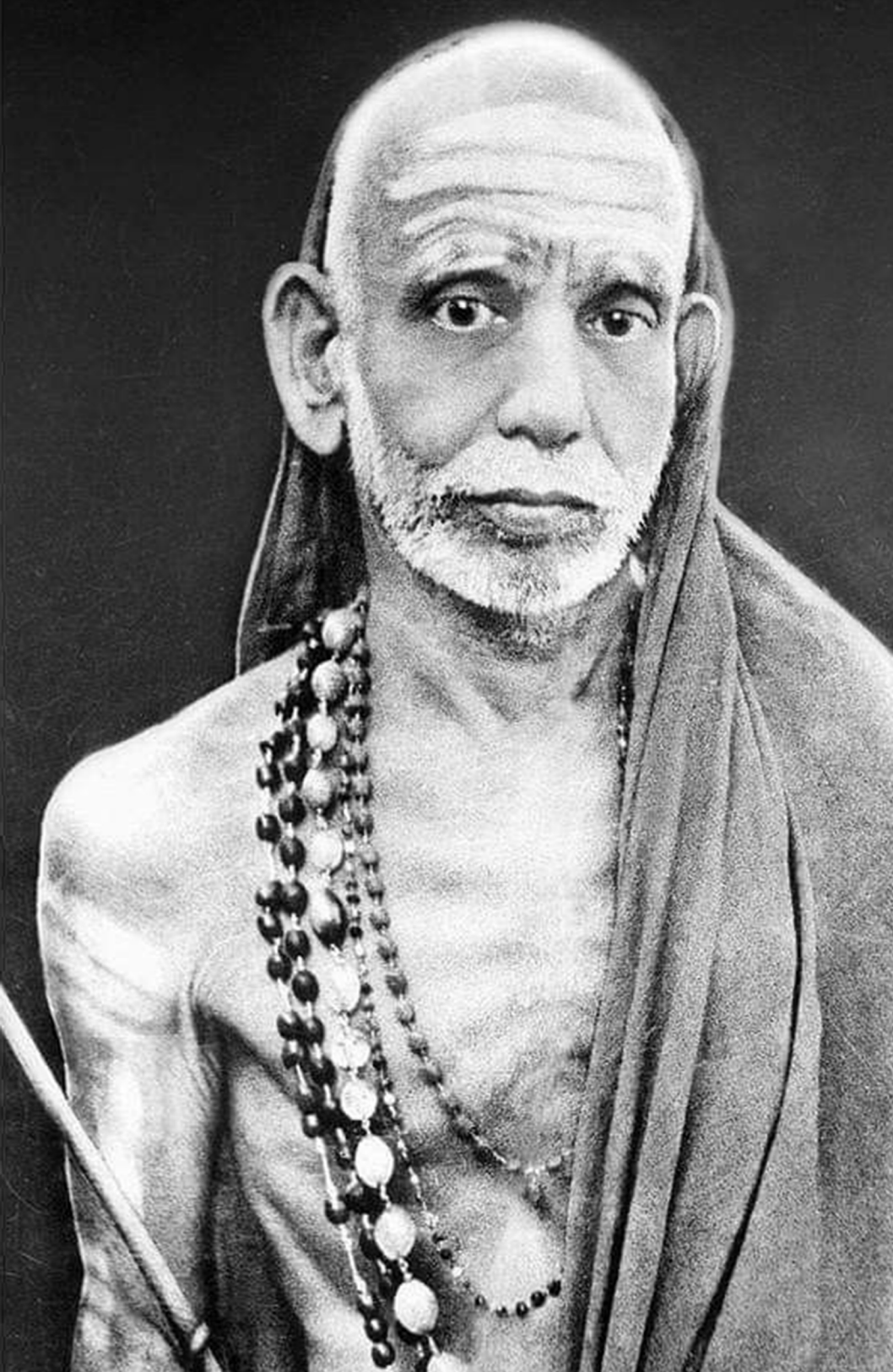
the presence of Shri Mahaswami emanated an indefinable but clearly noticeable air of peace which filled the surroundings. After one hour, he came out by an adjacent door from the northern building where he has chosen to reside. For three or four minutes he remained standing in the inner yard, frowning with a resolute air. He looked at me at least six times and then left the place.

I waited for him so as to revive some of the moments I had experienced in the morning. Suddenly he came out once again. I was compelled to cut across his path, at a distance of one metre and a half, to remove my bag that blocked his passage. Shri Mahaswami sat down, squatting, with an air of goodwill and determination at the same time. There were only a few visitors and, after a prostration, I immediately got an excellent place. I felt I should approach to within two metres; I was there for a rare thirty minutes of an uncluttered darśan.

At the beginning, he allowed me to adore him with the words “Jaya, jaya Śaṅkara.” Then I plunged into the heart until he replaced ‘this one’ with his own being. Somewhere in ‘me’ there flashed the immense Absolute Light, in the shape of rods or sparks, much stronger and more powerful than on other occasions.

An internal voice in English ordered me, “Do concentrate your thought on a single point.” I tried and succeeded in fixing in my heart a point of brilliant light not larger than a pinhead, firstly in the area where two light triangles had opposed each other at their apex and then the point alone. It developed and successively became a changing reflection of light, a sphāṭika-liṅga, the eye of Shri Mahaswami, and finally a sun. All these forms were structured out of a powerful light that was almost blinding. At a definite moment, I had the clear feeling that Swamiji opened with his hands the chest of ‘this one’ and tried to enlarge it. For a fraction of a second I was terrified, and then accepted it with gratitude. The interior Light blazed even brighter. One or two minutes passed and then the idea appeared that the Light would come from his chest.

I opened my eyes and clearly perceived how... from his chest... gushed out a steady, brilliant lightning. I slightly opened my hands, which I usually kept in añjali during the darśan and removed the shawl from my chest. A luminescent tube of some twelve centimetres



of diameter established itself between our two hearts and remained stationary. Shri Mahaswami did not seem to be in a hurry. By his look, he measured me five or six times from head to toe. ‘This one’ became a sort of gigantic sphāṭika-liṅga made of an incandescent fluid, having exactly the same consistency as that of the very heart of Shri Mahaswami, with a flaming volcano in the place of my own chest-heart, and a vague vestige of individuality.

When Swamiji decided it was enough, he slowly withdrew his own lightning, and the bridge of brilliance that connected the two hearts became progressively like a thread, until it perished. I watched Shri Mahaswami slowly getting up and avoiding any glance of contact with me, for he knew that I was almost paralysed. He went without any apparent reason towards a corner of the yard, then came back the same way and headed towards his room. He passed near me, slightly turned his head and fixed me with his gaze. I gratefully adored his pearl-like feet.

For a long time I kept in the chest a luminous cone in the place of my heart, tangible without being painful. As soon as I arrived at the dharmasālā, I noted down the essential aspects of this wonder.

Pandharpur, Monday 14th September 1981

The miraculous catch

Today there took place the vapana, the bimonthly traditional shaving.

I reached the camp in time to follow Shri Mahaswami to the river for his after-shaving bath. Before entering the water, his eyes searched for me, and when he located me he visibly relaxed. I then also entered into the water, which reached half-way up the thigh, at some twenty metres downstream, as was my habit so as to not shock the more severe traditionalists among the assistants and visitors. Between Swamiji and ‘this one’ were disposed in a closely packed semi-circle more than twenty men of different ages. All of them had the same two aims: to be washed by the water in which he had bathed and, especially, to try to collect the piece of cloth which Swamiji abandons in the river only on this special occasion. As for me, if I could reasonably hope to be washed by the water that had touched his body, the barrier of

men who stood between us gave me no hope concerning this piece of cloth, as I stood too far away from the human wall.

I concentrated then on what seemed to me more important: the complicated movements Shri Mahaswami executed according to a meticulous ritual. I had even forgotten the second part — the cloth — so much did I stand with eyes mostly closed and turned within, when I felt some agitation in the group standing in front of me. The men were glued to the river and thrashed the water with their feet while plunging down with their groping hands. “Shri Mahaswami must have dropped the cloth,” I thought.

It seemed somewhat strange that none of those who were near him was triumphantly displaying his catch, as so often happened, for normally it was someone who waited near Shri Mahaswami that captured the cloth.

A few minutes slipped away. The people in front of me seemed to have forgotten the disappearance of the cloth, as had I, when suddenly I felt at my feet a soft object, which seemed alive as it twisted and turned in the water. It rolled round my legs and remained there. There was an instant of terror: serpent, reptile, rope? My eyes turned automatically towards Shri Mahaswami, who impassively continued the rituals. I thought it cannot be something dangerous, but what have I round my legs? As the object or the animal did not move, I discreetly plunged the hand under the water as it was too muddy to see through. I touched, felt and caught something that seemed to be rather like a cloth. Could it be? Impossible! I was too far away, and why me? I slowly pulled a corner to the surface only to shove it back in the water: it was the ochre cloth of Shri Mahaswami!

To bring the priceless gift out of the river was a problem as I had to act quickly without attracting the attention of the onlookers. I solved the conundrum by letting my own shawl fall to the bottom of the river and then covered Shri Mahaswami’s cloth which I had carefully gathered up into a ball. I slipped the prize into my bag and did not draw any attention to myself.

I did not understand, neither at that time nor afterwards, how it was possible for a piece of cloth measuring some four metres in length and one metre wide to pass unnoticed through a close-knit group composed of twenty men in several rows, all standing in the river. Or

for that matter, how did it go round them while exactly calculating the right curved trajectory, and simultaneously flowing with the current at about eighty centimetres under the water level, then collide with me, and roll itself skilfully around my legs, as if obeying a precise order!

Shri Mahaswami came out of the water as if unconcerned. Dripping wet, he seemed so slender. He dried himself with a towel, gripped his *daṇḍa* and at once exuded vigour. After the *anuṣṭhāna* on the little sand beach, his force increased even more. He quickly climbed up to the edge of the bank where I waited for him. He stopped to witness my entire long prostration. I found him still in front of me when I got up and I believe there was a fine smile at the corner of his energetic mouth. He soon left, and in no time I saw him on the terrace of the main building. He was almost transparent, with those lines of contained energy on his face that can easily be observed after the shaving. I saw him for some time from behind; his head resembled a *śiva-liṅgam* seated on the neck of a young man.

Pandharpur, Tuesday 22nd September 1981

“Do not think anymore of the past”

The spiritual whirlwind that carried me along for the past few days has grown even more intense.

While the meditations become more powerful, they bring out from their hidden dimensions residues that have to be destroyed. Perhaps a bout of asceticism would be necessary, but I am already at the limit of the bearable. Shri Mahaswami seems totally unmindful, for as soon as I reach the camp each day he grasps me, works on me, shakes me, kneads me and twists me like a wet cloth. Stubborn as I am, I do not ditch the excruciating process. To think of God while in misery seems to be a more efficacious asceticism than thinking of God while at one's ease.

For the last ten days, I sank physically into a malady that went from bad to worse. The previous night I had fever, headache, a raging cough. I continuously repeated the *mahāmantra* and the divine names; otherwise, who knows, it might have been much harder. I took the decision not to go to the camp today and perhaps tomorrow as well,

for I am exhausted. The river Chandrabhaga is once again in flood; it rains again, the wind blows hard and it is cold. Added to the list of enemies of well-being, minor in themselves, but whose potency lies in their profusion, there are the superficial wounds to the feet — due to the same old story of uncomfortable sandals — and thorns in the heels — one would think that in my skin there is a hidden magnet that attracts these barbs — also the laundry does not dry in the humid weather, hence clothing has a mouldy smell; I lack vegetables, lemons, butter, I have a stomach ache, and so on...

This morning I had mentally composed a letter for my friend Raju, but could not write it down. I was on the point of losing the milk, my only food for noon, which was about to be swamped by water in the bucket meant to cool it down.

A French friend, Mr M., who has been here for the last three weeks, left yesterday. In the end I did not give him any letter to explain to my friends in France my sudden and unexpected departure to India. Īśvara, who made me come here, is in the heart of everyone and of whatever exists. From where I am now, I am unable to solve any of my European problems. The difficulties are the illusion covering the divine. Māyā made them appear, then let Māyā wipe them out! As for me, my aim is Brahman, exclusively. The small forces I still command are being spent on this quest. Shri Mahaswami has taken upon himself my entire weight. “Do not think anymore of the past,” told me a senior assistant, speaking, no doubt, in the name of his Master. In view of this admonition, to linger on my former affairs in France would be tantamount to an act of sacrilege. In addition, these last days I was so weak, I could hardly drag myself to the camp and also to where the milkman draws milk from the cows, as here, if one needs milk without water mixed and the milk to be as clean as possible, one must be present at the milking.

In the afternoon at the camp, the thought on Lord Vitthal shot up in my consciousness while I was in front of Shri Mahaswami. At that precise moment he, who was engaged elsewhere, turned his head towards me with an interrogative look, with the air of saying:

“Why do you think of someone else... Am I not here?”

On the evening of the same day, at home, it was as if Swamiji spoke to me, which seemed reasonable, as he was frequently referred to as a visible deity (pratyākṣa-devatā):

“I brought you to a point where any among the Great could definitively save you.”

And He... is He not one among the Great? Yes, there is no doubt about it. Then no more talk at the point where I am! I have nothing to reproach him with. I await only one thing: that the feeling of ‘I’, and this illusion of difference and responsibility should totally dissolve. It is remarkable to note how all the physical troubles perish entirely at some of these meditative peaks.

On the other hand, in an accomplished spiritual life it is not the problems that melt away, but rather it is our attitude towards them that is transformed. “The vāsanās become light as feathers,” say the sages. ▲

Far and Near

Upahar

Echoes of absence, wind through fallen leaves;
moondrift, a rippling fire of memories,
a flow of feelings, moving into prayer.

All changes, nameless One, are in Your gift:
the sun of pure belonging, soul’s content;
the grief of exile and the mystic woundings;
the carnival of light; the desolation.

Power of love unfolding life’s deep fable,
the sea, the magic isles, the lost companions;
recall in me the pilgrim’s secret joy.

Outshine my shadows, set my mind on You.
Turn me, return me, on the wings of grace,
back to Your lovely and eternal East,
where all ways meet, the holy ground, the Heart.

This Ātman is Brahman

VISHALAKSHI VISVESVARAYA

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's *Upadeśa Sāram* effectively summarizes the essence of *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*, *Upaniṣad-s*, and *Brahmasūtra*. For example, the central theme of the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, is in a way contained when Sri Ramana says:

दृश्य वारितं चित्तमात्मनः ।
चित्त्व दर्शनं तत्त्व दर्शनम् ॥

Upadeśa Sāram 16

[One's mind withdrawn from perceptions is the appreciation of Awareness (one's real nature) which is the appreciation of Truth]

The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* proclaims सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म, अयमात्मा ब्रह्म. All this is surely Brahman. This Self is Brahman. This Upanishad seeks to convey that the word ॐ represents this Vedantic truth. It brings out the importance of 'ॐ' by relating ॐ to different aspects of human personality and also its relation to the ultimate.

Vishalakshi Visvesvaraya, a post graduate in Economics, a Kovid (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan), & a social worker. She has been a devotee of Bhagavan and a student of Vedanta for many years. She is presently a trustee of Abhinava Vidya Bharati & Sustainable Urbanism International.

The Monistic Philosophy proclaims that Ātman, our inmost individual being (Self), and Brahman, the inmost being of the universe and all its phenomena are the same. For most people it is difficult to understand or to be convinced of this view point.

In this exposition first the factor of time is taken up. The Upanishad says the past, present and future are all represented in ॐ. Not only that but whatever is beyond the three periods of time is included too in it.

Brahman or Self is possessed of four quarters; hence it is called 'चतुष्पात्'. The entire period of a day of a person is divided between waking, dream and deep sleep states. Brahman or Self is possessed of four quarters. That is because the Upanishad says there is a fourth state which is beyond these three states and which transcends them. It is called the 'turīya avasthā'.

This fourth *avasthā* or state is distinct from the other three *avasthā*-s; it does not have special attributes by which it can be described. But it exhibits the feature of प्रपञ्चोपशमं the state where all phenomena have ceased. It is also 'शान्तं' peaceful for no change occurs; and it is 'शिवं' auspicious.

The *turīya avasthā* being beyond the subject-object relationship, beyond the manifested world, it is non-dual; this is the 'Ātma', the Self that has to be known, i.e. experienced and realized by means of *nididhyāsana*.

In fact, emphasizing the unique nature of *turīya* the Upanishad negates all the attributes that are possibly attributable to the *turīya avasthā*. Thus, if all possible attributes are negated one could conclude it to be non-existing. However, in order to avoid any such misunderstanding, the description 'ekātma pratyaya sāra' is given. Its 'Sara' valid proof, *ekātma pratyaya*, which refers to the single belief in one's own Self, is added. (no one will deny one's own existence).

This term 'ekātma pratyaya sāra' is of great significance. The term indicates that *ātma* is of the nature of consciousness. It is pure awareness, that is *ātma* is pure knowledge, in whose light the sense organs and also the mind functions.

The Upanishad says "सर्वमोकार एव". The term ॐ is said to be everything. Omkar is said to represent Brahman and since Brahman is everything, Omkar is also everything. Further the most important

statement made is “अयमात्मा ब्रह्म”. This is a *mahāvākya* which says the individual self is identical with the Universal Self.

The individual self though basically identical with the Universal Self, yet *Ātman* (the individual self) identifying itself with the mind-intellect-equipment becomes the ego-centric-separative individual called, *jīva*.

Different schools like yogins, the *pāśupata-s*, *sankhya* and many others have a different approach to the relationship between the Reality and the world. But Gaudapada who is a non-dualist, says these theories are only projections of the mind. The truth is only the substratum on which all these projections are set. Vedanta thus posits that these projections are only superimpositions. These superimpositions appear real till the delusion lasts like the serpent on the rope. The delusion will last till the individual self is in association with the body-mind-intellect complex. Once the individual self transcends this body-mind-intellect complex, the individual self is but the ‘Absolute’. Gaudapada puts it thus:

न निरोधो न चोत्पत्तिर्न बद्धो न च साधकः ।
न मुमुक्षुर्न वै मुक्त इत्येषा परमार्थता ॥

Kārikā Kartha Ch II v, 32

[There is neither dissolution, nor birth; neither anyone in bondage nor any aspirant for wisdom; neither can there be anyone who hankers after liberation nor any liberated as such. This alone is the Supreme Truth].

While elucidating the Vedantic philosophy the Glosser goes on to give certain examples. He says just as pot space is created from total space, the various entities in the world have taken name, form and function from the Absolute Reality which is homogeneous. When the pot is broken, the pot space merges with total space. Similarly, the *jīva* will merge in Brahman. But it is to be noted that this happens only on realization. Till this truth that the individual self is none other than the Universal Self is experienced one will not merge in the Universal Self, the Brahman. Until this happens the individual self, the *jīva* has to go on taking births.

Some Vedic tenets do give us the idea that Reality is different from individual self. To this Gaudapada says that this description of duality is not मुख्य, primary but ‘गौण’, secondary. He asserts that non-duality is indeed the ultimate Reality; duality is its effect whereas the dualists

perceive duality both in the Absolute and in the phenomena. Thus, the Glosser sees no conflict between non-dualism and dualism;

He says:

अद्वैतं परमार्थो हि द्वैतं तद्भेद उच्यते ।
तेषामुभयथा द्वैतं तेनायं न विरुद्ध्यते ॥

Kārikā Kartha Ch III v. 18

[As non-duality is the ultimate Reality, therefore duality is said to be its effect (*Kārya* or *Bheda*). The dualists perceive duality either way (i.e., both in the Absolute and in the phenomena). Thus the non-dual position does not conflict with the dualist's position.]

In this context, Gaudapada makes a very important statement, that the changeless Brahman appears to undergo modification only on account of illusion or *māyā* and not *defacto*. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* also says thus:

एतदेषाम्ब्रह्मैतद्धि सर्वाणि नामानि विभर्ति

It is this Self that supports all names.

रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव तदस्य रूपं प्रतिचक्षणाय ।
इन्द्रो मायाभिः पुरुरूप ईयते युक्ता ह्यस्य हरयः शता दशेति ॥

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad I. 6. 1

He (Brahma) transformed himself in accordance with each form; that form of His was for the sake of making Him known. The lord on account of *Māyā* (notions imposed by ignorance) is perceived as manifold. For, if this change was real the immortal would become mortal too. The *Karika Kartha* says thus:

मायया भिद्यते ह्येतन्नान्यथाऽजं कथञ्चन ।
तत्त्वतो भिद्यमाने हि मर्त्यताममृतं व्रजेत् ॥

Kārikā Kartha III, v 19

For the pluralities that is experienced in the world, his explanation is

यथा स्वप्ने द्वायाभासं स्पन्दते मायया मनः ।
तथा जाग्रद्व्याभासं स्पन्दते मायया मनः ॥

Kārikā Kartha III, v 29

Just as in the dream the agitated mind creates a delusory dream world and the dreamer identifying himself with it, takes it to be real; so too in the waking state, the waker's mind (due to agitations) projects

itself to a world of delusory plurality seemingly real for him, for the time being.

While this is so in the case of normal people, a *jñāni*, reaches a stage where because of his attainment of knowledge of Truth, which is Brahman (pure consciousness), the *jñāni*'s mind ceases to be. When the mind ceases to be, i.e. when it is not functioning, there is no object to be cognized; one could say this is a condition where the mind is free, while the objects are all present as before but not cognized.

It may be pointed out that though in deep sleep also there is no cognition, there is a lot of difference between a deep sleeper and the knower of Brahman. The striking difference is that:

लीयते हि सुषुप्ते तन्निगृहीतं न लीयते ।
तदेव निर्भयं ब्रह्म ज्ञानलोकं समन्ततः ॥

Kārikā Kartha III, v 35

In the case of one in deep sleep, the mind is withdrawn and is drowned in ignorance. But the mind of a *jñāni* becomes fearless Brahman possessed of light of knowledge all-round.

How does one reach this mindless state free of thoughts provoked by desires? The answer to this is given hereunder:

दुःखं सर्वमनुस्मृत्य कामभोगान्निवर्तयेत् ।
अजं सर्वमनुस्मृत्य जातं नैव तु पश्यति ॥

Kārikā Kartha III, v 43

Constantly remembering that everything is full of misery, one should withdraw the mind from the enjoyment arising out of desire. Remembering ever that birthless Brahman is everything, one does not surely perceive the born (viz. the host of dualities).

This is exactly what is conveyed by the verse quoted from *Upadeśa Sāram*.

In the beginning, the question is can really any one reach this mindless state free of thoughts? Only godly personalities like Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi can, for they have no desire whatsoever.





HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

The Darśan of Anandamayi Ma

Part Three

SHARON MAAS

Once again, a special book fell into my hands. This one was about a female saint who, I read, spent her time moving from place to place in North India; who was highly revered, had even been here, to Ramanashram, and declared that He is the Sun and we are all the stars in daytime. There was a photo in that book, of an old woman whose eyes held mine, pouring a love into my heart that melted me to my core. And I knew: I had to see her.

I wrote to her Ashram headquarters in Varanasi and was told she would be in Poona in May. I decided that I, too, would be in Poona in May. Was I running away from Arunachala, as had been predicted? Perhaps. But I was running towards a power which was at least as great, a power that would dig up all those terrifying vasanas, only to disarm them; a power that would accompany me for the rest of my life.

Her name was Anandamayi Ma.

I arrived in Poona, exhausted, sweaty, drained of enthusiasm. The journey from Tiruvannamalai, by bus, had taken two days but it had

Sharon Maas is the author of ten novels.

seemed more like two years. I'd spent a sleepless night in a cheap hotel, eaten street food, tried – and failed – to make conversation with a variety of women who did not speak a word of English. Somehow I'd found the right connections and the right buses, somehow I'd found Ma's Ashram, and here I was. First things first – I found the cheapest hotel close to the Ashram, deposited my luggage, had a shower and a hasty meal, and hurried over to the Ashram. Only to find it deserted. Where were the crowds that were said to follow this intriguing saint everywhere she went?

Finally I found someone and asked when I could see her.

‘Oh, you have the wrong date! The schedule has changed. Ma isn't coming for another week!’

What???

The bottom fell out of my world. I had carefully budgeted for this trip, brought along only enough rupees to keep me a week in the most basic of hotels. By the time Ma arrived, I'd have run out of money and it would be time to return!

I was devastated. And all alone. I knew not a soul in this crowded city. I had left the safe familiarity of Tiruvannamalai and Ramanashram behind, the serenity and the sheer joy of the place I now called home, for nothing. There seemed to be some doubt if Ma would even come at all: “she changes her plans on a whim”, I'd been cheerfully informed, and I should just wait and see, and pray.

“Don't worry, she is always here!”

I had a clear choice: return to Tiruvannamalai now, and at least save the money for the hotel, or wait at the hotel for a week for what would be at most a quick glimpse, and then return. I decided a quick glimpse would be better than nothing, after coming all this way, and so I stayed.

The week dragged past. As it drew to a close people began to arrive; by the time she was due to arrive, they were there in their hundreds, men in their crisp white dhotis, women in colourful saris, and there was a definite buzz in the air, an excitement that it was impossible not to be infected by. I'd never known anything like it; I could only compare it to the anticipation I'd known as a child looking forward to Christmas. The coming of something great, grand, a miracle about to take place on earth. I was swept up in a wave of beatific elation,

enough, even, to wipe me free of the worry of the money that had evaporated during the past thumb-twiddling week.

The Ashram consisted of low buildings around a large sandy courtyard, with a large hall in the centre of the courtyard. When the great day of Arrival dawned, the place was packed. I managed to find a place to stand and wait in the central hall, against a railing looking out towards the right-hand row of buildings, squeezed in among everyone else. We waited, and waited, and at last the buzz went up: she's here!

A big black car crept into the sight, having entered the courtyard at the back of the hall and made its slow way around to the place just in front of where I stood, where it came to a halt. A hive of activity collected around the car. All I could make out was a figure shrouded in white clothes exiting the car on the far side, escorted by several people over to the buildings facing me.

This was Ma. Just seeing her walking slowly away, back turned to me, literally took my breath away. I felt as if I were gasping for air. My heart lurched into a tattoo and I couldn't help but stare, spellbound, as the figure walked on to the balcony opposite to where I stood, and took a seat there, still surrounded by a gaggle of helpers. I had no idea what was going on; I could only stare. People coming and going, animated conversations I could not hear, men and women approaching and retreating, bowing and pranaam-ing, a truly little knot of excitement centred so closely around this one white-hulled being, like a queen bee surrounded by a cluster of buzzing devotees.

I could see her face. What could I do, but stare? Was it rude to stare? I didn't care. It was all I was capable of, my eyes drawn inexorably to that centre of radiance. That face was not still for a moment. She was talking to several people at once, it seemed, laughing, looking this way and that, hands gesticulating, receiving and handing out gifts, a shining, glorious, starburst sparking right there in front of me. All my cares evaporated. No thought of lost money, of having to leave the next day, of having wasted a week. I was held in thrall, staring shamelessly at this vision of pure glory.

Then she was looking up, her face in full view, focused, it seemed, at the crowds across the way in the building, the balcony where I was standing. She raised one hand, and gestured: a definite "come",

her gaze focused on the place where I was standing. I looked around to see who she was gesturing to. But everyone was looking at me. I pointed to myself, shook my head: me?

“Yes, you! She is calling you! Go to her!”

On shaking legs, on jellied knees, I walked over and stood before her. She said something, in a language I did not understand.

Someone translated: “Do you speak Hindi or Bengali?”

“Neither,” I replied, “Only English”.

They all spoke some more, apparently discussing me; my mind was in too much of a turmoil to understand what was going on. I only knew that She was there, before me, and her face, the most beautiful face I’d ever seen, was all I could see, everything else around me vague shadows in my peripheral vision, and everything in me melting away.

It lasted just a few seconds. It was someone else’s turn. I walked back to the central hall in a daze. I spoke to this person and that; a white woman asked me a few questions and seemed to take an interest in me, but I was in no state to respond rationally. I spent the rest of that day in a state of dissolution. Eventually, I found a place to sit in the centre of the hall and there I sat, cross-legged, and that’s when the tears came, and the realisation that I never wanted to leave Her, not ever; that all I wanted in life for ever more was to stay next to Her. And I didn’t know how, as I had no money, no means, nothing. So I sat there crying, pleading with Her, begging Her to let me stay.

All of a sudden, I felt hands on my face, covering my eyes, and a voice. The hands withdrew, I opened my eyes, and there was Thurid, a German woman I had met in Tiruvannamalai, a friend.

I recovered my senses enough to talk to her, and I told her I’d have to go the next day as my money had run out.

“No! You don’t have to go! I will give you money to stay!” she said, and that’s what happened.

The next few days passed in a daze. Ma came and went, and so did the devotees. I spent every minute I could at the Ashram. Sometimes people spoke to me. The white woman I’d seen on that first day, I learned, was Melitta Maschmann, an old German devotee. She told me that, on that first meeting, Ma had refused to believe I was not Indian.

On the second or third day I heard that people were asking for and being granted a “private” with Ma. I did not dare ask for a “private”; I felt I had already been granted one, yet I longed to be close to her again.

But one of her attendants approached me and said that Ma had sent for me. I approached her trembling with awe; she was sitting once again on the veranda of one of the buildings at the back of the Ashram. I was led to the front and sat in front of Ma. She was most tender, most kind. “I am very glad that you have come,” she said, and gave me some prasād. That was it. I had no questions, there was nothing I had to say, she said nothing more. I just knew I could sit there all day gazing at her.

On one of the following days I was sitting in the hall while she was giving darshan, as usual, talking and laughing in animation. As usual I was staring at her; an image came into my mind, of Her being a mother hen and me being a little chick under Her protective wing. All of a sudden she caught my eye and with a quick motion flung something at me: it was a yellow towel. She held my gaze and made some gestures, saying words I didn’t fully understand; those sitting next to me interpreted. “Put the towel over your shoulders!” they said, and I did, and when I had done so I realised that this towel represented the hen’s wing, and I was under it. Nothing could have been more definitive.

The next few days I cried and cried. I could not stop crying. I wanted to stay here forever, in Her presence. I wanted to do everything for her, give my life to Her, forever and ever. But all good things come to an end, and I prayed to stay, but no answer came. I followed her around the place. Once, she turned to me and said, “when are you leaving?” And I knew that, for now, it was over. This time there was no generous donor, no sponsor.

The night before I was due to leave, I was called again for yet another “private”.

“I am coming with you!” she told me, and heaped me with gifts: a white sari with a thin red border, a shawl, a copy of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

The next day I got on the bus to Tiruvannamalai.

This all happened in 1974. I wore the sari – my first – constantly after that, but one day it was stolen from the washing line. The yellow towel, I used as a cover for my shrine in my home in Tiruvannamalai,

in the hut of my landlord, a swami in *mouna* called Swami Satyananda. But it happened when I was not in Tiruvannamalai that the Swami passed away and the towel disappeared. I tried to find it, in vain. The *Bhagavad Gītā* was also stolen. I still have the shawl. ▲

All That Happens

Suresh Natarajan

All that happens — the good, the bad, the unpleasant
Happens on time as destined
All that happens — the good, the bad, the unpleasant
Vanishes on time as destined
All that happens is perfect
It's clear when we reflect
All that happens is impermanent
Like the clouds seen in the firmament
The intensity at the time of the event
Makes us forget it's all evanescent
Yet when we look back with clear eyes
It's all His passing show in disguise
Each destruction only for the next renewal
And each renewal, next destruction's fuel
Can't wish this movement away
Can't rush the scenes of this play
He unfolds as Time that consumes all
All that appears has one day to fall
Not a wrong note in this symphony
Nothing to judge, it's all in harmony
The only way out is to fully surrender
To accept everything with love tender
The ground on which Time does its dance
Watches it all without even a glance
Surrender takes us out of the scene
From a character to the unmoving screen
The character goes on doing what it's meant
Nothing to be proud, nothing to repent
What remains is unconditional love
Ever peaceful in the eternal now.

Qader E Mutlaq

Beloved Omnipotent

SYED SHAH MEERAN HUSSAINI HAQNUMA
TRANSLATED BY SYED NAWAZUDDIN AHMED

Introduction

One of the most prominent figures in the early history of Islamic mysticism in south India was Syed Muhammad Gesu Daraz. Gesu Daraz belonged to the Chishti order of Sufism, named after the town of Chisht, some 95 miles east of Herat in Afghanistan where it was first practised. The Sufi sheikh Moinuddin Chishti (1142-1246) came to India and disseminated the teachings of this order. His *dargah* or shrine at Ajmer is renowned.

Also known as Hazrat Khwaja Banda Nawaz Gaisu Daraz, he was a disciple of Khwaja Nasiruddin Chirag-Dehlavi (1274-1337), who had succeeded Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325) as the premier sheikh of Delhi. The shrine of Khwaja Nizamuddin is still the leading Sufi *dargah* in Delhi. Following the invasion by Timur

Nawazuddin who translated this poem from Urdu into English is the 7th generation, great grandson of the author of the poem Syed Sha Miran Hussain. He was initiated into Sufism by his father Syed Rafiudin Ahmed. Nawazuddin is thankful to the board of *Mountain Path* at Sri Ramanasramam for enabling this translation to be published in the magazine.

in 1398, Gesu Daraz (or 'long hair') and his followers fled south and eventually created a major Sufi centre at Gulbarga, Karnataka.

Syed Shah Meeran Hussaini, a Sufi saint of late 18th century is a direct descendant of Muhammad Gesu Daraz. He lived at Tirupattur of erstwhile Vellore district from 1811 to 1887. His tomb is a spiritual pilgrimage centre even today and the annual Urs is celebrated during the Islamic month of Rabbiyul Akhir.

It's related that once while taking a bath in a pond his silver ring slipped in the water. After finishing his bath when he ascended the tank he noticed his empty finger bereft of the ring. Addressing the fishes of the pond, resolutely, he commanded them to bring back his ring and his ring was returned by one of the fishes.

It is also related that Meeran Hussaini Haqnuma's forefathers who migrated from Gulbarga, Karnataka initially settled in Arcot under the patronage of Nawabs of Arcot.

His great grandfather whose name is also named Meeran Hussaini, a renowned Sufi saint, lived in Arcot and spent his years on the hills of Panja Pandavar Malai, a hillock near Arcot declared as a monument under Archeological Survey of India because of Jain Cave Complex.

The poem *Qader e Mutlaq* deals entirely about the self-enquiry in a very sublime manner. It speaks elaborately about delving deep into one's self in order to find out the reality by renouncing the acclaimed practices taught by various schools of religion.

Qader E Mutlaq

How pleasing is the Beloved Omnipotent
He dwells in the Certainty of Heart.

O companion, listen to my curious discourse
Wherein you will learn the Essence of the Beloved.
Of what use is to gain the world by deceit
Quietly now read these couplets with certainty.

How delightful is the plight of the Beloved
How eminently is he (Beloved) established in this world?
As Lord He pervades everywhere
As servant He amuses Himself.

When your being is annihilated
 When you are replete with contemplation.
 When you are refulgent with light
 He is the Beholder and He is the Spectacle.
 Neither your hidden nature is outwardly manifest
 Nor your beginning is your end.
 Though the Beloved is past your home
 He is ever present within you.
 The Beloved dwells in your eyes
 Only then every object is visible to you
 He hears through your ears
 He speaks through your mouth.
 I don't hear save through His Ears
 I don't see save through His Eyes.
 I don't speak save through His Tongue
 I don't exist but for His Existence.
 This existence is not my existence
 This rapture is not my rapture.
 Verily there is no greater vile than egotism
 But for this body there is no abode for the Beloved.
 How shall I describe my rapture, o companion?
 I am sublime between servitude and divinity.
 I am the *Qazi* – the Judge and I am the police
 Look how my ruse works, o companion!
 As a servant I am ever performing His errands
 Conveying every affair in the name of the Beloved.
 Remembering Him day and night
 Establishing His name in the world.
 Why do you search the Beloved in the faraway remote?
 The Beloved in His entirety is within you, O friend!
 In your eyes He is the Light
 Indeed your physical body is the Mt.Sinai, O companion.¹

¹ Alluding to the story of Moses when God summoned him to Mount Sinai in the form of an effulgent light.

MOUNTAIN PATH

How well has Muhammad said,
“Whoso knoweth himself, knows God.”
Every Alphabet and conjunction is present in man
When you become self-effacing, you would attain deliverance.
Some say mortify the soul, sacrifice your body and spirit
Redeem your life for the Beloved and cast away
the calamity of duality.

What is gained by mortifying the soul?
It is neither distinctive nor virtuous.
When the seeker and sought are mere agents
Surely it is an act of ignorance if one mortifies his soul.

Know that the soul is the comrade of the Divine
It is the site of manifestation of the Hidden Treasure.
Whoever comprehends this, finds the Beloved
This can be achieved through the Grace of the Master.

I reflect upon the soul as blooming.
Hence I am joined with the beloved.
Day and night I am absorbed in this union
I am neither dead nor alive.

Kindle the light of this body as radiant
So that it attains immortality.
Die before the death comes
Then from the Truth an everlasting sound comes.

Many have contemplated on the Beloved
To attain the Truth they founded many a form of meditation.
In vain they adopted diverse forms of remembrance
Imagining the Beloved to be far away,
They lost their faith.

Some falsely practice meditation, engage in vain task.
They don't possess the knowledge of the Beloved
They sweat and toil and moil,
For them the Beloved is far, far away.

Some believe in the revealing nature of light
And regard Light as God.

Some make a display of God as signifying the colour Yellow
And still others reckon with Sun and Moon.

Some are misled to think the Beloved to be as White
Some ogle at the Black, some hang down their heads
Thinking God as Green
Still others think God as Red.

Some said the empyrean is the Throne of the Beloved.
Some said He is in the firmament.
Some said He is in the Air.
And some, He is in the Heaven.

Some said retire into a mystic seclusion for forty days
Others withdraw into a cave and sweat hard.

Some observe fasting ceaselessly
Others perform the major ablution repetitively.

A few go to the forest, eat leaves and vegetation.
Like a fish in the water, some wash themselves constantly.
Like a crane waiting for a fish some wait endlessly
Nothing is to be gained from these practices.

Those who went to the caves are like rats.
Those who remain hungry are like snakes.
To attract a good crowd in the world
These are trickeries employed by these fraudsters.

Some have the greed to perform miracles
Like a bee they glide in the sky.
Some gather the news of the unseen world
Like a devil they pester for sensuous means.

A few walk on the surface of the water.
Few others float like a boat.
Few reveal the secrets of the heart. By these acts
Imagine themselves they knew the Beloved.

Like a devil some give session by entering into the body.
Some travel from East to West and instantly
Return to where they are.
Truly these are devilish acts
Nay they are of the nature of sensuous acts.

MOUNTAIN PATH

O companion, you do the feats of Angelic nature
Or else do the deeds of Graceful nature.
If you excel in the aforesaid (devilish) tricks
Then your master is surely the Devil.
Like an arrow shot from the spectrum (bow) of a rainbow
His efforts are cast in vain.

Truly these are stupid people
Sailing in a small boat in the ocean of ignorance.
But those who have yielded to the Beloved
Are free from these foul methods.

They silently undergo the retreat to their heart
Cast away the perils of duality from their selves.
They give up their lives for Beloved's sake
And ponder over the sweet mysteries of Spirituality.

Entire life is spent on the repeated invocation of God's name
The sheet of this body is torn and withered.
Alternating with a new tragedy every instant
Finally it receded back on not finding the Beloved.

Nothing is gained by observing this remembrance
Nothing is realized by this devoutness.
One does not become spiritual by performing these skills
Unless one realizes that one is ignorant of oneself.

That Light is neither Black or White nor Yellow
It is a Light, which is extraordinary and most superior.
He who has got this Light
Surely he remains in a blissful state.

Whoever of the companion finds the Beloved
He is in the company of 'wherever you look,
There is the face of God'.

He sings, "Surely the Beloved is nearer
to you than your jugular vein."

He sets his heart, "Have you not looked
Into your souls and found God."

I tell you a method to reach the Beloved, which is the nearest
Stop searching for the Beloved either in the East or West.

He is nearer to you than your jugular vein
 If you don't fathom this, you are like a scorpion.
 O friend! Sit not in solitude like a hermit
 Nor be a recluse retiring to a corner.
 There is no use sitting in seclusion,
 If your goal is to abide in the Oneness.
 Cast away the Ego within you
 Then behold the luminosity of the Beloved.
 Get yourself totally annihilated in that luminosity
 Then you would be dear to the Beloved.
 When the self is annihilated
 What survives is the continuation of the *Hu*.
 At this stage the Beloved cries out *Anal-Haq* (I am the Truth)
 Silently contemplate, you shall find the Beloved.
 When you become absorbed in the intensity of the *Hu*
 And also lose this sense of absorption, then
 Desire for the stage of 'neither servant nor the Lord' and
 Abide in the state of 'neither you nor I'.
 When you are firmly established in this state
 You qualify to be called a friend of God (*Wali*)
 You are a rescuer (*Ghouse*) and a polestar of spirituality (*Qutub*)
 I could predict you to be an inheritor of mystical knowledge.
 Then you rule the entire universe
 In every instant you experience the Ascension of Miraj.
 Eternally you are the crown of the epoch
 I therefore give my sincere offerings to my Master.
 If your *Murshid* (Master) is a perfect one and has
 Attained the stage beyond creation
 Then he has reached the goal, the destination
 Ask him if you are a true seeker.
 This unique path you would gain
 You would annihilate yourself and both the worlds
 Neither you would see the Ground nor the Empyrean
 Nor an Angel would find an admission there.

MOUNTAIN PATH

At this point a subtle sound becomes audible to you
Strange as it is, this sound is permeating every one.
Listen O friend, that sound is the intrinsic nature of the Essence
Meditate on this sound and you would gain the Beloved.

This meditation is called the perpetual prayer
None of the ascetics ever desires this meditative prayer.
Those who devote themselves to Truth
They dissolve day and night in this meditation.

Do not dispel or dismiss this lesson, because
These dewdrops are the very light of the beloved.
When one among these four is the Beloved²
Why then do you remove the Beloved from your heart?

Look! The Beloved is the First and the Last
He is the Hidden and the Manifest.
When you have made this declaration with the Beloved
Why then are you laden with the burden of proof?

Seven alphabets are with you at all times, O friend!
Of these seven

One Essence is present.
Ha, Ayn, Mim and *Qaf*³ my friend
Kaf, Sin, Ba altogether are seven.⁴

Verily Adam is the archetype of the manifestation of the Essence
The world without Adam is merely laden with the attributes.
The seven Alphabets are the companions of the Adam
Discern this from the Master.

Know that two are the paths to the proximity of God
One is by performing the obligatory duties.
Other through supererogatory prayers
Conforming to these two, you live in honorable manner.

These two paths lead to one Goal, with the reflection of I in I
Intone the greater Self of I by denying
the existence of the smaller self.

² The First, the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.

³ Life, Knowledge, Intention and Power to carry out His intentions.

⁴ Speech, Hearing and Seeing.

Achieve the goal by contemplating 'In me is the Beloved'.
'I am the Truth', and thus establish the name of Truth.

In me is the Beloved and in the Beloved is me
Each sacrifice in the other and get steadfast.
Except by this path none has ever seen the Beloved
The true mystics ever abide in this path.

Those who understood the Beloved have nothing to look upon
They have no name of their own other than the Beloved
Even the sacred name of Allah is non-existent there
In that place there is neither the cupbearer nor the cup.

It is quite difficult to expound this stage
Here the very best and firm intellect will get amiss
Except for Mansur none got access to this stage
Whoever proclaimed, "I am the Truth"
Ended up on the gallows.

The journey towards the Lord has ended.
Now begin the journey with the Lord
As journeying into the Lord is to be your goal, destination,
Cast away all your pride and greed.

I have disclosed the sublime secret and revealed it
Have ripped open the veils of duality.
Have gathered up the pearls of mystical union
Have also measured its rhythmic composition (poetic form).

My Master is Peer Bahadur who is the acme of Perfection.
He is undoubtedly the one, who has realized the Truth.

An accomplished Polestar of the Gnosis
One who has merged with the Rescuer and the Messenger.

Where is a Sheikh, a Guide like him in this era?
What are seven empyreans and what is time and space
Under his command is the affair of both worlds.
What are territory and people and what are Angels and spirit?

I offer myself as a sacrifice to my Master
My body and soul are an offering to you, O Master.
I am like a fodder on this path of spirituality
Of all his disciples I am the most favored devotee.

O my Master, pour your entire attention on poor Haqnuma
O my merciful Master, show me the right Gnosis.
Teach me the secrets of life, as it should be
Show me the secret of 'Know Thyself'.
How eloquently I have narrated the knowledge of God
O comrades! Listen with your heart and soul
Inscrutable are the ways of Providence
Verily the Truth has provided this human form. ▲

The Ashram and Covid 19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 cases continues to be prevalent in Tiruvannamalai District. To ensure the safety of our devotees and the Ashram workers/volunteers, the Ashram will closely monitor the situation and *may* continue to strictly enforce the lockdown *after* December 31st, 2020. However, please check the official Ashram webstie for the latest information.

Till the implementation of a successful vaccination program against the COVID Virus, the Ashram will NOT open the guest rooms for overnight stay.

Please bear with us during this unusual, mysterious pandemic. Devotees will be kept informed about any prospective re-opening date. Like administrators everywhere, Sri Ramanasramam management faces difficult choices and thus needs our patient cooperation. In the meantime, we can take solace in the reasonable hope for a viable and safe vaccine.

The World As Thought

Bhagavan's Radical Claims and Nature of Perception

VASKO KOHLMAYER

“Just as the spider draws out the thread of the cobweb from within itself and withdraws it again into itself, in the same way the mind projects the world out of itself and absorbs it back into itself,” wrote Sri Ramana in *Who Am I?*

The suggestion that this universe with its enormous spaces and innumerable galaxies is a projection of the human mind strikes most people as unbelievable if not outright shocking. And yet Sri Ramana remains insistent: “There is no doubt whatsoever that the universe is the merest illusion.” Almost as if to make matters even more perplexing, this is what Sri Ramana has to say about the essence of the physical objects we encounter around us: “All the moving, unmoving and seemingly insentient things that become objects of perception for the senses are, in truth, pure consciousness.”

Many of Sri Ramana's statements were so radical that even some of his close followers could not accept them. Understandably so, given that his assertions seem to defy common sense. But no matter how far-fetched Sri Ramana's pronouncements may seem, many people

Vasko Kohlmayer was born and raised in the former communist Czechoslovakia. He first encountered Sri Ramana's teachings in 2008.

sense that in some way at least he must have been right, and it is this intuition that attracts us to his teachings. Furthermore, the more we ponder our experience, the more we begin to suspect that the world may not be quite as it appears to our conditioned eye, and that it is our distorted view that gives rise to actions that keep producing pain and suffering in our lives.

The good news is that we do not need to accept Sri Ramana's statements on faith, but we can test their validity by examining our own experience. To be able to do so effectively, however, we need to be willing to relinquish at least some of our habitual ways of thinking in order to create room for the enquiry to unfold. Perhaps the most productive way of accomplishing this is by becoming conscious of the fundamental principle of human cognition: When we look at the world, we do not perceive actual physical objects but mental images generated by the mind. When observing a tree in the garden, for example, what we see is not the physical plant itself, but a picture built by our mind from the input supplied by the sensory apparatus. Thinkers and scientists have been aware of this fact of perception for quite some time, and yet we normally take no notice of it. Not being conscious of this aspect of our cognition, we overlook its profound implications as far as the nature of reality is concerned.

Once we grasp that what we perceive around us are not actual physical entities but mental formations, the whole edifice of Sri Ramana's worldview will start becoming more intelligible. This realisation can, in fact, be used as the stepping-stone for developing a systematic line of reasoning that shows the correctness of even some of the most apparently counter-intuitive of Sri Ramana's claims. This would include the ideas such as that this world exists in the mind only and that the universe comes into being in the very process of perception.

Perhaps most importantly, the insights we obtain in the course of our investigation will help us see through the false conceptions that distort our view of reality. And even if the enquiry should result only in a partial correction of our vision, we will still be in a position to catch a glimpse of just how reasonable and correct Sri Ramana's teachings truly are.

Objects and Things

Our knowledge of the universe derives from sense data received in the form of sensations and impressions. Sense data is processed by the mind and cognised as objects and things in the world.

Thus, what we perceive is not physical objects and things as such, but images in the mind constructed from the input supplied by the sensory apparatus. When we look at what we believe to be physical objects and things around us, what we actually witness are not external physical entities but MENTAL PHENOMENA.

Given its nature as a mind-dependent entity, a mental phenomenon can only exist in the mind; it is not possible for a mental phenomenon to exist independently of the mind.

Despite the fact that we instinctively believe in the existence of external physical objects, no one has ever seen a physical object directly. Given that the mind's cognitive apparatus can only process and perceive sensations and impressions – which are mental entities, not physical realities – directly witnessing a physical object is, in fact, impossible.

The belief that the mental phenomena we perceive correspond to objects and things in an outside world has no warrant in fact. The falsity of this assumption can be seen when we examine the nature of dreams.

Whilst asleep we are fully convinced that the objects and things we observe correspond to external entities located in a physical world. Upon waking, however, we quickly recognise the error of this belief. The objects and things we had come into contact with had no external existence: they were merely mental formations generated by our mind. The essence of what we perceive in dreaming and waking is the same. What we perceive in both are mental phenomena and mental phenomena are not physical realities that exist outside the mind. They are psychic entities made of mindstuff.

Since the mental phenomena we perceive in dream do not correspond to independently existing physical entities, there is no logical reason to assume that the mental phenomena we perceive in waking do.

Given that they are of the same essence and nature, the mental phenomena we perceive in waking must be as much a product of the

mind as the mental phenomena we perceive in dream. Our instinctive assumption notwithstanding, they cannot refer to autonomous material bodies.

The truth of this can be better seen by reflection on the fact that an independently existing object has never been witnessed by a human being and that such seeing is actually not within the realm of possibility. Given its nature, all that the mind can ever recognise and attend to is sensations, impressions, thoughts, etc., which are psychic phenomena that are devoid of any physical content.

Our conditioned assumption that our perceptions correspond to physical entities that exist autonomously in an external world constitutes a fundamental error of human cognition.

Objects and things that we perceive are not physical realities that possess their own mode of being, but mental entities whose existence is confined to the mind.

Space

We perceive objects and things in the world as distinct from one another, separated by physically measurable distances of various spans and magnitudes.

We believe that the space in which we see these objects and things extends externally as a three-dimensional expanse that stretches in all directions.

Scientists call this expanse physical space. It is defined as ‘a boundless three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction’.

This physical space is contrasted with an abstract space, also called a mathematical space, which is referred to as a ‘conception, the result of a mental construction’.

In contrast to abstract space, physical space is said to exist independently of the mind as an autonomous reality that exists regardless of human perception of it.

This view, however, is demonstrably false. Since objects and things are mental phenomena, the space in which we perceive them must also exist in the mind only.

Let us restate this crucial point: Mental objects cannot exist in an external physical space which would exist outside and independently of the mind. Such a thing is not possible.

To assume that mental objects can have their being in an external physical space constitutes a category error. This assumption contains the false premise that psychic entities can exist in a non-mental environment.

Since all objects and things we encounter are mental phenomena, the space in which they appear must also exist in the mind. In brief, space – like all objects and things we perceive – is also a mental phenomenon. Space does not exist independently or externally of the mind: space is an appearance within the mind. Physical space is fundamentally as much of an abstraction as mathematical space. Both are mental constructs.

Universe

Since the universe consists of a vast conglomeration of things that appear in space – and since, as we have seen, these things as well as space itself are mental phenomena – it follows that the universe is mental in nature.

Since the universe exists in space and since space exists in the mind, so must the universe. The universe, therefore, does not exist as an independent system that extends into physical space, but as an assortment of mental phenomena in the abstract space of the mind.

This conclusion follows inescapably from the recognition that objects and things we perceive are mental phenomena. Having arrived at this point, we are now in a position to see the truth of Sri Ramana's contention that this world is a 'binding concept that is wholly mental'.

Even though it is deeply held, the belief that there is an external physical universe is false. This belief is the result of our conditioned assumption that sensory impressions are generated by objects and things that subsist independently of the mind. Dreams prove the erroneous nature of this belief.

Dream and Waking

In his discourses Sri Ramana would often allude to our experience of dreams when trying to elucidate the nature of reality. We will follow Sri Ramana's lead and spend some time on the subject in order to consolidate our understanding.

In dreams we observe and encounter objects and things which seem to be located in external physical space. While dreaming we are fully convinced that these exist as autonomous physical entities. The world we encounter in dream seems as physically real as this waking state universe.

The instant we awake, however, we recognise that the objects and things we saw in the dream had no independent existence but were generated entirely by our mind. This also holds true for the apparently physical space in which we encountered these objects and things. Upon waking we quickly realise that the whole three-dimensional world, which seemed so completely and assuredly real, was merely a projection of the mind.

The error we commit in dream is this: whilst dreaming we assume that the mental phenomena we encounter are self-existent physical entities that possess an external existence which is independent of the mind.

The mind continues to commit the same error in the waking state. In waking, the mind also perceives only mental phenomena, but it mistakenly assumes – as it does in dream – that they possess their own reality as independently existing material entities.

In both dreaming and waking we do not perceive physical objects that exist independently in an external world but mental phenomena arising in the mind. In the case of dreams this becomes obvious the instant we awaken. In the case of waking, this becomes clear when we investigate the nature of our perception.

Creation

The ‘physical’ objects and things that we see in the apparently external world are in reality mental phenomena.

Mental phenomena exist only as long as they are being perceived by the mind. They continue to exist only insofar as they remain in the mind’s field of awareness. Conversely, mental phenomena go out of existence when the mind ceases to be aware of them.

The mind becomes aware of mental phenomena by perceiving them. Being mental phenomena, the apparently ‘physical’ objects and things thus come into existence through the process of sensed perception. To put it another way, perception is the substratum in which the apparently physical objects and things exist as mental phenomena.

This mechanism can be seen at work in dreams. In dreams things and objects come into existence the moment we perceive them. As long as they are held in perception, they appear to exist. When they cease to be perceived – the moment we awaken – they go out of existence.

As a vast cluster of objects and things in space – all of which are mental phenomena, including space itself – the universe can exist in the mind only. As such, it comes into existence in the process of being perceived.

To restate: Being an assortment of mental phenomena that appear in a space which itself is mental in nature, this universe comes into existence via perception.

Perception is an act of creation. To perceive is to bring into existence.

To be perceived is to exist. Nothing can exist outside of perception. Nor has anything been observed to exist outside of perception. Perception and creation are two sides of the same coin. This can be seen clearly by contemplating the nature of dreams.

The worlds of waking and dream are the same in this fundamental regard: they are mental phenomena and as such subject to the same mechanism of creation and dissolution via perception.

Like the worlds of dreams, this universe is a mental phenomenon that comes into being in the process of being perceived. ▲

Epitaph

Upahar

We rise and fall in Love,
the naked truth our only lineage,
the silent heart our root and last resort;
our moment's shining here a wave of light
on Your eternal waters.

I Wake From Sleep

Nadhia Sutara

I wake from sleep to sleep again
the dreamless sleep of sleeplessness;
Rising from this life of sense
and senselessness,
Emerging into one where Stillness speaks,
and Silence sponges out the dust of ages.

I speak to tell you what I see,
and yet no sound emerges.

I speak without my tongue
in the language of the heart,
and though no sound is heard,
you understand:

Heart speaks to heart,
heart receives heart,
At the pinnacle of our beingness,
where nothing stands between us
for we are not apart.

Within your heart you hear me
singing spring-songs in the Silence
of the place where you have always been
and yet so long to be.

Listen to the Stillness
singing spring-songs endlessly,
And hear me sing my love for you
and of your love for me.

We wake from sleep to sleep again
the dreamless sleep of sages;
Rising from the dream-life of our infancy,
leaving toys and cradles in the nursery,
Emerging into Stillness and accord,
our separateness dissolving with our cages.

SHORT STORY

The Easiest

SHARADA BHANU

“...Of all the methods of attaining realisation this is the easiest. What could be nearer than our own SELF? And to conclude, I would like to end with Bhagavan’s words from *Atma Vidya*: ‘Lo very easy is Self-Knowledge,/Very easy indeed.’”

Saakshi took off the headphone, shut her laptop and took a deep breath. “Yes, of course. Easy. It shouldn’t have taken twenty years and counting...” She had been just fifteen when she had read *A Search in Secret India* and found Bhagavan Ramana. “Been found by...” she corrected herself mentally. “He came for me. And I fell flat and forever. My Guru. *Mine*. But as for Self-Realisation ... it might as well be on the moon. Worse. As distant as the Big Bang. No, worse, receding like the red shift.”¹

She would have liked to sit quietly for a while, turning over the concepts she had encountered but now was not the time. She heard Ranjan come in from the garden with the kids. “Saakshi, is it over? The children seem to be hungry.”

¹ An important term in astronomy. Light from distant galaxies is shifted to longer (this means the redder) wavelengths because the universe is expanding, and the galaxies are moving away, thus receding, from one another.

“All done. And thanks! It was a good talk and I would have missed it if you hadn’t taken over. Sorry you’ve had to pause your work.”

“No reason why you should miss a rare opportunity. I’ll go back to it after the children are asleep. Working from home has its advantages.”

Saakshi observed, “I should have said disadvantages. You now work very late hours.”

She took out the *dosa*² batter and placed the *tawa*³ on the fire.

“Treat,” she called out to her daughter Akshara and son Aditya who, judging by the sounds were having a cushion fight in the drawing room. “It’s dosas for dinner tonight! Dosas!” She knew Ranjan would like some curd rice too. She took out her pressure cooker. It was small and efficient. If she could get the rice going before starting on the dosas...

Ranjan seated himself at the small kitchen table. “Any help?”

“No, I have some chutney in the fridge.” The measuring cup, now, where was it? Not inside the rice tin. Or anywhere near it.

“Who was the speaker,” asked Ranjan.

“It was... will you believe it, I’ve forgotten his name. A foreigner. From Peru.”

“Naturally. We are doomed to get instructed in our own religion by Phoren polymaths.”

Saakshi shrugged. “Well, as I’m a zero in both Sanskrit and literary Tamil I am grateful to anyone who can shed some light.” No, the cup wasn’t inside the lentil container, either. The water in the cooker was steaming away. She hastily reduced heat and returned to the shelf.

“What are you looking for?”

“Measuring cup. Rice.”

“Shut your eyes.”

“What? Oh Ranjan, don’t fool around.”

“Abracadabra. Here it is.” He released her head from the crook of his elbow and handed the object with a flourish.

Saakshi stared. “Okay, where was it? Did you hide it? The kids are hungry; really, Ranjan.”

² A popular savoury dish, cooked in different styles, which may be served as a snack, part of a meal or a complete meal in itself.

³ Metal griddle on which *dosas* are cooked.

“Now, love, why try to blame me simply because you couldn’t see it? It was right here in front of the gas stove.”

“Pah. Amazing how these things sometimes HIDE.”

“Saakshi, you miss the obvious. Every time.” She snorted in disbelief, grabbed the cup, poured a dosa, measured rice and loaded the cooker in what she hoped was amazing speed and synchronicity. Controlling her exasperation at herself, she cooked. Okay, she had lost a few minutes looking for what was right under her nose. It wasn’t a big deal. Chill, woman, chill.

“Amma,⁴ I won! I caught the cushion four times! Akka⁵ only caught three!”

“You’re wonderful, pet. Now wash your hands.” She served them both, gave little Aditya a hug and blew a kiss to Akshara who was smiling meaningfully. An indulgent sister, she usually let him win.

They were tired after their play with their father in the garden and she found it quite easy to get them into bed after dinner.

“It’s Amma’s turn to read to me!” Akshara could read competently but both children loved story time and she and Ranjan took them in turns. Ranjan pulled out Aditya’s cot which rested neatly under Akshara’s and settled himself beside his son. Aditya liked the stories his father made up, improvising as he went along.

Akshara, now nine, liked fantasy. She produced C S Lewis’s *The Silver Chair* and found the page where her father had stopped. Saakshi had read it, but long ago as a teen and she found that the story again absorbed her. Two children, accompanied by a creature called a Marshwiggles, were searching for the lost prince of Narnia. They had been told by the Lion, a being simultaneously animal, human and divine, both God and Guru in this world, that they would be guided on their quest by signs which they had to memorize and look out for. They had already missed the first sign. Now they had to spot the ruined city of the giants and find writing on a stone. The children were very tired, cold and hungry. They were focused not on the quest, or on the clues, but on getting to shelter, hot baths, food and rest. So they failed to recognize the ruined city, and missed seeing

⁴ Mother.

⁵ Elder sister.

giant letters which spelt the words “UNDER ME”. Only when they were prisoners in a giant castle, did they look out of the window and now saw from a distance that the flat table top mountain they were struggling on the previous day was actually an ancient fallen city and there was this clearly legible message, spelt out in large letters. They further realized that they had actually stumbled into the huge letters which were carved on the rocky ground, while they had been walking along the bleak landscape of the ruined city. Yet they had missed noting this vital sign altogether.

“But if the letters are so large, how do they miss them Amma,” asked Akshara.

“Well one reason is that they are too large,” said Saakshi. “Do you remember when we played ‘Spot the Place’ on the India map? When I set a town like ‘Salem,’ you found it, even though the letters were quite small. But when I set ‘Himalayas’ you didn’t find it because it was in very large letters, right across the whole range.”

“I wasn’t looking for large letters at all. You tricked me Amma,” complained Akshara.

“But I never told you that the letters would be small, Akshara. You thought they would be small because the first few words were all in medium or small type. When you don’t know anything about the object for which you have to look, you have to keep an open mind and look at everything, both large and small.”

There was a pause. “Amma, the children were too close to the letters. How can you think ‘this is actually an “E”’ when you are falling into a pit?”

“That’s smart of you, *kanna*.⁶ Yes, they were too close to read. The lion set them a hard task. Did he warn them it would be hard?”

“Yes, he did.”

“And they agreed, didn’t they, that they would do it?”

“Yes. But he brought them into this world of Narnia only to do this task, Amma. So they had to do it.”

You have a point there, thought Saakshi.

“Were they concentrating on the signs when they were struggling in the wind and snow?”

⁶ A term of endearment: ‘love’.

“No, Amma they were thinking... about food and a hot bath.”

“If you were there, what would you have thought about,” asked Saakshi.

“*Dosas*. No, onion *bujjis*.”⁷

They both laughed and Akshara turned on her side and shut her eyes. When she drifted off to sleep, Saakshi tucked her in. Aditya was still wide awake, enthralled by a tale of a mouse whose life seemed to be very like his own. He was not a good sleeper. She switched the light off and slipped off quietly to her bedroom.

The night was cool and the peaceful darkness flooded the room. No traffic on the road at all, thanks to the lockdown. Ranjan would go back to work once Aditya was settled. She had this time to herself.

Her bed was against the wall, like Akshara’s. She sat cross-legged, resting against the wall, drinking silence, even as she followed a train of thought. “Obvious, that much was plain. Hidden only by being too large, immense. Containing the universe. Universes. And too close... Like an ant crawling over a page. Impossible to read the words. Even if the ant wasn’t in survival mode. Even if it wasn’t searching for food. Even if not focused on the body and creature comforts. ‘The Self is not an object, it is the subject.’ Nothing is closer than the Self.”

Silence seeped in, through the pores of her tired body. As it sometimes did, meditation happened without effort. Now she was the silence.

When Ranjan came in, she opened her eyes. “Good God. What’s the time?”

“Past midnight. Time to rest, surely? Found the Self, yet,” he inquired, with the urbane irony which sometimes irritated her.

“Fat chance. I’ve been asleep.”

“*Sushupti*.⁸ Next best thing, right? Saakshi, give it a rest.”

“Oh, IT is in rest. Me, I don’t know. Yes, of course, I’m turning in. Were you working all this while?” She settled her head on the pillow, as he sat down.

⁷ Fritters. Deep-fried onion rings coated in batter.

⁸ Deep dreamless sleep, the third of the four states of consciousness and considered superior to the first two, the waking and dream states. It may herald or precede transcendental consciousness, the fourth state.

“Yes. No, I was also looking over the details of this insurance policy I’m taking. I told you.”

“Ranjan, why are you plunging into this? You were never very keen on large insurance policies...”

“Love in the time of corona. Sweetheart, your school teaching job pays next to nothing. If anything happens to me...you shouldn’t be stuck with the house loan. You’ll have the kids’ future to think of.”

She miserably put her arms around him. “Ranjan, just shut up. NOTHING is going to happen to you. Or me. Or the kids.”

“PROTEGO.⁹ Hermione Granger¹⁰ has cast her spells and this house is sacred space, right? And we won’t think of big, bad COVID-E Mort¹¹ creeping in.”

“We certainly won’t. And it’s not me, nutcase. Bhagavan has us all under His protection.”

A small body was climbing over Ranjan trying to reach the safe space between. They had forgotten to keep their voices down.

“Amma. I’m not sleepy.”

Ranjan glanced over his shoulder. “Welcome to the club. Your Amma isn’t sleeping either.”

“What is she doing, Appa?”¹²

“She’s searching for herself, Adit. You know, like hide and seek.” Aditya successfully completed his crawl over Ranjan and hurled himself on Saakshi. “Amma! I found you! You’re not lost! You’re here. See, you’re here.”

Laughing helplessly, Saakshi hugged him. “Wow, you clever boy, Adit.”

“It was easy, Amma. You weren’t hiding. You are Here.”

It was sometime before they all stopped laughing.

Ranjan was still smiling as she patted Aditya, now obligingly ready to sleep. He said, “I thought Akshara was the bright one.”

⁹ A shield spell used in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter novels for protecting oneself.

¹⁰ One of the central characters in these novels. A brilliant young witch.

¹¹ A covert reference to Voldemort, an evil wizard guilty of many murders and chief antagonist to Harry Potter in the series. His name can be translated as ‘flight from death’ or ‘theft of death’ and he is so frightening that people refer to him as He Who Must Not Be Named.

¹² Father.

“So she is.”

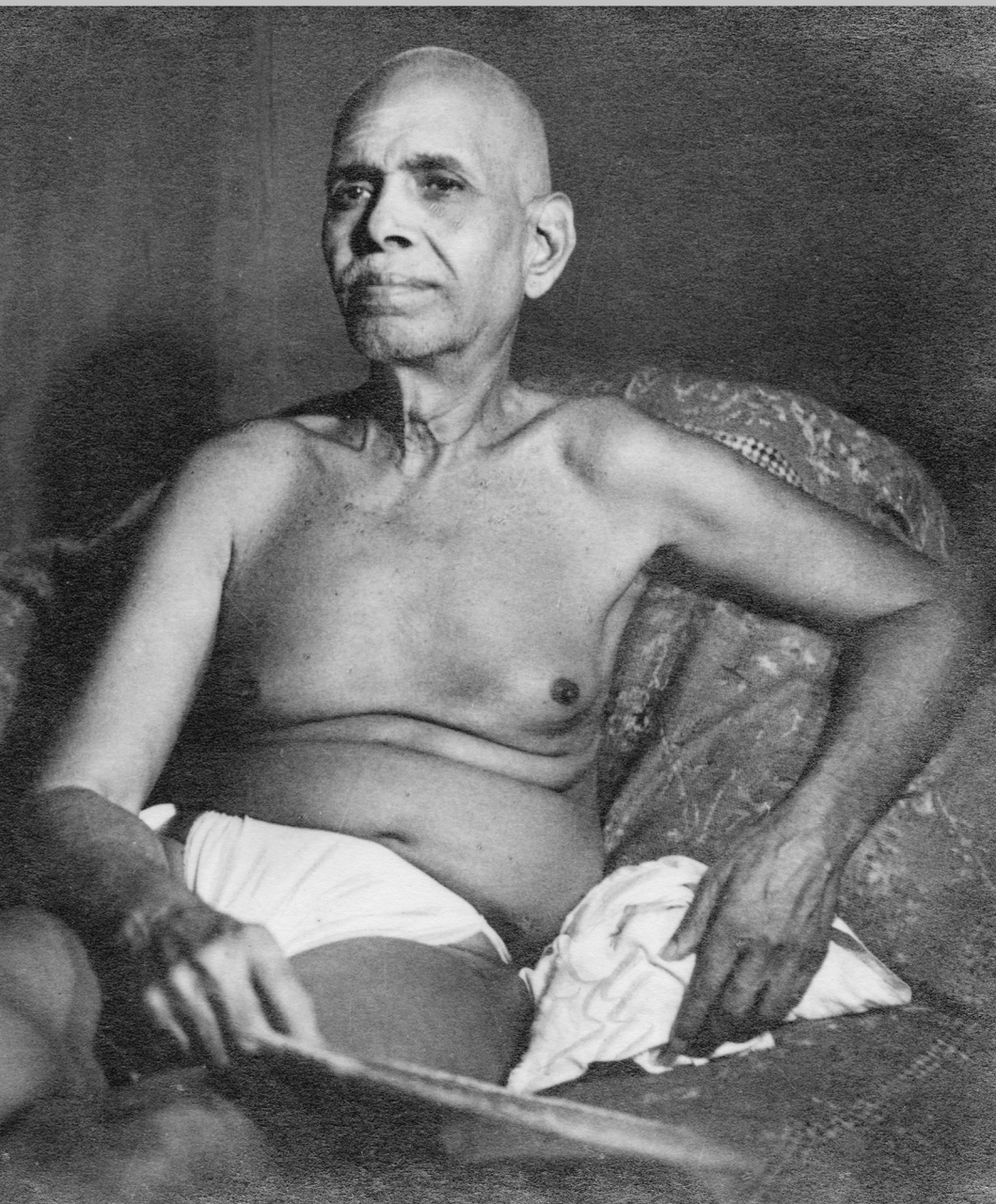
“No, no. This chap beats all. Any guy who can complete your twenty-year odyssey for you in five seconds flat is clearly genius level. And he’s snuggled up to a very pretty woman, neatly eliminating the competition. Yoga *and* Bhoga. Have to hand it to this fella.”

As always, she would be the last one to sleep. This was the time to admit to herself that she was humbly grateful. “Thank you Bhagavan. Thank you.” Saakshi stroked Aditya’s head. “And thank you, my baby. If only it were that simple. I am not my body of course. But thank you. It’s very good being found by you.

Thank you Ranjan, for love in the time of corona. Though how you imagine your insurance policy will at all make up for your absence if you are gone...And what policy can I take? How will you manage if I go? You will have to cope with the kids’ *present*, not their problematic future. When the breadwinner goes it’s bad. When the caregiver goes it’s devastating, right? How can you even entertain the possibility? Covid...Death, was the Inadmissible. Wash your hands. You had to trust Bhagavan and seal off your space, your body, your thoughts. Protego. That was the only way. Wear the mask, sweetheart. You can act, can’t you.”

But Voldemort flew on air and breached her thoughts. Coldly she re-imagined the scene. If she were dead and they released her body and that was Saakshi lying there would Aditya still have ‘found’ her? The simple impossibility of this twisted inside her with terrible force. She looked down amazed at her own body. Body. Just a body. The kids knew better. She touched Aditya’s head again, with wonder. “You knew. You found me, not my body. Everyone knows. As always, I am the last.” She saluted the *jñāna*, now radiant in every single person in her life. Immortal.

And then, at last, she acknowledged, *I am here.* ▲



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

The Buck Stops Here

SANJAY RAGHAV

My coming to Bhagavan's feet was not a mere coincidence but was divine planning to help me to reach my heart, the seat of Bhagavan.

I was born in a family where spiritual practices were part of a daily routine. However, an intense yearning to know or experience God came during my college days. I read various spiritual texts and followed various paths and sects. This all led to mental purification and some blissful experiences.

In July 2015 in the span of a couple of days people from different walks of life met me and advised me to look through Bhagavan's teachings and visit Sri Ramanasramam. This led me to read and watch information/videos available on the internet.

An opportunity came when I attended a neurology conference in Chennai in January 2016. On this trip I visited Sri Ramanasramam for

Dr. Sanjay Raghav belongs to the Melbourne Ramana Centre which is based at his clinic, the Dandenong Neurology, 136 David Street, Dandenong 3175 VIC, Australia. Ph: 611438697150; Email: drsanjayraghav@gmail.com

the first time. The most striking thing I saw as I entered the Ashram was a 400-year-old *iluppai* tree. This tree is blessed to have seen Sri Bhagavan and is a witness to everything happening in the Ashram even today. This realisation filled me with reverence for this divine tree. My attention was caught by the Sri Chakra Yantra in the sanctum sanctorum of the Matrubhuteshwara temple at Sri Ramanasramam. It is worshipped regularly since its installation by Sri Bhagavan in 1949. Mother's Temple and the Sri Chakra Yantra are symbolic of Sakti, who is the divine feminine consort of Siva. One thing which caught my ears was the chanting of the refrain "Ramana Sadguru - Ramana Sadguru - Ramana Sadguru – Rayane!" by a devotee who was distributing *prasad* in front of the ashram *puja* well. This left me chanting it even after coming back from the Ashram.

On the 7th of January 2016 I did *giripradakṣiṇā* (circumambulation of the Hill) starting around 4.30 am. It was still dark when I started, at a constant but slow pace. Probably thirty minutes after I had started walking, suddenly my head turned to my right towards Arunachala Hill. I was amazed to see that the whole of the Hill had taken the form of Lord Siva with the crescent moon on his head. I bowed in reverence and this experience made me feel overjoyed and blessed. Walking on the Hill was another amazing experience. I went up to the top of the Hill where a fire is lit during the Deepam festival. It was not a planned trip to the peak. I went to visit Skanda Ashram in the early morning but when I reached there, I found it closed. I thought of waiting there until it opened and asked a local woman where else I could visit. She suggested that I could continue my climb to the peak of the Hill. I was a bit apprehensive, seeing so many monkeys around and no proper path.

However, she pointed out that there were arrows showing the path painted on the boulders and rocks. It must have taken me a couple of hours to reach the top but it was certainly worth the effort. To stand at the summit was an amazing experience, with divine energy embracing one from all directions. I met a French devotee who had been staying in Tiruvannamalai for the last three months and who had been climbing up to the top every day. He himself was amazed by his ability to climb the Hill, as he was not a fitness freak. Just before reaching the summit I met a young man who was sitting in a small

shack which he used to visit every day. He offered me tea in a coconut shell. His guru used to live there, but now had moved to Puducherry.

When you visit Skanda Ashram, Virupaksha Cave and the Arunachala temple and when sitting in the meditation hall or just being there, you can feel Bhagavan's presence everywhere. Once you visit the Ashram you are eternally bound to Arunachala, which brings you back again and again.

My next visit came in July 2017, when I came to the Ashram with my wife and two sons. While we were at Delhi airport, I sprained my back and had excruciating pain. This pain continued during my travel to Tiruvannamalai. We were to stay at the Ashram for 2 nights and I had planned to do *giri pradakṣiṇā* in the early morning. I had no clue how I was going to do it, as I was not even able to walk upright. I went to bed early in order to get up at 4 am and to my surprise there was no pain at all when I woke up. It was all Bhagavan's grace.

I believe that when a seeker becomes 'ripe' through various practices and *sādhana*-s she/he comes to Sri Bhagavan for the final assault on the ego. The buck stops here, when you are at Sri Ramanasramam!

My life changed and things started happening on their own even without my efforts while I was trying to be in self-abidance. Both material and divine help came with His Grace. It was my experience that when my sense of doership was gone, with complete surrender, my life unfolded in the best possible way with least effort.

Many people think that unless you find a living master you cannot be in self-abidance. I would like to say what Sri Sadhu Om said, "Only the Master is living, while the rest are dead!" Bhagavan said umpteen times to his devotees that he was not the body so that when he left the body he didn't go anywhere. I think he is now helping us more intensely and more widely than while he was in his bodily form. His grace is ever flowing to all of us. We need to fine-tune ourselves to his frequency. We need to become worthy to receive his grace.

All his help comes to your doorstep even without your asking. He knows what is best for you and so complete surrender to him is the best recourse. Such surrender takes away our worries as well.

Over the years Bhagavan has caused several of his ardent devotees to cross my path. They have helped me on my spiritual path in many

ways. I have received books, the *Mountain Path* journal, pictures, audio books and other inspiring resources over the course of time. Needless to say, their combined guidance has helped me in my practice of Self Inquiry.

In January 2018 I attended the Ramana Jayanti celebration in Sydney. This was a good opportunity to meet other Bhagavan devotees in Australia. With the help of the Sydney Centre and the blessings of Sri Ramanasramam we started Bhagavan Satsangs in Melbourne from 2019. Almost every day I meet or talk with seekers of the Truth, with whom I share Bhagavan's teachings with unconditional love. His ocean of bliss is infinite and as you dive into it, the joy of bliss gets deeper and deeper.

A tree is known by its fruit. This is very true of Bhagavan's devotees, who are the fruits of the tree called Ramana. I have come across many devotees who abide in the Self. When meditating with them one feels the presence of Bhagavan. In Self-abidance everyone is part of us. All seekers of truth are dear to Bhagavan. We can help each other to get established in the peace and joy of the Self by applying the teachings of Bhagavan in our daily lives. This community is slowly growing around us as an extended family, it is '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' ('The whole world is one family') made manifest.

A visit to the Ashram and Arunachala greatly speeds up our spiritual progress. The most important thing in daily practice is paying attention to the feeling of awareness which is the unchanging witness of all events. We should regularly contemplate in solitude to cultivate peace and then preserve our peaceful awareness throughout the day. Other things which can help our practice are *sattvic* food (a simple diet based on seasonal fruits, lentils and vegetables), spending time in nature, a rock from the holy Arunachala Hill as a constant companion and photos of Bhagavan. All things are his ever flowing grace.

Offered at the lotus feet of my Guru, Sri Bhagavan:

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya.

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti! 

Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Chapter Four

The Lord Gifts Bags of Gold Coins to Namdev

NABAJI SIDDHA

“Listen, O Siddhas!” continued Nabhaji to the eager devotees who were listening to the account of Namdev with rapt attention and great reverence.

“The Lord, the righteousness-incarnate (in the guise of the Brahmin) addressed a few words to Nama after the marriage ceremony was over:

“O supreme devotee! Of the different kinds of charity such as food, clothing, gold, knowledge, virgin girl (given in marriage), land and cow, the meritorious deed of giving food is of highest value. Though imparting Knowledge is of eternal value, he who offers food to the supreme devotees of the Lord will encounter no obstruction in his path of *sādhana* oriented to attaining immortality.

“I give you an example of the secret and supremacy of this charity of food. Towards the end of the Mahabharata war, though Karna was losing in the battle, he still remained invincible on account of the merits of his charity. Lord Krishna, in order to deplete this source

of strength of *punya* or merit, assuming the guise of a Brahmin approached Karna for charity. Karna pleaded helplessness as he had nothing more with him to give except his life which he was ready to offer at the feet of the Brahmin. The Lord in disguise said that he had no need for his life, but He asked him to make over all his *Punya* which alone travels with the soul after death and secures a place in Heaven. Karna acquiesced to this demand readily. But before performing the formal act of charity, Karna said that he was tired and thirsty and wanted some water to drink. When the Brahmin poured water from his water-pot into Karna's palms, the water turned into gold again and again. Karna was assailed by fatigue and thirst and asked desperately why the water was turning into gold. Then the Brahmin asked Karna whether he had given any food in charity during his lifetime. Karna said that he had always donated only gold, jewellery and such precious treasures. The Brahmin replied that he was therefore not destined to get any item of food or drink, as there was no such merit in his store to draw from.

“Suddenly, Karna remembered an incident. When a Brahmin came to him for food, he had directed him with his index finger to Yudishtira who was distributing alms food. On hearing this, the Lord in disguise told him to suck at his index finger. When Karna did this, a tiny spout of water sprang from that finger, by which his thirst was quenched. Thereafter, in a ritualistic way, he poured water and donated all his *Punya*. The Lord then revealed His true form which delighted Karna's heart.”

“Further, O Nama,” continued the Brahmin, “the scriptures declare that the Dharma of austerity is the ornament for a *sannyāsi*, while Dharma of charity is the ornament for householders. The self-oblivious *Brahma-jñāni*-s and supreme devotees of the Lord wish for nothing even in their dreams and they need nothing but a few morsels of food till the body completes its *Prarabda*, and those who provide this food are blessed indeed! So you should perform this Dharma of *annadanam* (alms-food), the feeding of the *sādhu*-s and the needy and thereby uplift your family.”

With these words of nectar, the Lord left the scene.

These parting words of the Brahmin made a deep impression on Namdev and he earnestly followed this Dharma of feeding *sādhu*-s and the needy liberally with his limited means. This led to greater

poverty and hard times. But this did not deter him, though he was in the throes of poverty. He surrendered his lot more and more to the Lord, longing to belong ever more and more to Him. He spent most of his time in the temple, worshipping the Lord, wearing joyfully the *tulsi* garland previously worn by the Deity, singing hymns or remaining in total absorption. His parents, even in their old age, continued to sew clothes to earn money so that their daily offering of food could be taken to the Lord without fail.

One day, they didn't have any grains at home to prepare the food and they couldn't bring themselves to borrow money or grains from anyone. With sorrow in their hearts they reached the temple and complained to the Lord, "O Master, our poverty has prevented us from bringing any food for you or Nama. How can our only child be put to starvation?"

On the other hand Namdev was pained to see his aged parents going through such a struggle to do their parental duty. He said, "O dear ones! Where is the need to feed me and Panduranga when there is no wherewithal in the house?" While his heart melted at their love and devotion, his parents remained inconsolable about their son going hungry. Soon, forgetting his hunger, Namdev absorbed himself in singing the praises of the Lord and his parents returned home.

At that moment, the Lord, in the form of a servant, with his Garuda turned into a bull, and with a large sackful of gold coins placed on this bull, reached Damaset's house. He called out loudly to Namdev. When Gunabai, Namdev's elderly mother, came out, He said, "O mother, I have come from a very long distance. I have some work with Namdev. Ooh...O God! Am I thirsty and tired!" Gunabai took him for a guest who was certainly unwanted. She thought, "Having come from a distant place, he will certainly expect to be fed by us. He might require some feed for the bull also. But we have nothing left in the household." She wanted to discourage him from waiting for her son. So she said in a firm voice, "Whatever your business with my son is, he has gone elsewhere. We don't know when he will return. You need not wait for him."

The servant replied, "O mother! Why don't you come out? I have travelled a long distance in the hot sun. Can't you at least offer me some water to quench my thirst? Instead you are speaking to me in

a severe tone. Is this the way to treat a visitor? Have I come here expecting to be treated to a feast in your house? You may be poor. There is no deadlier disease than poverty. But why are you also poor in common courtesy? I would not step into such a rude household for anything. But I have to obey my master's instructions and wait here till Namdev's arrival."

Saying this, the servant sat down on the front doorstep. Now and then he grumbled in a low voice about his fatigue. This behaviour of the servant irritated Gunabai. "Why are you sitting on the threshold as if you are a moneylender who has come to collect his dues forcibly?" "O God! These people are so uncultured! Poverty is one thing, kindness is another thing. These folks are poor in both money and virtue!" With these mutterings, the servant made himself more comfortable on the step as if he was prepared to wait till eternity! His audacity infuriated Gunabai. However, calming herself, she told him, "If you are very tired and thirsty, there is a well nearby. You can go and quench your thirst."

The servant laughed loudly, "I asked you only for water and you are directing me to a well. I am sure you have not done enough meritorious acts to offer me even water. O barren woman! It is but natural that you have no maternal instincts of kindness or tenderness. How can your inhospitable attitude invite auspicious wealth into your household? No wonder you remain poor!"

Damaseth, who was inside, was dumbfounded to hear these rude words. He became furious at the arrogance of this servant and bawled, "You haughty fellow! You don't know your place. You are a mere passerby. What audacity you have to come to our house and insult us! Leave right now or else I will collect the neighbours to beat you to a pulp and teach you a lesson."

But the haughty servant replied, "O old man! You are not any less lacking in good manners. Is it for this kind of treatment that I volunteered to come to your aid? I can make mincemeat of you both in a trice, but for my regard for Namdev! Is it for this miserly wretched pair that Kesava Saukar sent all these grains and gold? Even if I get killed I will not give the bag of gold coins to these wretches!" He got up and patted the bull as a sign for it to leave, and in that process he deliberately made a few coins drop to the ground.

Having realised the situation, the couple came rushing to the servant and pleaded, “O son, on account of our poverty, old age and many days of starvation and exhaustion, we had forgotten all our good behaviour and hospitality. We have behaved abominably with you. Please forgive our lapses and give us whatever you have brought for us!”

The servant ridiculed them, saying, “O neighbours! Come and see how they have changed their colour on seeing the gold! Their hospitality is for the money and not for me. If any thirsty or hungry man comes to their door, he will surely die of thirst or starvation; for, they will not stretch out their hands to give him even a glass of water. It is in challenging times that one’s Dharma is put on trial. The charity of a man, the loyalty of a friend and the faithfulness of a wife are proved under trying circumstances. These people, known for their righteous ways, when faced with poverty couldn’t come forward to quench a man’s thirst and keep up their righteous ways. On the contrary, they abused someone who had come to help them! Those who practise charity in times of poverty, humility while in authority, fortitude in trying times and cheerfulness in humbling conditions are alone noble and the crown jewels among men. Those women who stand by their husbands, steadfast in chastity against threat, patient when the husband is angry, and eager to serve their guests, are the most exalted among women.

“While these are the norms of righteous behaviour, I wonder how this couple came to be called noble in this town! From this one occasion, I have come to know what hard-hearted people they actually are, just as a single grain of rice from the cooking pot is the measure of the degree to which all the rice in the pot has been cooked.” He again patted the back of the bull to get it moving. Blocking his way, the old couple appealed to him again, “O man of noble conduct! Please bear with our misbehaviour! Poverty has made us blind. We are indeed sinners to treat you so dishonourably. But please don’t hold it against us!”

But the servant was adamant. He said, “O neighbours, you are the witnesses to their pretentious words. Earlier they pulled at my hair, now they lick my feet! They are such lowly people and would stoop to anything to suit their purpose! They are so greedy that they will sell their honour for money.” He turned his back on them insolently.

Damaseth came to face him and said, “We beg you to relent a little! Don’t be so harsh with us! You have seen with your own eyes the state of our poverty. Please take pity on us and come into the house. Redeem us from this abject poverty.” They cajoled him and brought him into the house and seated him. After offering him water, they asked, “You are a young man, so you can’t know or understand the combined grief of our old age and poverty. How long has your master Kesava known our son Nama? While he has sent you as a servant to hand over all this to Namdev, why have you been acting so insolently towards us?”

When Damaseth rushed to lift the sack down, it fell because of its own weight, scattering several gold coins on the floor. Seeing so much wealth, Damaseth’s heart turned at once to the Lord in gratitude. He started singing hymns on Him. This melted the heart of the Lord disguised as the servant. He said, “This gift is from Kesava Saukar, a resident of Vaikuntapuram who has known Namdev even as a child. He has sent a large sack in which he has packed ten bags, each bag containing ten thousand gold coins. You must also count and check the total number of coins. Now I am going to the river Chandrabhaga to take a dip and to bathe my bull. Then I will go to the temple and meet with Namdev there.”

After he left, they counted the coins and hurriedly purchased a few groceries and made food preparations of six different tastes for the Lord. They also bought beautiful clothes for Namdev and his wife. They asked Namdev’s wife to wear her new clothes and sent their offering with her, along with the new clothes for Nama, who was, as usual, in the temple, day and night.

Being decked with new garments and jewellery, Rajabai looked as pretty as a celestial damsel. Her joyful walk and cheerful face added to her charm. When she reached the courtyard of the temple, she found her husband in a self-forgetful state, singing and dancing. Going near him, she called to him several times, trying to bring him back to external consciousness, “O Swami, I have brought the *naivedyam* (food offering to the deity) for the Lord. Are you much afflicted by hunger? Is that why you have lost yourself in singing and dancing? Please open your eyes, and please perform the ritual of bathing and decorating the Deity and then please worship the Lord and offer this food to Him.”

THE LORD GIFTS BAGS OF GOLD COINS TO NAMDEV

Regaining his awareness of the outer world, Namdev's eyes fell on his wife. With a surprised look he asked, "O lady, you are decked in silk and jewels! Where did you get them from? How did you get such a variety of delicacies and fruits? Tell me quickly."

"O Swami, it is your childhood friend Kesava Saukar who sent bagfuls of gold coins for you on a bull through a servant. The servant was very disappointed not to find you at home. He left us quite a while back to come to meet you in the temple! Hasn't he come here yet?" Namdev realized that it must be Lord Panduranga who was behind all this. He became speechless with deep feelings of love and gratitude and stood motionless for a long time with tears streaming down his cheeks. Then, becoming aware of his duty, he put on the clean clothes after a bath and taking the plate of *naivedyam* entered the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Lord. With joy welling up in his heart, he placed the food before the Lord and with great love beckoned the Lord to partake of the food. Lord Panduranga, manifesting out of the stone, asked Nama innocently, "O Nama, you appear very happy today!"

"O Lord! What kind of play-acting is this that you approached my parents disguised as a servant?" asked Namdev with a flood of tears pouring from his eyes.

"O dear Nama! How many years you have been a watchman in my courtyard and a servant feeding me! I had completely forgotten to recompense you for all your services. Don't be upset. You must collect your wages from Me now and then and live your life without hardship. Now, pay attention to Me and feed Me properly and lovingly!" chided the Lord playfully. Then, He continued, "Hereafter, spend your daytimes with Me and stay at home at night."

Thereafter, Namdev's days started with the Lord and ended with Him. Whenever thoughts of His compassionate acts overwhelmed him, tears would flood his eyes. He would be overpowered by emotion and remain absorbed in His love for hours. He followed the practice advised by the Lord, of being in the temple during the day and staying at home with his family at night. Wherever he stayed and whatever the situation, his mind was always immersed in incessant remembrance of his Beloved Vittal. ▲

(To be continued)



D. Thiyagarajan

The Ashram old gentlemen's guest room

Clinging to the Feet of the Lord

The Avirodha Undiyar and Vairagya Catakam of Tavattiru Santhalinga Adigal

ROBERT BUTLER

'To whatever religion they belong, whatever practice they adopt, it will be acceptable to us if the ego awareness is lost.'
Thus, like a great elephant in triple musth, the pure one in grace avowed, as the proponents of other faiths their heads in shame bowed, that warrior who with the fullness of jñāna was perfectly endowed.

Thus does the author of the *Pulavar Puranam*, Dandapani Swamigal, sing the praises of one Santhalinga Swamigal, who was initiated into the Virasaiva branch of the Saivite faith by his guru, Adi Sivaprakasa of Tiruvannamalai. This took place in the latter half of the 17th century. Santhalinga, unlike his guru, Adi Sivaprakasa, and his direct disciple, Kumara Devar, was not at all prolific and left us only four texts, none of them very extensive. But their influence

Robert Butler has been a devotee of Sri Ramana for 40 years. He has published, independently and through Sri Ramanasramam, a number of translations and commentaries on works by Sri Ramana, Muruganar and earlier authors of works in the Tamil advaita tradition. Translations by him, including *Ozhivl Odukkam* and *Sonasaiai Malai*, have been serialised in previous editions of the *Mountain Path*.

over the centuries, in Tamil Nadu and beyond, greatly outweighs that of the works of many of his contemporaries. We might point to our own Bhagavan Sri Ramana as another such instance of an author of works in which the weight of truth far outweighs the weight of words. Nor is this the only parallel that might be drawn between the two, as this article, one hopes, will make apparent.

The encomium by Dandapani Swamigal was prompted by one of these four works, the *Avirodha Undiyar*, which argues forcefully that all faiths, in terms of their essence and final goal, are in harmony with each other. Putting in mind of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, v. 2, Santhalinga declares in verses 41 and 47:

All religions are agreed in postulating three primal entities – god, the soul (*jīva*) and the worldly bond. However each holds a different opinion [as to their nature and relationship].

Beyond postulating the existence of the three primal entities, it is not possible to come to any definitive conclusion [as to the exact relationship between them]. This is because the mind itself is that bond.

Thus, Santhalinga establishes that the mind, that is to say, the body based ego-mind, is at the heart of all religious conflict, since all its elaborate speculation regarding the nature of reality is simply a part of the very illusion which masks that reality, and therefore all its theorising will be endless and contradictory, being based purely on imagination. The only recourse therefore is to bring about the destruction of the mind. Santhalinga continues in verses 49 and 62:

He who would cut away worldly bondage will practise the extinction of the mind (*manolaya sādhakam*). This is the means by which the Supreme will manifest.

Submerge the mind so that it does not stir and rise again. Should it stir, you should kill it there and then. Thus will the ghost-mind be slain.

Here again we are reminded of the *pēy agandai* – *ego ghost* in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, which can only be slain by focussing without a break on its source through the process of *ātma-vicāra*, self-enquiry, which Sri Ramana characterises in *Upadēsa Undiyār*, v. 7 as *āru ney viḷcci pōl, viṭṭiḍādu unṇal* – *meditating without a break like a river or the flow of ghee*. The final term of this practice of submerging the

mind so that it does not stir is the mind's permanent, irreversible, extinction. This state is evoked in verses 64 and 67:

Thus should you sleep ceaselessly in pure consciousness alone, free of the ignorance of conditioned awareness. [In this state] the Supreme Reality will become manifest to you.

In the consciousness in which the 'I' has died, how might I speak of the liberation which 'I' have attained. Even the Four Vedas cannot describe it.

Sri Ramana speaks of this state as 'sleeping' in pure consciousness in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§609.

That is the state of the *jnani*. It is neither sleep nor waking but intermediate between the two. There is the awareness of the waking state and the stillness of sleep. It is called *jagrat sushupti*.... Go to the root of thoughts and you reach the stillness of sleep. But you reach it in the full vigour of search, that is, with perfect awareness.

Thus the ending of the ego-mind, the *jīva* or personal self, which falsely perceives itself as inhabiting a body within a world exterior to itself, is, declares Santhalinga, the means for resolving all conflicts between opposing religious beliefs, along with all other conflicts. The question now arises, of course, of how this state is to be brought about. The ego-mind, as we know, is not one to be easily vanquished.

The next work we shall talk about, *Vairagya Catakam*, devotes the first half-century of its 100 verses to addressing this very question, and does so, we may add, in a rather novel manner.

In these first 50 verses, entitled *cāttiram – sastra, teachings*, the discriminating faculty, to which the author of the commentary, Chidambara Swamigal, gives the name *vivēkam*, is addressing the mind, upbraiding it and telling it that it alone is the reason why both of them are unable to gain the realisation they both seek. By 'discriminating faculty' we mean the unmoving Self, reflected in consciousness as the witness, the unmoving 'screen' upon which the drama of the mind and senses, the 'external world' plays out. *Vairākkiam*, Sanskrit *vairāgya*, is the discipline of remaining purely as the witness of the body-mind complex, cultivating an identity with the underlying reality, Brahman, the Self and remaining detached from

and indifferent to the experiences of the body-bound ego-mind, the *jīva*. It is the *vivēkam* alone which speaks in these verses but there is an implied dialogue between the two, with *vivēkam* successively demolishing the mind's supposed assertions and counter arguments. Chidambara Swamigal, who was the disciple of Santhalinga's own disciple, Kumara Devar, and who composed the commentary at Santhalinga's own request, structures his prose commentary as a dialogue in which the mind's part in that conversation, its assertions and counter arguments, are overtly laid out. In his Preamble to the work, Chidambara Swamigal explains as follows:

Examining what it is that the mind grasps to subsist and rise up and identifying each of its attachments as such and such, *vivēkam* addresses the mind in the second person, in order to remove all those attachments from it and to bring it under its sway. Thus this work is narrated from the point of view of that discriminating faculty, *vivēkam*.

Addresses to the mind, or heart, are not rare in Tamil literature, both in the secular realm of *Agam* love poetry and in the outpourings of the later *bhakti* saints, but here there is imagined to be a dramatic dialogue going on between the discriminating faculty and the mind, rather than a one-sided address. As mentioned previously, the mind's side of the dialogue is not given in the text itself, but only in the commentary. Therefore in the forthcoming serialisation in the *Mountain Path*, an Argument has been prefaced to a number of the verses, to give the gist of what the author of the commentary supposes to be the mind's side of the dialogue.

So, we must ask, what is it that *vivēkam* says to convince the mind to consent to and contrive its own annihilation. It begins by telling the mind that it must consent to abandon its attachments, which it lists as *uravu* – relations and friends, *porul* – possessions, *cukam* – happiness, pleasure, *iḍam* – land, property and *pugal* – fame, praise. Then, after a few more verses containing salutary warnings about the fleetingness of human existence and dangers of procrastination, we read in verse 15:

O Mind! apart from those who never leave Him who is the body's beginning and end, it is difficult indeed for all others to escape cruel Death. The son of matchless Mrikandu [Markandeya] bears

testimony to these words. Therefore do not fear. We do not know if this very moment is the moment when the body will meet its end. Accordingly, cling tightly each day to the feet of the Lord, regarding them as our refuge. Thus may we too curb the might of Death.

Three hundred years later, we may be excused for finding Santhalinga's adjuration to 'cling each day to the feet of the Lord' as a specific for defying death not particularly helpful. Fortunately, we have another *jñāni*, in the guise of Ramana Maharshi, to solve the conundrum for us, expressing the same idea in a modern idiom:

If a man considers he is born he cannot avoid the fear of death. Let him find out if he has been born or if the Self has any birth. He will discover that the Self always exists, that the body which is born resolves itself into thought and that the emergence of thought is the root of all mischief. Find wherefrom thoughts emerge. Then you will abide in the ever-present inmost Self and be free from the idea of birth or the fear of death.¹

Sri Ramana said many times that *bhakti* – devotion and *vicāra* – enquiry are simply two sides of the same coin, both resulting in the annihilation of the ego-mind, as it is resolved into the Self, pure being. Once we realise this, concepts such as 'clinging to the feet of the Lord' take on the aspect of a more practical *upadeśa* and as such may revitalise our view of the earlier literature, which is often regarded as inspirational, aspirational even, but not particularly practical. When we see that the phrases 'clinging to feet of the Lord' and 'abide in the ever-present inmost Self' have exactly the same meaning, verse 15 takes on a much more practical aspect as *upadeśa*.

Having said all this, we must recognise however that in the texts of Santhalinga's era, the sort of practical, direct *upadeśa* given by Sri Ramana was beginning to permeate spiritual literature. One might speculate that this had something to do with the introduction of printed books in which *upadeśa* could be disseminated easily and widely amongst those who had no access to a teacher. There was now a need to 'spell out' the meaning of the *upadeśa* to those not in a position to

¹ Venkataramiah, M, (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§80.

receive it directly from a guru. *Vicāra* embodies the negative aspect of realisation, which is to deny attention to thoughts and to focus on the point of their arising, until the mind is subsumed in the Self and permanently ended, like the river that flows into the ocean, whilst *bhakti* is to entertain just one thought, that of union with the divine, so that in the end even that thought is abolished, like the stick used to stir the funeral pyre, which is itself consumed by the flames in the end. In the modern era, where in many cultures the sense of the divine has been virtually annihilated by a materialistic world view, it is the former approach which is likely to prove the more useful to the aspirant.

We see in the following quotations from verses 20 of *Vairagya Catakam* the stirrings of the former, more modern, view, in which no pre-existing belief in ‘the divine’ is demanded from the spiritual aspirant:

Truly, your very desires are the seeds which furnish you with births over and over again. Restrain them, my mind! The sea of desire will dry up. The waves that are your thoughts will vanish. All thoughts will die away. There is no doubt whatsoever that, in each moment [that those thoughts are absent], there will be for you in that moment worship of the golden feet of our Father Somasekharan, He who is the fullness of Reality.

Compare the above with this passage from Talk§485.

The fact is that the mind is only a bundle of thoughts. How can you extinguish it by the thought of doing so or by a desire? Your thoughts and desires are part and parcel of the mind. The mind is simply fattened by new thoughts rising up. Therefore it is foolish to attempt to kill the mind by means of the mind. The only way of doing it is to find its source and hold on to it. The mind will then fade away of its own accord.

Thus both Santhalinga and Sri Ramana identify the cessation of thoughts as the key to Self-realisation or union with Lord *Śiva*, which amounts to the same thing. In the following quotation from verse 23, Santhalinga reinforces the argument that the cessation of thoughts is the key to union with the Lord:

Civan is not something that can be perceived by the senses. Therefore realise and clearly know that to remain free of thoughts is the means for you to reach Him.

Such statements are no different from those made by Sri Ramana, once we learn to equate ‘reaching the Lord’ with ‘realisation of the Self’.

Self-realisation is the cessation of thoughts and all mental activity. Thoughts are like bubbles on the surface of the sea (Self).²

Vicāra finds little or no place in the earlier *bhakti* songs, notably those of the *Tēvāram* saints and Manikkavacagar and the *Nālāyirad Divya Prabandham* of the Vaishnava Alvars, but very soon such ideas begin to be expressed, in the *Tirumandiram* of Tirumular and the works of Pattinathar for example, then later in the Siddhanta works of Meykanda Devar and his lineage, so that by the 17th century we regularly find a mix of *bhakti* and *vicāra* expressions, in the works of such as Tayumanavar, Tattuvarayar, Kannudaiya Vallalar, Santhalinga, Auvdai Akkal and many others. The more we are able to instinctively read *vicāra* into expressions of *bhakti*, and *bhakti* into expressions of *vicāra*, the richer and more meaningful will our experience of these older texts become. Santhalinga devotes the second 50 verses of his *Catakam* to *tottiram* – *praise of the Lord*. We leave the reader with the final verse of the 50, which, in its balance of externalised and internalised concepts, encapsulates perfectly the confluence of *vicāra* and *bhakti*, discrimination and devotion, the two opposite poles of being which coalesce in the state of realisation.

Our Lord, refuge I seek,
 refuge [at your holy feet!]
 With all defilement
 of mind and senses gone
 so that pure awareness I become,
 grant me then a life
 that [from you] no separation knows,
 free of both the seer and the seen,
 and henceforth I do you beseech
 exercise your dominion over me. ▲

² Brunton, Paul. *Conscious Immortality*, ‘The Mind’, Chap.18. p.158. 6th ed.



Bhagavan's Shrine on Deepavali day

Vairagya Catakam

TAVATTIRU SANTHALINGA ADIGAL
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

In these first 50 verses, entitled *cāttiram – sastra, teachings*, the discriminating faculty, to which the author of the commentary, Chidambara Swamigal, gives the name *vivēkam*, is addressing the mind, upbraiding it and telling it that it alone is the reason why both of them are unable to gain the realisation they both seek. It is the *vivēkam* alone which speaks in these verses but there is an implied dialogue between the two, with *vivēkam* successively demolishing the mind's supposed assertions and counter arguments. Tavattiru Chidambara Swamigal (TCS), who was the disciple of Santhalinga's own disciple, Kumara Devar, and who composed the commentary at Santhalinga's own request, structures his prose commentary as a dialogue in which the mind's part in that conversation, its assertions and counter arguments, are overtly laid out. The gist of Chidambara Swamigal's commentary has been given in the form of an 'Argument' prefaced to some of the verses, particularly the earlier ones. These first 50 verses have been translated in prose form, whilst the second 50, consisting of *tōttiram – praise* to Lord Śiva in Chidambaram and in several other *Sthala-s*, have been translated in verse form. The commentary begins with a short Preamble by the commentator.

Invocation to Ganapati

Placing at the fore the Elephant Son
sired by the lordly Three-eyed One,
following his footsteps, shrouded by his flanks,
like warriors, untiring, ever ready for the fray,
into the realm eternal they shall go,
their enemy, worldly bondage, there to slay.
And with that maid beyond compare,
Eternal Bliss, union they shall come to know.

Preamble

The discriminating faculty, *vivēkam*, affirming not this, not this, strips away the body, which is the product of the five elements, and the organs of sense and action. Subsequently it begins to strip away the inner organs (of mind, intellect, will and ego). However each time it turns its attention to the mind, which is the foremost of these, and attempts to strip it away, the mind, being the faculty most closely related to it, does not subside but rather it does, in its accustomed manner, attempt to subdue the discriminating faculty and drag it into those things which constitute attachments for itself. However *vivēkam*, being aware of the manner in which it is thus being dragged away, exercises its power and confronts the mind. Examining what it is that the mind grasps to subsist and rise up and identifying each of its attachments as such and such, *vivēkam* addresses the mind in the second person, in order to remove all those attachments from it and to bring it under its sway. Thus this work is narrated from the point of view of that discriminating faculty, *vivēkam*.

Argument

Vivēkam exhorts the mind to stop wasting time and to devote itself henceforth to the task of freeing itself from the toils of birth. The mind acquiesces and agrees to adopt this course of action.

Bless you my mind. Stay still, don't wander off! Just a word from you. Tell me this: here below, we have obtained this body by the performance of lofty penance, have we not? At the world's end,¹ will it still be here? If you examine the matter closely, you did nothing to

¹ *ūli kālam* – the world's end. In Hindu mythology at the end of each *yuga* (great age) the entire universe is said to be consumed by a great deluge or submarine fire.

obliterate the seven births² that surround you. You did not worship the Lord's twin feet. Why so? (1)

Argument

Vivēkam points out to the mind that, even though it had the good fortune to have the chance of serving the noble Sivaprakasa as his disciple, it failed to take advantage of that opportunity but wallowed instead in the mire of domestic life. 'What use will your wife and household be to you at the time of your death?' it asks.

Not realising that his holy feet were your strength, you did not accept as your master the lofty Sivaprakasa Swami,³ easily accessible to you as he was. You did not go about serving him, and you did not attain the state of liberation, so hard to reach. Listen to me! You wallowed in the mire of domestic life and all the rest and suffered there, my mind. If messengers arrive tomorrow bearing the summons of Yama, will they (your relations and friends) be able to help you? Speak! (2)

Argument

The mind agrees but objects that without itself there will be no support for its wife and family and that it should therefore remain with them. Vivēkam points out that it is quite likely that death or some other misfortune will separate it from them anyway and that in the final analysis, no jīva has the power to aid another jīva but only the Lord.

Truth to tell, worrying that, but for you, there was no support for your home and family, you forgot the holy feet of the Lord. When Death comes and takes you away, will you return to the earth daily to take care of them? When we consider, childish mind, our only support is Civan. Can one living soul be the support for another?⁴ (3)

² *ēḷ bhavam* – the seven births. In Hindu tradition living things fall into seven categories: creatures that live in water; creatures that crawl; creatures that fly; animals; unmoving things (plants and trees etc.); mankind and gods. The total number of species is given as 84 lakhs, that is to say, 8,400,000.

³ Santhalinga's guru was Adi Sivaprakasa, whom he encountered in Tiruvannamalai.

⁴ *uyirkku uyir tāṇum ōr tuṇai āmē* – can one living soul be the support of another? Since it is only the consciousness of the Lord, the supreme Self that animates the *jīva*, then it follows that one *jīva*, being essentially inanimate, can in no way be

Argument

The mind concedes that this is true and requests vivēkam to advise it how it should interact with the other jīvas that it meets in the course of its existence. Vivēkam points out that the other jīvas in its life are simply the instruments of the Lord's grace in bringing it into contact with the good and evil deeds that are required to bring it to the realisation of its true nature. 'In regarding these jīvas as either enemies or friends and experiencing hatred or love for them on account of that, you have done me great harm!' says vivēkam. It declares that the mind's only friend is in truth the Lord and its only enemy, the ignorance of its true nature.

You lacked the true realisation that our true support is the ancient feet of the garlanded Supreme Lord who accompanies us as our protection and that, conversely, the enemy that causes us inner suffering and destroys us is ignorance. Mind, debased beyond comparison, you considered the *jīvas* with which you came into contact in the course of your actions as either enemies or friends,⁵ and in so doing you experienced anger and all the rest, and brought ruin upon me. (4)

Argument

Assured of the need to abandon its personal attachments, the mind now wonders whether it might continue to enjoy its material possessions

the support of another one. TCS quotes v. 1 of the *Tiru Aruḷ Payaṅ* of Umāpati Śivācāriyar:

Just as the letter 'a' in all [Tamil] consonants inheres,
the matchless Lord as pure awareness, pervading all things, appears.

⁵ Since the Lord, the Self, Brahman is all that in reality truly exists, and since all that happens to the *jīva* is ordained by the Lord for its ultimate salvation, it is a grave error on the part of the *jīva* to identify itself as an independent ego-mind and react with either affection or hatred towards the other *jīvas* that it encounters and that appear to cause it good or harm. TCS cites the following verse 96 of the *Civabhōgacāram* of Guruñānasambandha Dēcīkar:

Who are great and who are low,
who is friend and who is foe,
when He who, great in glory, great in name,
the very form of consciousness and bliss,
does everywhere as Himself exist,
animating all creation, insentient and quick?

whilst pursuing its spiritual quest. Vivēkam replies that it is the experience of many that have gone before that all material possessions must be abandoned and asks the mind whether it thinks itself wiser than they. The mind concedes that this is the case and asks what it is that constitutes true wealth, to which vivēkam replies that it is only to gain the grace of Lord Śiva.

You did not realise that the wealth that consists of those things which are impermanent brings manifold afflictions⁶ and that, conversely, to abandon these, remaining free of the afflictions they bring, is happiness. Amongst those who have abandoned those things ere this, are there none whose depth of understanding matches yours? Speak, mind. Henceforth, free of attachment, we shall gain the grace of the supernal Lord, deeming it to be the Reality. That indeed is the wealth that is hard to attain. (5)

Argument

Having reluctantly consented to abandon personal relationships and possessions, the mind sets its sights on happiness (inbam) as a goal, such as that enjoyed by a powerful king, surrounded by his armies, an idea which vivēkam now proceeds to demolish in its turn.

Mind, did you not regard as sweet the lives of those who rule the earth, surrounded by their armies, and then pass away? ‘If you gain the immaculate knowledge that knows no lack, heaven and earth both will come to bow down at your feet. The moment you perceive the true life, you will weep for the former days that passed in vain.’⁷ Did you not mark these words of the wise? (6)

⁶ TCS cites v. 46 of *nīdi veṅbā*, an anonymous work on ethics and morality in 100 *veṅbā* verses:

Possessions bring suffering. In accumulating them there is sorrow; then in guarding them there is sorrow; when they are lost there is more sorrow, and, alas, when they are appropriated by others, there is yet more sorrow.

Also *Tiru-k-kural*, 341:

Whatever you renounce, whatever it may be,
no more suffering from that source shall you ever see.

⁷ In his commentary on verse 194 of *Oḻivil Oḍukkam* by Kaṇṇuḍaiya Vaḷḷalār (a commentary which he undertook at the request of Santhalinga Swamigal himself) TCS gives the following graphic illustration of the renunciant’s feelings on realising

Argument

Having now consented to abandon its worldly attachments and devote itself to austerities, the mind asks if it might not lay claim to some place on earth where it might go to practise those austerities. Vivēkam replies that, when even the perishable body is not its true home, what use will the earth be to it.

Thinking ‘This is our property, this is our home’, identifying yourself with earth, you become earth. You have no shame, foolish mind. Considering the fact that even the body itself is not our home,⁸ should you cherish the earth, which is the home of the body, which is destined to die? Know that the refuge for all beings is at the holy feet of Him who adorns himself with the cobra. (7)

Argument

Vivēkam now warns the mind against the dangers of coveting worldly fame and renown. ‘The only true glory is the attainment of liberation,’ it affirms, ‘and the only true disgrace is to suffer continued births. Therefore you should remain indifferent to worldly honour and disgrace.’

You did not understand. In this world you coveted praise. In the future, should you take on another body, will you enjoy in that body the glory you enjoy in this? Or will you even know about the fame of your former life? What your name was? Who you were? Even if you experienced disgrace in a former life, it would be no different than praise. Mind, if you examine the matter closely, you will realise that

how much he has suffered due to the dominion of the mind and senses: *There are deep sighs of grief at the thought of how for time without measure he has been gnawed at by those faculties, as an earthworm is gnawed at by ants.*

⁸ See *Tiru-k-kuraḷ* 340, in chapter 4, *Nilaiyāmai – Impermanence*:

Does it have no proper dwelling of its own, that the soul
in the body’s flimsy shack should make a home?

The world and the body are the same in the sense that their nature is that of insentient and impermanent matter, as seen from the perspective of the *jīva*. The only safe refuge is at the feet of the Lord or, in Advaitic terms, the Self. The body and the world are mere temporary appearances in the underlying reality of the Self.

glory is only the gaining of matchless liberation and disgrace is only the suffering of birth and death.⁹ (8)

Argument

Vivēkam warns the mind against taking the opinions of others as a measure of its spiritual progress. It affirms that only the Lord, who allocates our deeds and their fruits, can be the judge of its progress. Nothing can be gained if austerities are performed with a view to impressing other jīvas. However if they are performed with the Lord as your sole witness, the whole world will come to know of your greatness, says vivēkam.

You propose [through your austerities] to make the people of the world think you are a great sage. But it is only the Lord, who dwells within you, who bestows bondage and liberation. What is the use of others knowing [of your greatness]?¹⁰ With the Lord's divine golden feet as your witness, perform arduous austerities, my mind. Thereafter the Primal One will bestow upon you such greatness¹⁰ that the people of the world, recognising it, will pay homage to you. This you should know. (9)

Mind, if you investigate diligently, you may verify from your own experience that there is no bliss whatsoever to be found amongst all the six life-forms that are born upon the earth. You have studied holy

⁹ In verse 2 to 8 the discriminating faculty mentions five areas in which the mind should abandon its outer attachments. These are listed by TCS as *uravu – relations and friends, poruḷ – possessions, cukam – happiness, pleasure, idam – land, property and pugaḷ – fame, praise*. TCS cites *Prabhu Linga Līlai, Sādhakāṅga Gati*, v. 19 in illustration of this:

A potsherd and a gold coin, a friend and an enemy, poverty and riches, glory and shame, the house and the forest – the mind that possesses the ability to regard all these as not different from each other is a virtuous mind.

¹⁰ TCS cites the following verse 84 of *civabhōgacāram* to illustrate this point:

The Vedas declare that they are really great who seek not the name of greatness but exercise modesty and restraint. They are really inferior who boast that they are great. Say, who will endure suffering in this world, if these do not?

books that tell you that war and all other sorrows afflict even the gods themselves.¹¹ Other than the incomparable feet of the Lord, there is no profound state of happiness. (10)

Argument

Not satisfied that the mind, although it has given up its outer attachments and begun to practise austerities, is treating the matter with the due degree of urgency, vivēkam expands on its theme further.

You are no help to me whatsoever. Without investigating deeply and at length either the experience of suffering and loss involved in birth and death¹² or the deep sorrow caused by diseases and all the rest, you did not fear the seven births. Mind, you did not perform *pūja* and pay homage at the feet of Lord Śiva's devotees. You did not weep incessantly, as they told what was the bliss of liberation. (11)

Argument

In this and the following verse, vivēkam accuses the mind of hiding behind a façade of piety, whilst in reality it has not abandoned its

¹¹ The gods in Hinduism, in spite of their relatively elevated status compared to humans, are basically afflicted by all the same suffering, including birth and death, desire, fear and disease. See v. 204 of *Oḻivil Oḻukkam*:

Observing the profound delusion in which even the gods, Vishnu, Brahma and Indra, flourish, [believing themselves immortal], then pass away, [the *jnanis*] shake their heads in disbelief; and seeing the frenzied contortions visited upon the people of the world by the same delusion, they cry out, 'Alas for them!' As for the *jnanis*, seeing themselves only as the Self, they dance to the rhythm 'taam taam'.

¹² *pirappu irappu adil tuyaramum kēḍum tinṛal* – the experience of suffering and loss [involved] in birth and death. In his *urai* TCS quotes three verses from *Civadarumōttaram, ceṇaṇa maraṇa iyal*, v. 21-23, which describe the torment supposedly suffered by the foetus during the process of gestation and birth. Verse 23 ends as follows: *ālaik karumbu eṇavē yōṇi vaḷiyiṇ vali tolaiya nerukkappaṭtu nilamicaiyē tōṇrum uyir ūṇ nilaiyudaṇē* – Like a stalk of sugarcane crushed in a mill, squeezed in the vaginal passage, its strength ebbing, the soul emerges upon the earth in its fleshly form. TCS then quotes two verses from *Peruntiraṭtu* which illustrate the suffering entailed in the process of dying, the second of which ends with the following words: *inda mā irappil tuṇbam bhavattuṇbattu eṇ maḍaṅgē* – the suffering of this powerful death is eight times that of birth.

worldly ways. Its pious demeanour and display of book learning are merely the stratagems by which it conceals its lack of spiritual advancement.

The Lord who dances in the golden Hall inspires in the virtuous the desire to draw near and unite with Him, performing *puja* and singing hymns of praise. Yet you do not seek refuge in Him. You speak like those who have surrendered to Him. You are celebrated amongst the wise. Yet you covet the wives of others.¹³ Mind, for shame, what have you done here? Have you not yet died? Destruction will be yours! (12)

Though you have recited and understood many works, though you have preached the path of righteousness to others, you have not abandoned a single iota of your worldly ways.¹⁴ Mind, in this life, whilst others take your actions to be pure, you are worse than an ass that goes about smeared in *kumkum* since, although it has not attained human form, at least it is free of inner deceit. (13)

Argument

The mind acknowledges the criticisms levelled at it by vivēkam but feels that it should not be too difficult for it to overcome its attachments if it embraces one of the six religions sanctioned by the Vedas. It therefore requests vivēkam to inform it which of these is superior. Vivēkam replies that freedom from māyā and ensuing death can only be attained if the pure state which entirely transcends those six religions and their practices and observances is gained.

¹³ TCS cites *Tiru-k-kuraḷ* v. 273. As a cow might be disguised in a tiger's skin in order to be able to graze with impunity on another farmer's crops, one who merely presents a façade of spirituality is able to indulge in all kinds of improper behaviour, such as coveting other men's wives, without fear of being challenged or unmasked, employing the ascetic's garb as a form of protection.

He who affects a pious demeanour with no strength [of tapas] within is like a cow that grazes [on others' crops] wrapped in a tiger's skin.

¹⁴ TCS cites *Tiru-k-kuraḷ*, 834:

There is no fool greater than he who has failed to master the art of practising that which he studies, learns and to others imparts.

Whilst all the four Vedas speak of a single state of peace,¹⁵ you, wallowing in the deadly encircling pit of the six religions,¹⁶ remain in the pernicious twin states [of *sakalam* and *kevalam*]¹⁷ that bring disgrace upon you. It seems, lowly mind, that you still hanker after the company of the destiny that the body affords you in the form of deeds, and the friendship of Death, who releases you from that body.¹⁸ (14)

(To be continued) ▲

¹⁵ *oru cama nilai* – a single state of peace. This final goal, which even the *Vedas* and *Āgamas* in their verbal formulations can only point to, is referred to as the *cutta avattai*, Skt. *śuddha avasthā* – the pure state. It is the same state as that referred to in note 16 below as *jagrat suṣupti*.

¹⁶ The six religious systems which are considered to be Vedic, each being based on a deity of the Hindu pantheon, are: *Śaivism* (*Śiva*), *Vaiṇavam* (*Viṣṇu*), *Śāktam* (*Śakti*), *Sauram* (*Sun*), *Gānapattiyam* (*Ganeṣa*), *Kaumāram* (*Murugan*). In their highest form, these too can lead to the highest state, which is referred to in the following quote from *Oḻivil Oḍukkam*, v. 153: *aṟu camayattōrkkum aṟudi iṭṭa kūḍal tuṟavāy avā aṟuttal tuymai* – the pure state which results from renunciation and the cutting away of desire, and which the followers of all six religions agree is the final goal. However, what *vivēkam* is condemning here is the mind's tendency to observe only the outer forms of those religions without grasping their essence.

¹⁷ The term *sakalam* – manifold, divided refers to waking and dream, in which awareness is divided and diversified into awareness of many things and *kēvalam* – single, solitary, undivided, refers to dreamless sleep, in which awareness remains as the only one indivisible whole. The *cama nilai*, referred to in note 14 above refers to the state of *jñāna*, in which these are transcended. This is the state that Ramana Maharshi refers to as *jagrat suṣupti* – waking sleep.

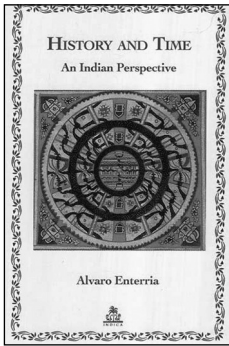
That is the state of the *jnani*. It is neither sleep nor waking but intermediate between the two. There is the awareness of the waking state and the stillness of sleep. It is called *jagrat sushupti*.... Go to the root of thoughts and you reach the stillness of sleep. But you reach it in the full vigour of search, that is, with perfect awareness. — *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§609.

¹⁸ This is the same idea as that expressed by Kannudaiya Vallalar in verse 123 of *Oḻivil Oḍukkam*. The false teacher will be like Brahmā, the creator of the worlds, in so far as his instruction causes any movement whatsoever in the minds of his disciples, and he will be like Death, in that he condemns them to the repeated death and rebirth of the illusory mind-body complex, as the mind continually arises and subsides by turns at the prompting of the false guru's instruction.

In those who, wearied by ritual activities, come to him asking for instruction, the Illustrious One fosters the bliss of the Self, so that they dwell in silence.

He is the true guru. As for the rest, know that, in so far as they cause the slightest movement in the minds of their disciples, they will be like Brahma, the creator of worlds, and the Lord of Death.

BOOK REVIEWS



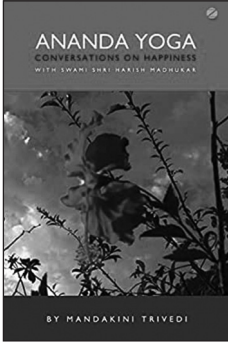
HISTORY AND TIME – AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE by Alvaro Enterría. Indica Books, Varanasi. 2019 Rs.175. P.54. ISBN: 9789381120194 www.indicabooks.com

There are two principal views about time: It can be linear starting from point A and ending at, say point Z, with no redress. Each past moment is fixed as if with stone. The future is the great unknown governed by forces over which we have absolute control. This is generally the standpoint of Western or Occidental thought. There is a specific past, a present and a future. None of them mingle. The rigid demarcations make for History as it is known in Western academic circles. The arguments are usually about when and why something happened. History is localized, by that one means, it is anchored in time and space to a specific region. It depends on artifacts and documents for proof.

The Oriental view is much more flexible. Time is regarded as cyclical. The three states of time are not necessarily fixed. In fact, the past can be altered, the future too as the stream of consciousness in an individual mutates according to the level of consciousness experienced. That is to say a *jñāni* can if necessary alter the ‘past’ of a devotee and release them from the consequences of their ignorant behaviour. The interaction of fact and myth is accepted as being real. The author quotes the great savant Raimon Panikker: “The vision a people has of its history indicates the way in which it understands its own past and assimilates it into the present [...] And India has lived its past much more through its myths than through the interpretation of its history as a memory of past events....there is no criteria for differentiating myth from history; a disconcerting fact for the western mind, unaware that its own myth is precisely history.”

Alvaro Enterría lives at Varanasi since many years and is a lover of India and has studied in great depth Indian culture and philosophy. He has previously published one of the best introductions to Indian culture and thought, *India from Within: A Guide to India’s History, Religion, Arts, Culture and Society*. This small volume of 53 pages

has more wisdom and insights than many a weighty volume. Those interested in the concept of time and its meaning would do well to read this booklet. — T.V. Ramamurthy



ANANDA YOGA Conversations on Happiness with Swami Shri Harish Madhukar by Mandakini Trivedi. Pub: ZEN Publications, Juhu, Mumbai-400049 in collaboration with Shaktiyogashrama Gurukulam, Telbaila, Maharashtra-412108; 2019. Rs.430, pp.294. ISBN 978-93-87242-41-8

This book is aptly titled. It is crammed with laughter, love and Ananda (joy). Swami Harish Madhukar answers questions asked by devotees who play with him, tease him, laugh at him and his bulging belly, and pull his beard. He could, if necessary, talk the whole day but he told his devotees that it is the experience of the meanings of words which mattered. Madhukar being a no-nonsense man could be stern with the disciples and correct them when they were slipshod, lazy, selfish etc., but he was always full of love and laughter.

The book is compiled by his disciple and successor Mandakini Trivedi, an award-winning Mohini Attam dancer. Thanks to the guru and disciple, the words in the book inspire and illumine and sing and dance.

Madhukar was from Haryana and like most Haryanvi men he was strong and handsome. He had postgraduate degrees in English and Hindi, was an art critic and ran a printing press, an advertising agency and a leather goods manufacturing firm. He had a lovely wife and six children and life was happy. But Madhukar thirsted to experience the wholeness of life. One day he sold his firm, distributed the proceeds among the workers and went off to the Himalayas in search of a guru who would solve the riddle of life for him. After much wandering and search, he found the Master in ageing Swami Swarupananda, a silent, still one. He did not teach him the Scriptures but asked him to graze the ashram cows on the hilly terrain. After two years of patience and despair, he discovered that it was Nature which tended the cows and not he. He became calm, attentive and receptive. He was ready for the silent teaching from the Master, Nature and the Self.

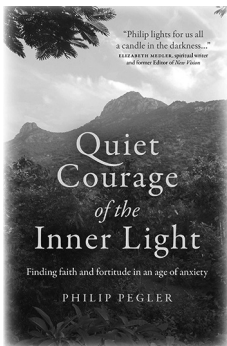
Swarupananda left the body and Swami Madhukar started an ashram Shaktiyogashrama Gurukulam in Maharashtra near Lonavla about 150 kms from Mumbai. It was a simple ashram where everything including food was simple. Madhukar was a devotee of Devi Bhagavati who is praised in *Lalita Sahasranama*. If to Sri Ramakrishna Kali was Brahman and to Sri Ramana Arunachala was the Self, to Swami Madhukar Bhagavati was everything and he let Her do everything. He had an apt verse or story or parable for any occasion and he drove home a point with admirable ease and effect.

Madhukar was full of love but eschewed attachment. He said 'He who comes to see me does not know himself but he who knows his Self is merged in me.' He advised devotees to begin the spiritual journey where it ends. He said "Self-realisation can occur to anybody at any time, anywhere." He loved life and revered death. He was free and let his devotees be free.

From some of the photographs in the book, it may be inferred that Madhukar's wife and children became part of his spiritual family.

Madhukar left his body in 1996 when he was 73 nominating Mandakini as his successor who is dedicated to fulfilling her Guru's vision in the realms of spirituality, art and education.

The book is a thing of joy, Ananda, because it pertains to one who was full of Ananda and lovingly compiled by one who has discovered Ananda in dance and life by her Guru's grace — Atreya

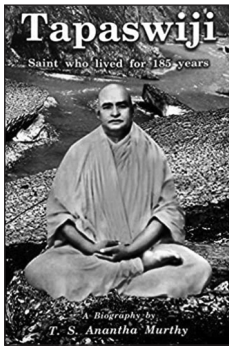


QUIET COURAGE OF THE INNER LIGHT
Finding Faith and Fortitude in an Age of Anxiety
by Philip Pegler John Hunt Publishing, 2020
Paperback: pp.168, Rs.983. ISBN-13: 978-1789043457 www.johnhuntpublishing.com
Philip Pegler has contributed articles to the *Mountain Path* and is the author of two previous volumes which were favourably reviewed here. The first was a fine biography of Clare Cameron an English writer and mystic titled *Hidden Beauty of the Commonplace*.

The present volume under consideration is a series of essays that would interest someone who is treading a spiritual path in the

modern world. The essays are extended musings on the implications and challenges an aspirant encounters and how to respond consonant with our principles. The author spent some years living at Arunachala and knows the ashram and Bhagavan's teachings well. There are subtle hints of J. Krishnamurti and a Christian concern to ask what are the right attitudes and appropriate conduct for the world we live in particularly with global warming and environmental degradation. The author writes from his own hard earned experience and trials and the short articles are not yet another well-meant but tedious series of sermons. The observations are subtle and well-reasoned. The writer is gifted with a smooth flow which is a pleasure to read. Inevitably in this age few have the time to consider quietly Philip's intelligent discreet observations but for those who do will be rewarded.

— Christopher Quilkey



TAPASWIJI Saint who lived for 185 years. A Biography by T.S. Anantha Murthy. Pub: Sri Vishnu Ashram Trust, Dibbagiri Hill, Bangalore District, Karnataka 561203. Fourth edition 2015. pp. xiv+416. Rs.450. ISBN 978-81-7525-453-4. Phones: 098450 00262; 098440 39437.

This is an interesting book by a retired judge of Karnataka, though a librarian may wonder if it should be classified as Biography or Fiction.

The language is very simple but the style is verbose and repetitive. It is the story of the amazing life of a very simple-hearted man born to Sikh parents, the father being the ruler of Patiala, a Sikh princely state in Punjab in North India. Krishan Singh, as he was named, had a *sattvic* temperament and admired one of the most *sattvic* among men, Guru Nanak the founding Guru of the Sikhs, and other saints. Being a prince, he had to learn horse riding, fencing and other martial arts. Often he had to leave home, his wife and little son, for long periods to fight off invading armies.

Once, on his return from a battle, Krishan was shocked to learn that his wife and son and then his elder brother had passed away. Destiny had started preparing gentle Krishan for a renunciate's life. One day

he left Patiala on horseback for Delhi hoping to meet the then Moghul emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, and request his help in strengthening the security of the princely State. He did manage to meet the emperor but the latter told him that his writ no more ran in the land and in any case, what really mattered was love for and service to God. This had a profound impact on the very receptive prince with the result that he did not return home. He rode on till he was far away from crowds, near the Himalayas, dismounted and, after ensuring that the horse would be cared for and after casting away his royal attire, sword and all and wearing nothing except a loin cloth and a waistband to which he tied a gem, he started walking. Henceforth, he would walk and walk, sit and sit and stand and stand or walk with his left hand raised above his head. Always in deep meditation. For days on end. He was now 55 years old. This and a lot more he narrated to the author 115 years later. What were Krishan's experiences from now till he met the author T.S. Anantha Murthy?

Though the book may lack literary merit and often sounds unconvincing, yet it is a page-turner. The Saint (no more Krishan Singh) and the former judge are good storytellers. The book is crammed with encounters of incredible and bizarre kinds. One can be sure that few readers would give credence to most of the events narrated in this book. The Saint seems to have had an astounding retentive memory at the age of 170 years when he shared his experiences with the author. He told him about the 8-foot tall Swami claimed to be five thousand years of age who was born as Dwivedi in U.P. during the days when Lord Krishna walked the earth, how he found the lonely place he settled down in far beyond Badrinath in the Himalayas, the vast herd of cows he had raised out of a single cow and calf gifted to him; the two kinds of leaves with red spots, the juice of one of which would bestow a longevity of 5,000 years and the other 10,000 years. His archaic Sanskrit was understood by Kripal Singh the temporary companion of the Saint. The saint told the author about his rejuvenation by *kayakalpa* treatment by a *sadhu* in Parasuramkund in Assam ensuring him longevity; his *darśan* of Goddess Kamakhya near a temple in Assam in the form of a very lovely young woman who asked him to give away the gem tied around his waist to the temple priest and vanished; the Saint obeyed the command; his long walk on

the banks of Irrawaddy river to Burma (now Myanmar), his stay with Buddhist monks and gaining of a working knowledge of the Burmese language; his meeting a Hindu *sadhu* who came in the form of a tiger soon morphing into a *sadhu* and conversed with him in Hindi. As a tiger the *sadhu* hunted wild animals for food and as a *sadhu* he ate the food left for him by the frightened villagers. The Saint saw during his walk a man riding on the back of a tiger; he met a *sadhu* 500 years young (always a round number!) who too could turn into a tiger. He was once a man-eater but not anymore; his meeting a *sadhu* who had two pills, out of which one if kept in the mouth would enable one to fly over a short distance and the other over hundreds of miles. There is no further detail given about the Pill Airways. A tiger prostrates before the Saint. A boy and a girl save the Saint before a man-eater catches him by taking him into their hut. He meets Motiram who does not hiss at him though he was a cobra. Someone's pet. The Saint has visions of Lord Krishna, Sage Durvasa and others. Asvattāmā, son of Drona, the archery preceptor of the Mahabharata time appears and narrates the epic to the Saint. Vishnu Das, as the Saint called himself, visits a Muslim faqir not very far from Hardwar who turned mutton curry into cooked potato for the vegetarian Saint's consumption. The Saint meets Ramakrishna Paramahansa sitting on the banks of Hooghly and tells him that Kali was only one of the forms of Divinity. Didn't the spiritual titan know that already? Vishnu Das missed meeting the wonderful Sarada Devi and other devotees of the Paramahansa. No dates are given. One wonders if the first rejuvenatory *kayakalpa* process at Parasuramkund which induced unconsciousness in the Saint for 21 days had something to do with his later visions. However, he seems to have been always calm and fearless. He once told the author Anantha Murthy that Self-Knowledge alone matters.

The Saint visited Sivabala Yogi (See April 2017 *Mountain Path*) at Adivarampet and was highly impressed. He told him that he was at a higher state than Ramana Maharshi. Anantha Murthy for his part placed Vishnu Das above the Sage of Arunachala. How quick the judge was to judge! How can there be a state higher than steady abidance in the Self in the non-dual state? Can one climb beyond the peak?

— Jijñāsu



ASHRAM BULLETIN

Navaratri

Navaratri at the Ashram began as late as it could be according to liturgical calendar guidelines with the first night *puja* taking place on the 17th October. It is on an Amavasya (New Moon) day that the deity normally comes out and goes in procession around the Ashram with the first of nine *alankara*-s (decoration of the deity) taking place on the following day. But this year owing to the lockdown there was no procession and Yogambika remained within the *sanctum sanctorum* much like the rest of the world experiencing the second wave of the virus. Though Yogambika never left her station in the inner sanctum, Ashram Navaratri went on nonetheless with a handful of staff in attendance. The Ashram telecast live the event on YouTube channel each evening. Meanwhile at the Big Temple Navaratri *alankara*-s which took place each night in the Kalyana Mantapam, were closed to the public. A similar programme was put in place for Karthikai Deepam in view of the pandemic protocols and closed to the public.

Deepam 2020

This year the Deepam festival was celebrated in a simple manner due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There is no procession around the four Maada streets as in the previous years. However, the procession was carried out inside the central shrine in the fifth *prākāra* of the temple.

On 20th November Deepam festival began with the hoisting of the flag (*Dwajaroohanam*) signifying the commencement of the festival. On November 29th, the Bharani Deepam was lit at 4 a.m. in the main shrine and at 6 p.m., the Maha Deepam was lit on top of the hill with the many litres of ghee sent to the temple by devotees. “Every year it is held as a grand event and lakhs of people take part in the event, but this time the event will be low-scale due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All the festivities were conducted inside the temple premises,” said the Temple Joint Commissioner.

The public was not allowed inside the Arunachaleswara Temple on 29th November 2020 for the Bharani Deepam and Maha Deepam. No one was allowed to climb the hill or perform *girivalam*.

On the other days of the ten day festival some 8000 people were allowed each day for Swami's *darśan*. Tickets were available online at the temple website for 5000 and 3000 without ticket.

Girivalam was not allowed on Maha Deepam day, 29th November and also the day after. This was strictly controlled by the police.

Due to Covid-19 no special buses were made available people to come to Tiruvannamalai for Karthikai Maha Deepam. The police stopped all outside vehicles trying to enter the township for *girivalam*.

And finally, Arunachaleswara Swami and Apeetakuchambika *utsava-s* were not taken on procession around Arunachala Hill as is the usual custom on the second day after Maha Deepam.

Corvid 19 in Tiruvannamalai and the Ashram

As the covid 19 virus surges and retreats, the Ashram, albeit reluctantly, has had to close its gates to devotees for the first time since Bhagavan came to reside at the foot of the Hill. Many people are disappointed at not having free access to the ashram, but in view of the fact that as we go to press there have been more than 800,000 cases of covid-19 in Tamilnadu with 12,000 deaths and of these 19,000 cases have been reported in Tiruvannamalai along with 300 deaths recorded, it has been deemed wisest to keep the ashram gates closed so as to reduce to a minimum the risk of infection through congregation. Tiruvannamalai was one of the hot spots of the virus, with schools closed and transport by bus and train reduced to a minimum. Many are waiting for some finality to this pandemic so as to be able to carry on with their lives, while others seem to dare to ignore it and behave as though it wasn't happening.

Times have changed so radically that it is hard for some to accept the new reality. Bhagavan has always maintained that all are equal and no special treatment should be given to anyone least of all, himself. In this spirit of one-for-all-and-all-for-one that has characterized the Ashram's inclusive acceptance of all, irrespective of sex, age, faith, and nationality through the decades, the Ashram management does not discriminate against visiting devotees based any criteria other than all are welcome who wish to receive Bhagavan's *darśan*. The Ashram management has decided to apply them to all devotees, irrespective of age or gender. As we go to press, the Ashram is taking a wait-and-see approach and will continue to monitor the situation. ▲