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## Ramana Ashtottaram

### 32. *Om Phullambuja vilochanāya namaha.*

Prostration to the one with eyes bright and beautiful like a fully blossomed lotus.

In this unbroken and prolonged *samadhi*, when the body was neglected, starved and shrunk, the face was cool and charming and the eyes arresting in their brightness. The rest of the body had shrunk almost to nothing — he was just two eyes in a beaming face.

The phrase *phullambuja vilochanah* can also mean ‘one whose blossoming heart-lotus shone through the eyes’. His whole heart was in the eyes. The inner brightness shone through the windows of his eyes.

### 33. *Om Chandrikāsita hasa sri manditanana mandalāya namaha.*

One whose comely face was lit up by the cool moonlight of a smile.

It was the experience of many who came to Bhagavan that his smile soothed and illumined like the cool brightness of the moon. His face was lit up by brilliant eyes and though intense, this powerful look was cooled by a benign smile.

The stillness of his radiant heart was reflected in the calm, bright beauty of the face. Those who were blessed to be in his company were elated by that gracious glance and clear smile which was cool and calm like moonlight. ▲

## EDITORIAL

# Bhagavan and the Tradition of Advaita

We read, hear and concentrate so much on Advaita Vedanta that it seems to be, for us followers of the teaching of Ramana Maharshi, the only path to follow. If that were the case, it would be of interest to follow it back and see its origins and connection to Sri Ramana.

The tradition of Advaita Vedanta is most often associated with Sankara, especially his commentaries on the Badarayana’s Brahma Sutra, the Bhagavad Gita and the principal Upanishads. Sri Ramana Maharshi translated into Tamil Sankara’s *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, *Vivekachudamani* and *Atma Bodha* and in talks with devotees elaborated on the subtle points of the tradition using Sankara’s viewpoint as a reference. It is said that their teachings are similar but it should be understood that Sri Ramana’s authenticity is not dependent on orthodox interpretations of religious texts— his authority rests on his own inimitable experience.

Though the writings of Sankara are considered to be the doctrinal pillars upon which the advaitic tradition rests, we keep in mind that Advaita Vedanta did not originate with Sankara.

Both Badarayana and Sankara refer to ancient teachers and their schools, which belonged to the advaitic tradition. Badarayana alludes

to various teachers, Asmarathya, Audulomi and Kasakrtsna among others while Sankara refers to his *sampradaya* (lineage or tradition) and cites ancient teachers with a reverence appropriate to elders in one's tradition. Sankara and his disciples made frequent references to certain *vr̥ttikara*-s, commentators, especially to a sub-commentator on the Brahma Sutras, named Upavarsa. Sankara went to the extent of saying that this commentator was a member of his own tradition and calls him Bhagavan. In all, there are some ninety-nine such *vr̥tti*-s, commentaries, referred to in the *Sariraka-bhasya*, that is, the commentary on the Brahma Sutras.<sup>1</sup>

We can trace back to the Vedas many of the teachings of Advaita. The first clear emphasis on the immanent and transcendental nature of Brahman is recorded in the teachings of Yajnavalkya.<sup>2</sup> One can see in the Upanishads the development and debate of the finer points in metaphysics — the question of *moksha*; the nature of Brahman; and the concealing power of *avidya*. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* we can find an example of the purest advaita as taught by the great rishi Uddalaka: *sad eva, saumya, idam asid ekam evditiyam*. (In the beginning, my dear, this was Being alone, *one only without a second*.)<sup>3</sup> There is a passion and conviction in the texts, which indicates commitment and adherence to the truth in the lives of these rishis. These are no idle debates but fiery deliberations, which contain a hidden power which can excite the reader even today.

What was it that drove these seekers to fathom the depths of the mind and consciousness? Whatever it is, we today resonate to the very same tension. Is it the same impetus that today compels us to restate those stubborn questions about the nature of reality? What is real? What is false? Though baffled by these questions, we can readily identify with this modern rishi, Sri Ramana because intuitively we know he has resolved these burning questions. His connection to this ancient lineage is not proved by some spurious heritage but by the recognition

<sup>1</sup> *Bhamati and Vivarana Schools of Advaita Vedanta* by P.S. Roodurmun, p.10. Motilal Banarsidass, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad*, III.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Chandogya Upanisad*, 6.2.1.

his feat is perennial. It is open to all who dare refuse all anodynes and pursue their convictions whole-heartedly.

It was around 300BCE that Badarayana systemised the flashes of Upanisadic genius and gave us the Brahma Sutras. From this point, scholars have been able to vaguely trace the lineage of preceptors who, each in their way, elaborated aspects of the teaching. There was a living, continuous line of teachers who expounded the tenets of Advaita.<sup>4</sup>

Does Sri Ramana Maharshi belong to this tradition? If so how — as it appears he arrived suddenly at the summit of advaitic understanding without any preparation or visible link to the advaitic tradition? If he does not belong to any tradition, then on what authority did he teach?

Bhagavan does not belong to any specific tradition. In the lineage of authentic teachers which have been thrown up by the Sanatana Dharma in the last several thousand years we see these individual prominences — surges of exemplary understanding. There doesn't seem to be any thread connecting them to those who went before or after. Like Arunachala, they stand alone. They came, not merely to preserve the recorded wisdom but to rejuvenate it free of the historical, social and religious accretions that obscured the direct perception of our being-ness.

Bhagavan was that rare anomaly, a marvel like some mythic bird that sprang into life full grown without having to grow or learn. From his awakening, he was complete. His awakening was the single, sufficient, pre-requisite that sanctioned him to teach us, his followers.

We do understand that something significant occurred one day in Madurai in 1896. What exactly it was cannot be related because the experience was beyond words. No amount of words such as 'refulgent Self' or 'Self-realisation' explains the momentous occasion. The fabric of his carefully constructed world was ripped open. The conventional restraints of time and space were subverted. What happened

<sup>4</sup> *Pre-Sankara Advaita Philosophy* by S.L. Pandey. Darshan Peeth, Allahabad, 1974.

Further, we should remember that metaphysical truths are eternal and while they may change in external form according to circumstance, the change has nothing to do with what is termed evolution, as we know it today. The foundation is unaffected by time and change as is the essential unity of being which is unaffected by the multiplicity of the states of manifestation we experience.

outdistanced our language of mental image and concept. Something did occur but what it was, remains a mystery to this day. What we do know is that the young Venkataraman was radically and irreversibly changed and that he left his family and security to find his 'father'. He did so in the shape of Arunachala and the rest is history.

We cannot say how or why this event occurred. To say that it was the result of past *samskara*-s is an explanation but nothing more. What we are discussing is an 'event' which was not an effect of something else. Self-realisation is not a result. We say it does not have a cause because the 'concept' of Self-realisation transcends all notions of causality. The best we can articulate is that it happened. This experience of Ramana is as close as we can come to defining what advaita means. For advaita in its true sense is not a philosophy, it is an experience.

What concerns us who now follow in his footsteps is his ability to transfer to us something of the magic, which enveloped him so completely. A pretty picture on the wall or a nice story about Ramana is all very well, but it does nothing for us who hunger for that same transcendence, which catapulted Venkataraman beyond the physical emotional and mental needs of a person belonging to his milieu.

We all seek to be free of the constraints imposed upon us by society, our family or our own conditioned personality. We look to Ramana for the solution because we do know that here was someone who accomplished the unthinkable.

Bhagavan taught as much by example as instruction. His life was a teaching: he was invariably courteous to others; he never accepted something unless others could share; he wasted nothing that was available; he never asked another to do something he could not do himself. In short, he was as self-sufficient as any human being could be on this terrestrial plane. When people came to see him he did not take, rather he gave: he gave respect, he gave understanding, he gave patience and love. It was as natural to him as breathing.

Bhagavan understood early on that those who came to him for guidance needed some type of map so that they too, could pass through that often terrifying territory where they had to give up all their expectations and pre-conceptions of who they were and win through to the other side, the fourth, *turiyatitta*.

The teaching most readily available to his newly arrived, mature devotees was Advaita Vedanta. Though it was not commonly followed or understood by the majority of Tamils, it was recognised as the ultimate instruction. It was the one traditional teaching which most corresponded with his experience. He was given various scriptures such as *Vivekachudamani*, and requested to explain them. He did so with ease. In the course of discussions he discovered that the experience related in these texts were identical with his own experience.

He respected the tradition and in time became very proficient in locating a relevant line in a text to clarify a point but he was not bound in anyway by the written word. He established the teachings of advaita for those who came and were prepared to listen, its intended purpose and how to arrive at that desired state. He did not have to explain anything to himself. Bhagavan's qualification as a guru rests on the foundation of his own distinctive experience. There was no difference between Bhagavan and *jnana* — he was *jnana*.

We should note that he said too much scriptural study could be an impediment. Once the basic theory was understood the responsibility lay with the seeker to practise. The emphasis is on perception and understanding.

Though he did not belong to the school of advaita in the conventional sense, Bhagavan used the teachings of advaita for his own purpose. He understood right from the beginning, the value of the orthodox teaching which was aimed at preparing the adherent for that dramatic moment when we leave all attachments and sense of identification with an individual body-consciousness.

One of the last things he wrote was a short poem. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, a master prior to his death generally composed a pithy verse, which summed up his attitude at this decisive moment of departure. We can see the same spirit in Bhagavan's verse:

As one throws off the leaf after eating the food,  
The seer sheds his body.<sup>5</sup> ▲

<sup>5</sup> *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 147, 2001.



# Hridaya Vidya

S. SANKARANARAYANAN

The central teaching of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is succinctly stated in *Ramana Gita*, chapter 2, verse 2:

“In the Heart’s cavity, the sole Brahman, as an ever persisting ‘I’, shines direct in the form of the Self.”

This is from the first Sanskrit verse composed by Sri Bhagavan who had not up to that point even studied the language or its literature. The Sanskrit verse spontaneously streamed forth as an expression of his direct experience of the vision which enlightened him.

It is said that the Brahman itself is the one without a second who shines in the heart-space of all beings as the direct form of the Self. Brahman is the incessant sparkle of ‘I’ (*sphurana*). It follows that the Brahman is in the heart

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and is the true form of the Self. The 'I' in the heart is the expression of the Self. Then, what is the Heart? The Maharshi explains:

### Source of 'I' thought

The spot from where the entire mental activities of embodied beings emanate, is the heart and it is there in that so-called space all these activities also cease. The substratum of this infinite range of activities is the 'I' thought. Therefore the 'I' activity is said to be the root of all action. The existence of all the distinct mental activities pertaining to sense, action, quality and substance occurs because their origin is the 'I' thought. From where the 'I' thought emerges, that in short, is the heart.

### Abridged form of Macrocosm

It is an aspect of occult knowledge that whatever is in the macrocosm is in the microcosm. Whatever principles have gone into the construction of macrocosm, the same principles are employed in devising the microcosm. The superficial observer sees and thinks that the microcosm appears as a part of the macrocosm because of its immense magnitude and is entirely dependent on it. The fact is quite the opposite. The consciousness presiding over the microcosm makes possible the perception of the macrocosm. So, if microcosm, the sense of 'I', does not exist, how can the macrocosm be perceived as an object? If it is not held in perception, to whom will its existence be evident? Therefore the universe which is called the macrocosm is dependent on the microcosm that is the body. It is said that the body in its entirety is in the heart. Heart is the locus of the Self where everything is sustained.

The scripture says that the Self is the birth place of the five elements out of which the body had come into existence. Thus the microcosm is established in the heart and the macrocosm is established in the microcosm.<sup>1</sup> It follows that from the point of view of the Truth, the whole cosmos in a subtle way exists in the heart. This will be evident if the following is borne in mind: The world of sensory objects in the gross form has in the subtle plane the correspondent forms of activity

<sup>1</sup> *Day by Day*, p. 185. Bhagavan describes the Heart as "That which is the source of all, that in which all live, and that into which all finally merge, is the Heart referred to."

of the mind. The mental activities in the subtle causal plane are the form of the 'I' activity. The rise and decline of the 'I' activity is the active aspect of the Heart itself. We could say the heart is the abridged form of the macrocosm.

### The Derivation

Bhagavan derives the word *Hridayam* as *Hrt* and *Ayam*, He is the heart. By this derivation, the heart is mentioned as the true form of the Self. It is proper in both ways to say that this Person, the Self, is located in the Heart and also the Heart itself is the Self. We should be aware of this fine distinction.

When searching one's own true form by tracking down the 'I' thought, it is appropriate to say that the Self is in the heart. When the search is over and one's own true form attained, it is more appropriate to say that the Self itself is the heart. So in *Sat Darsana*, it is mentioned that "He is in the heart, devoid of thought, called the heart."

In *Arunachala Pancha Ratna*, Bhagavan says, "O Lord, thou dancest, incessantly in the heart as 'I am'. For that reason, thy name is the Heart, so say the learned."

Thus the Brahman, the Self and the real 'I', which are one and the same, are located in the Heart and are the Heart itself.

### Description

The direct sadhana for knowing the heart is the tracking down the origin of the 'I' thought. Equally, it is not possible to have direct knowledge unless one has direct experience. Traditionally the heart has been described in different ways; its form is visualized according to the culture, the times and intent of the scriptures. Some of the designations are: The heart-lotus, the heart-cavern, the subtle cavity, the little space, the inner ocean, 'as slender as the fibre in the stalk of *nivara*, yellow, it shines resembling an atom'. Bhagavan says these descriptions are conceptualizations and are therefore limited mental activities.

It is true that the description of the heart as a form facilitates our conceptual practice of the teachings but it does not sustain the thrust of our practice which seeks the actual origin of all these concepts. One is able

to know the heart only when the concept ceases. Even though the heart apparently exists as very subtle spot in the body, it can be only apprehended when all appearance of activities cease and not otherwise.

### Is it physiological?

We have said that there exists a very subtle spot for the heart in the body. Bhagavan has said the fact that every one points to the chest when referring to himself by gesture, is sufficient proof that the Absolute resides as the Self in every heart. Therefore can the physiological organ made up of flesh and blood and situated on the left side of the chest, be the heart which we have been speak? It can never be. The lump of flesh and blood is composed of the five elements and is part the gross body to which it belongs. It will perish along with the body. It cannot be the seat of Brahman, the Self which transcends the physical and is eternal. If at all the heart is situated in the body, it should be in the subtle body and not in the gross physical level.

### Is it Anahata?

In the human being, there are different planes and components which are quite distinct but at the same time are coordinated into a harmonious unit we call a whole human being. These planes are governed by conscious centres and sources of the dynamic powers by the being and they act as focal points for the consciousness to operate. These centres are picturesquely known as *chakras* (wheels of power), or *padmas* (lotuses) that are ready to unfold. They are situated in the subtle body and are arranged in an ascending series from the lowest physical to the highest mind centre and spiritual centre. These centres are commonly known by yoga practitioners and in the Tantra shastra are known as *muladhara*, *swadhishtana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *visuddhi*, *ajna* and *sahasrara* respectively. The *anahata* centre corresponds to the centre of the chest in the subtle body, and the *sahasrara* to that centre located at the top of the head. In the Tantra shastra, the *anahata* is recognized as the heart centre. Bhagavan says that the *anahata* does not correspond with his description of the heart. Bhagavan asks if it were the heart, the seat of the Self, why should the *tantric* start the yoga from *muladhara* centre? If the *anahata* were to be the seat of the Self, the yoga of the

tantric also would have started there, as the purpose of his yoga is also would be to find the Self. Sri Kapali Sastriar in his commentary on *Ramana Gita* has explained the true form of *anahata chakra* with quotations from the tantric texts. He says, “Though *anahata* is mentioned as the Heart, it would be clear to the discerning mind when it hears about its description, the result of its worship, etc., that it is other than the heart, the place of the sparkling Self.”

*Anahata* is the place of the unstruck sound, the subtle speech, and it is among the six centres which the Yogi has to worship and transcend. In the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse of *Shatichakranirupana*, it is said, “Above that, in the heart is the lotus full of grace, resplendent like a *banduka* flower, set with twelve letters of red colour beginning from *ka*. A celestial tree is indicated as *anahata* by name which bestows in abundance one’s wishes. Here, pretty with six corners is the field of the wind, like smoke.” The text then elucidates the mode of worship of the *anahata chakra* and in the 26<sup>th</sup> verse, the result is mentioned thus: beginning from “Whoever contemplates in the Heart, the lotus, the celestial tree,” and finishes by saying, “He is the lord of all speech, yea, and the lord of the worlds, has power to protect and destroy.”

Likewise in *Anandalahari* starting from “Tasting fully the pollen of the lotus of unfolding consciousness” it then goes on to mention in the course of dealing with the contemplation of the heart named as *anahata*, the result is “whose words fructify in the eighteen fold *Vidyas*.” Elsewhere the yogis mention that the heart known as *anahata* is made of wind principle while the other centres are made of the principles of other elements such as earth, water, fire and space. Sri Kapali Sastriar concludes that the results of the worship of the form of the Heart indicated by the word *anahata* are absolutely different from the results generated by the sadhana on the form of the Heart or *Hridayam*, which is the true identity of the Self.

Sri Vasishtha Ganapathi Muni in his aphorisms on the essence of Raja Yoga has demonstrated that there is a path behind which lies the heart, that is, the *anahata*, and as well the path which is in front, there lies the heart that is the true form of the Self. In his magnum opus, *Umasahasram*, the Muni also sang that there are two well-laid paths for

the play of the Force, one at the back and the other in front of the *sushumna* channel. Therefore though *anahata* is known as the heart situated in the centre of chest, it is different from the Heart that the Maharshi spoke about. The Heart, where the Self sparkles and where the Maharshi asks you to track down the 'I' activity has been acclaimed in the Vedic mantras as "In the Heart, in the inner ocean", in the Upanishads as "He who is the ether inside the Heart," "Hundred and one are the nerve-channels of the heart" and "That which is this lotus abode, the little inner space." In the *Bhagavad Gita* it says, "Lord in the locus of the heart of all beings, the one abiding in the heart, by the sword of the knowledge of the Self." <sup>2</sup>

### The Exact Location

How can a location be mentioned for the true form of the Self which is devoid of the quality of finiteness? The body is the embodiment of ignorance, conditioned by time and place and indicative of inertness. It is suffused by the light of the 'I'-notion. The body's acquaintance with knowledge and action originate from the 'I' activity. Therefore, it is correct to infer that the place of the 'I' activity, the root of all the activities of knowledge and action pertaining to the body should also be relevant somewhere to the body. It is the direct realisation of Bhagavan Sri Maharshi that the location of the heart is on the right portion of the chest and not on the left side. From there effulgence flows through the *sushumna* channel to the *sahasrara*, the centre in the head. From there it flows down the body and *that* is the start of all worldly experiences. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A verse in *Na karmana* which was chanted daily before Bhagavan and is still chanted before His shrine states, "That alone which shines as the tiny *akasa* (space) void of sorrow, in the lotus heart, the tiny seat of the spotless Supreme in the (inner) core of the body is worthy of worship."

<sup>3</sup> "The Self does not come from anywhere else and enter the body through the crown of the head. It is as it is, ever sparkling, ever steady, unmoving and unchanging. The changes which are noticed are not inherent in the Self which abides in the Heart and is self-luminous like the Sun. The changes are seen in Its Light." — *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 616.

### Heart and the Mind

The whole world as we know it is in the form of sensory objects. The existence of the sensory objects is evident from the activity of the senses. The existence of senses is under the control of the mind. Therefore, the whole world is replete with the mind. But, as we recall the mind is born only from the heart. It is not different from the heart. Bhagavan says that all stories or theories of creation and existence end in the heart.

We have already talked about the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm. The sun in the macrocosm corresponds to the heart; the moon corresponds to the mind in *sahasrara*. The moon is not self-luminous as it depends on the self-luminous sun. Similarly the knowledge in the form of mental activity does not *itself* know and depends on the knowledge, that is, consciousness, which resides in the heart. Just as the sun gives light to the moon, the heart bestows its radiance on the mind. In the night, when the sun is not present, one sees the light in the moon. Similarly when a person who is not stationed in the heart but rather is identified with the mind, he sees merely the mind and not the mind's original source, that is, the heart. Without seeing the origin of light, the true form of one's own Self, the ordinary man sees by the mind and things are regarded as separate and different and thus the person is deluded. The knower who is stationed in the heart sees the mind merged in the light of the heart, just as he would see moonlight as a pale and dependent reflection in the presence of the sun during the day. The perception of the division between the seer and the object to be seen is only situated in the mind. For those stationed in the heart the seer becomes one with the sight.

This sadhana of searching for the Self within one's own being, in the heart is the direct method and is superior to other Vedantic sadhanas as 'I am He', 'I am Brahman', 'I am not this, not that'. <sup>4</sup> ▲

<sup>4</sup> *Upadesa Saram*, v.10, "The practice of fixing the mind in its own source in the Heart is, without doubt, true *bhakti*, *yoga*, and understanding."



# The Heart

CHARLES READ

*The One Being, presiding over the mountain Arunachala, who appeared before us as Bhagavan Ramana, is without doubt, present deep within our Hearts. May we seek darshan of the Lord there also.* — Author

*Oh Arunachala! In Thee the picture of the universe is formed, abides and is dissolved; this is the sublime Truth. Thou art the Inner Self. Who dancest in the Heart as 'I'. Heart is Thy name, Oh Lord!* — Arunachala Pancharatnam, v. 2

Ever since I was a boy I have contemplated the mystery of existence, how this extraordinary universe came into being and how I appeared into it, alive and conscious. I have never been able to accept the widely held belief that consciousness has somehow evolved from

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matter though science itself has stated that matter is actually energy that has manifested spontaneously out of nothing. I have come to realize over the years that things are not necessarily what they seem, but subject to alteration due to the magnifying, projecting and distorting nature of our minds. Fortunately I came across Ramana Maharshi's teachings that have enabled me by using the intuition of a stilled and empty consciousness, to see more clearly into the meaning of my existence.

How do I know that I am? This question requires a questioner, and that is I, myself. This is not something that can be explained, but only experienced. To see, eyes are needed, to perceive, a mind is needed; but what do I need in order to know that I am? The conviction of being, 'I am', is the primal knowledge while all other such is acquired later via the mind. 'I am' is the only permanent, self-evident experience that forms the basis for all subsequent happenings. There is continuity in our sleeping and waking states. It is the continuity of Being ('I am') which is consistently present — the experiences of body, other beings and the world come and go. It all changes; only the 'I am', the Beingness, is unchanging.

It is our common experience to be located in a body, but not over all of the body. There appears to be a centre where the certainty of being alive and aware arises. Bhagavan Ramana would point out that drawing attention to ourselves, we indicate our chests not our heads. Our heads rise up in wakefulness and sink down with sleep. He called that intuitive sense of 'I' the center of Being, that formless knowledge 'I-AM', the Heart. The Heart is both the source and center of everything in the body. The Heart is its permanent identity, rather than the brain, our changing and unstable mental-personality. Just as the sparkle in water droplets is a reflection of the infinite light of the sun, so is the 'I am' the reflection in the individual of the universal 'I-AM'.

We know that we are for to be is to be aware. In the way that the illuminating light of an oil lamp cannot be separated from its flame, being and the awareness of being form a similar joining. What we see does not reveal itself or shine of its own accord. To see anything, including darkness, an illumination is necessary. Of what is its nature,

this revealing light of consciousness? It is the self-revealing 'am' in our experience of being that lights up the mind and reveals the world. The mind has its origin in the self-illuminating existence that is us.

But how are we to account for the many and varied experiences of the experiencing centre 'I'? In his poem, *Arunachala Ashtaka* verse 6, Bhagavan Ramana explains how the One Being manifests as 'I', giving rise to a myriad of so-called individuals and objective worlds.

"You alone exist. Oh Heart, the radiance of Awareness. In You a power mysterious dwells, a power that without you is nothing. From It (this power of manifestation) there proceeds, along with a perceiver, a series of subtle shadowy thoughts which, lit by the reflected light of mind amid the whirl of *prarabdha*, appear within as a shadowy spectacle of the world and appear without as the world perceived by the senses, as a film is projected through a lens. Whether perceived or unperceived, these (thoughts) are nothing apart from you, Oh Hill of Grace."

Commenting on this verse Ramana says, "Though it is the only One, yet by its wonderful power it gets reflected on the tiny dot 'I' (the ego)..... such power is called mind in the subtle plane and brain in the physical plane. This mind or brain acts as a magnifier to that Eternal One Being and shows It forth as the expanded universe..."<sup>1</sup>

Just as film scenes are contained within the light from a movie projector, so too is the image of the world contained within the Light radiating from the Heart. The mind is but the medium for this Light. The One Being, manifesting as the universal Heart, appears as the things we see including ourselves.

Ganapati Muni wrote of this in *Ramana Gita* Ch. 5 as well as in the following three verses of his poem dedicated to the Formless Power, *Umasahasram*.

"Whoever realizes the *citta* (pure awareness) as being more precious than the whole universe, as the carefully concealed treasure within the Heart's cave, he will discard all other desires.

Mother! Your radiance which has emerged from the Heart, but has not yet reached the head and is being borne along by the *amrita nadi*

<sup>1</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 323.

(the channel between the Heart and *Sahasrara*) is called *buddhi*. Inherence in that *buddhi* is called inherence in you.

Maheswari! As the light from the moon is but the reflection of the sun's radiance, so the reflection of the radiance of *buddhi* that reaches the atom (of matter) in the head, becomes the *manas* (mind) the source (starting point) of all thoughts.<sup>2</sup>

Then Ramana slowly explained: "Nayana has extolled the very precious nature of *citta* in the first sloka and then explained his own experience gained by spiritual practice. Though the radiance passing from Heart to head gets entangled by external influences due to its association with sense organs, it will be experienced in its pristine purity by those who arrest the current in between in the *amrita nadi*. This radiance is not anything different from the Pure Awareness of the Heart. *Citta* is the subtlest essence of the mind and intellect.

What proceeds to the head from the Heart is that pure radiance. *Citta akasha* and *chid akasha* coalesce inseparably. The Heart is the support of the universe as well as the body. The universe and the body are inhering in this subtle all pervading Heart. Whence all knowledge and activity arises in the *jiva* is called the Heart. It has to be understood by experience; it is there as a subtle centre on the right side of the chest.<sup>3</sup>

When in deep sleep unaware of the world, or ourselves we still exist, but the mind is not active to enable the perception of either subject or object. Bhagavan Ramana has stated that upon waking we briefly experience the Light of the Heart but the projected latent mental impressions immediately manifest as 'myself and the world' and these experiences are taken to be real. Hence the need to retrace this process if we wish to understand and 'realize' our origin, the Heart-Self. We must turn inward from worldly experience, from the subjective ego, to the primordial Light of Being, to the nameless and formless core. This is the process of Self-inquiry.

<sup>2</sup> *Umasahasram*, Canto 4, v.21, 22, 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Nayana* by Dr. G. Krishna p. 193.

Bhagavan Ramana taught that the mind is a bundle of thoughts centred upon the root thought, 'I'. This sense of 'I' rises and falls with waking up and falling asleep. From whence does this sense of I-ness arise? What is its source? Seekers are instructed to turn within to quieten the mind, in order to experience the endless expanse of consciousness. Our identity is clear in our awareness, but there is no one there. We are formless, pure space. In this condition nothing is happening. Because it is the custom the mind to be constantly active, it is unable to comprehend simple being where nothing happens. While performing such contemplation, the mind immediately starts to analyse thereby disturbing the inherent peace of being still. The only way is to let go such random thoughts and just BE. In this timeless, formless condition the individual is able to receive the Guru's grace, as the ego regains its source and the Heart manifests as the true Self. The Heart, ever shining as the dynamic core of everything that is, can be known by intense devotion to the truth of one's existence.

"You know that you are. You cannot deny your existence at any moment of time. For you must be there in order to deny it. This (Pure Existence) is understood by stilling your mind. The mind is the outgoing faculty of the individual. If that is turned within, it becomes *still* in course of time and that 'I-AM' alone prevails. 'I-AM' is the whole Truth."<sup>4</sup> ▲

<sup>4</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 503.



## KEYWORD

# Avidya

**Sanskrit:** ‘not-knowledge’; ignorance.

The concept of *avidya* is one of the most important in Advaita Vedanta. *Avidya* is a comprehensive term which includes *maya*, and can also indicate *ajnana*.

*Avidya* is the cause of *adhyasa* or superimposition of the non-self on the Self. *Avidya* or ignorance is generally accepted as a lack of understanding or a negation of knowledge. In fact, ignorance is a combination of a negative and a positive aspect. The negative is that which conceals the reality from us, and the positive is that which projects the manifest world. This latter positive power (*sakti*) is called *maya*. *Maya* and *avidya* are generally synonymous, though *maya* is sometimes said to be the ignorance or adjunct of *Ishvara*, the creator of this world, and *avidya* to be the ignorance or adjunct of the *jiva* or the individual soul.

*Maya* is associated with the effect of *avidya*, namely the world of name and form.<sup>1</sup> It is an indubitable fact of our experience that though

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<sup>1</sup>“Knowledge and ignorance can only pertain to objects, the non-Self. They are not appropriate to the Self, whose form is pure consciousness.” *Padamalai* by Muruganar, p. 58. Trans. Dr. T. V. Venkatasubramanian, Robert Butler and David Godman. 2004.

we incessantly pursue answers for our suffering, we never attain a satisfactory and final resolution. We can say that from the perspective of the ‘cause and effect’ of phenomena, the most persistent aspect of *maya* is that it prevents us from locating the cause of our discontent. *Avidya* is the failure to discriminate between reality and appearance.

Since ignorance is the cause of bondage, the removal of ignorance is the means for *moksha*, liberation. The removal is accomplished through the realisation of the Self which is the sole reality. The vicious cycle of life and death is dependent on the law of cause and effect. As long one identifies with causality which is illusory (*avidyaka*), there is no end to *samsara*.

We can say the cause of birth and death is ignorance (*avidya*). The ultimate truth is causeless; it is not dependent upon anything for its existence. When one exercises discrimination (*viveka*) between what is real and illusory, one becomes detached (*vairagya*) and knowledge (*jnana*) arises.<sup>2</sup>

According to the sages, the thirst for a ‘cause’ ceases when we attain the Truth or highest knowledge. The one aim of Vedanta, therefore, is the eradication of *maya* or *avidya*. We do not ‘attain’ self-realisation—it is already available and at all times self-evident. What we are required to do is remove *avidya* which obscures self-knowledge. The ultimate reality is not the fruit of activity, all that is required is the removal of ignorance through knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Reality is not dependent on impermanent forms for its existence. What is it which transcends time and space? Wherever we are and whatever the time, the principle of reality remains one and the same. It is ‘one without a second’.

Bhagavan differed from the conventional emphasis on *maya* as an independent entity or *sakti*. He referred to it as non-existent. It was

<sup>2</sup>“The ego, which is the first born of *avidya* (nescience), is what makes for the distinction of ‘I’ and ‘not-I’ which in turn brings about the entire host of finite experiences.” *Ramana Maharshi and His Philosophy of Existence* by T.M.P. Mahadevan, p.34. Sri Ramanasramam, 1999.

<sup>3</sup>M: *Brahma jnana* is not a knowledge to be acquired, so that acquiring it one may obtain happiness. It is one’s ignorant outlook that one should give up. The Self you seek to know is verily yourself—*Maharshi’s Gospel* Book Two, Chapter One, Self-Enquiry.

not something which had the power to create illusion. He said, like Shankara, that *maya* was *mithya*, that is, non-existent and this subtle understanding is at the root of his teaching.<sup>4</sup> If, in the first place *maya* was non-existent, where is the question of illusion? If there is no illusion, where is the question of *moksa*? You are already That, *Tat twam asi*.<sup>5</sup>

We leave the final word to Sri Jnanadeva who wrote in his *Amritanubhava*:

“If the ignorance, because of its own state of ignorance cannot know itself, how can it testify its own existence?

Therefore, were it asserted that ignorance makes itself known by itself, such a conflicting assertion would make the one asserting to observe silence.

The only knowing one is the Atman and if he is fooled by ignorance, then who will take note of that ignorance?

If it (ignorance) cannot for its own sake render the knowing one (Atman) not knowing (ignorance) then one ought to feel ashamed of calling such (as) ignorance.

Were the sun to be swallowed by the clouds, by whose light the clouds would be visible? (Or) if sleep overpowers the sleeper, who would enjoy the sleep?”<sup>6</sup> ▲

<sup>4</sup>Bhagavan: People ask: How did ignorance arise at all? We have to say to them: ‘Ignorance never arose. It has no real being. That which is, is only *vidya* (knowledge).’ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 298.

<sup>5</sup>The Self is ever-present (*nityasiddha*). Each one wants to know the Self. What kind of help does one require to know oneself? People want to see the Self as something new. But it is eternal and remains the same all along. They desire to see it as a blazing light, etc. How can it be so? It is not light, not darkness (*na tejo, na tamah*). It is only as it is. It cannot be defined. The best definition is ‘I am that I AM.’ *Ibid.*, Talk No. 122.

<sup>6</sup>*Amritanubhava*: VII.12-16, p.78. Translated by R.K. Bhagwat. Samata Books, Chennai, 1997.



# Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma's  
Commentary

Verse Nine

S. RAM MOHAN

## Introduction

The two, namely the personal God and the individual souls dealt with in the last verses are a dyad (*duvandva*). Dyads are pairs of opposites, each being the two extremes of one or more qualities, like darkness and light. The personal God is differentiated from the soul as being all-knowing and all-powerful. The soul is described as being ignorant, weak and imperfect. These two constitute a dyad. Knowledge and ignorance, good and evil, pleasure and pain, inside and outside are other examples of dyads. In fact, the dyads are incalculable in number. The principle of dyads differentiates all aspects of life in the world. There is also another cause of differentiation, which was exemplified in the last verse, the triangles of relations called *triputi*-s. One of these

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is the triad of seer, object seeing and the act of seeing. These triads are infinite and immeasurably differentiate the world. The question arises, whether these differences independently arise. If it were found that these are unreal, that would confirm the conclusion reached by the 4th, 5th and 6th verses. In the next verse Bhagavan begins the inquiry, into the nature of dyads and triads.

**Verse 9.**

The dyads and triads always subsist on one thing — the ego. If the Truth behind it be sought in the Heart and found, all of them, that is, dyads and triads, would cease. Those that so see the Truth thus are sages (*jnani-s*) and they are not deluded. This you should see.

**Commentary**

The dyads and triads occur because of mind. Plurality arises due to nescience. The perception of unity as substratum is wisdom. When one member of a dyad is seen, the other member, its opposite, is also seen. In the same way, if one member of a triad is seen, simultaneously the other two are also seen. When one member of a dyad ceases to be seen, the other also vanishes. So too, the three parts of a triad cease simultaneously. As with the whole world, these dyads and triads disappear utterly in deep sleep. This is because they are creations of the mind and do not exist independently of it. Of all the thoughts that arise in the mind, the foremost and most important is the thought of ‘I’ which is the basis and support of all the other thoughts. This ‘I-thought’ always arises only in connection with a body, usually the gross body.<sup>1</sup> This is the ego (*ahamkara*).<sup>2</sup> In this verse, Bhagavan says that the dyads and the triads depend on the ego-sense, that is, they owe their existence to the ego.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Ulladu Narpadu*, verse 25.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed exposition of this ego is given in *Ulladu Narpadu*, verses 23 to 26.

<sup>3</sup> In the original verse it is said only that they all subsist on “one thing”; the ego is not specifically mentioned. According to Sri Lakshmana Sarma, Bhagavan explained that it is the ego that was meant during his conversation with the disciples. In verse 26, it will be shown that this ego is the cause of the world as a whole.

9. മിഥുനങ്ങൾ പ്രകൃഷ്ടം വേർതിരുവേണ്യ ഘറ്റം  
 വിദ്വാനുജ്ഞാതം തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ  
 തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ

മിഥുനങ്ങൾ പ്രകൃഷ്ടം (mituna) veyyathil — The pairs of opposites (light and dark, good and evil, and so on), [and] the three factors of knowledge (the knower, the known, and knowledge itself)

മിഥുനങ്ങൾ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ — are things which exist

തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ — by grasping always on to something (literally, one thing - the ego).

തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ — If (one) investigates with the mind (reasoning faculty).

തന്നെ തന്നെ — existing

‘തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ?’ ‘തന്നെ തന്നെ?’ — ‘What is that something?’

തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ — those things (the pairs of opposites and the factors of knowledge) will all cease.

തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ — Literally: Those who have seen (that).

തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ — [and] those who have seen the truth.

തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ തന്നെ — they are not confused.

തന്നെ തന്നെ — Know (that).

9. The pairs of opposites and the three factors of knowledge are entities which depend upon the one (the mind or ego) for their existence. If one investigates with one's own mental faculties what that one actually is, those entities will cease to be. Those who know in this way are indeed knowers of the truth. They are not confused. This you should know.

— Robert Butler

It is this ego that serves as the seed from which grow all the varieties of difference that conceal— for the ignorant— the Truth of the real Self. It is thus evident that if and when this ego is extinguished by suitable means (*sadhana*), the whole of this phenomenal world would cease and the Real Self will shine unhindered.<sup>4</sup>

In verse 27 and those that follow, it is stated that the means of extinguishing the ego is the quest of the truth or of the place of birth—the source— of the ego-sense itself. That very *sadhana* is indicated here in this verse by the words, “if the truth behind it be sought in the Heart and found.” That is, if the aspirant, seeking to lay bare the truth of the ego, turns his mind inwards, and persists in the quest, the mind finally dives into and is dissolved in the Heart, then there dawns the experience of the Real Self. In the verse what is styled “finding the truth of the ego” is only this experience and nothing else. It is then said these dyads and triads will vanish. From this we must understand that in that experience, these elements of bondage do not survive. Along with their parent, the ego, they are extinguished. Because they do not survive in that state, they are not at all real, but only illusory appearances due to *maya* and *avidya* (ignorance). But so long as the conviction remains active that the body is the Self, they will continue to be taken as real, just as dream-objects appear to the dreamer as perfectly real until he awakes.

It is also stated that the one who has become a sage by being established in this awareness of the Self, is not deluded by these dyads and triads. For him, they do not exist. He does not see them as real, because he sees their substratum, the Self. As the mirage does not delude the one who has seen the dry, hot earth, likewise the dyads and triads do not delude the sage. The delusion is only for those who are bound by the sense of ego, the sense of identification with a body.

In other words, since differences have their root in the ego, and since this ego dies in the ‘experience of the real Self’, all this, namely the mind and its

creations—the dyads and triads—become extinct, leaving the One Real Self as the sole survivor.

The usual tendency of the mind is to try and understand things by dividing phenomenon into pairs of categories—the dyads, light and dark, day and night, death and life. The famous *Nasadiya-sukta* of the *Rig Veda* mentions these pairs of categories. Some other thinkers have postulated a three-fold categorization: instead of two, there are three, like the *gunas*. Whatever may be the categorization, Bhagavan Ramana says that the substratum is one. He mentions in a verse that as all alphabets start with A, the first *akshara*, likewise from the Aum, the many unfold.

Bhagavan echoes the ancient teaching of the Yama, the god of death to that other young *jignasu*, Naciketas in the *Katha Upanisad*. As the one fire having entered the world becomes corresponding in form to every form, so the one inner Self of all beings is corresponding in form to every form and is yet outside: “As air which is one, entering this world become varied in shape according to the object(it enters), so also the one Self within all beings becomes varied according to whatever (it enters) and also exists outside (them all).”<sup>5</sup> The one is immanent in the many and yet transcends it; as the Vedas would say, *atyatishtat dasangulam*, it transcends all measurement. ▲

<sup>4</sup>The path of Deliverance is thus very simple, though it appears to be difficult, except for the fully qualified.

<sup>5</sup> *Katha Upanisad*, II.2.10.



# Gokarna: Holy Site of South India

M.S. BALASUBRAMANIAN

Last May a number of us had the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to Gokarna in order to attend a *Veda parayana* programme sponsored by Ashram devotees. For many of us, it was our first visit and from the very first day we were taken with this small village along the Arabian Sea.

It is said that Gokarna is a holy place but one must go there to appreciate what that really means. Entering the main street of the town gives the impression of moving through a scene from the Puranas. Indeed one gets the impression that everyone in the village is either a pundit or a priest or at least well-versed in the Vedas. When strolling down Car Street toward the main temple, one will invariably hear Vedic recitation in a number of households whether night or day. This is a real treat for those of us coming from life in the noisier, modernizing India or, for that matter, from the fast-paced, consumerizing West. To imagine that traditional culture could still exist and thrive in the years

\* Photos are from Sankarling of Gokarna.

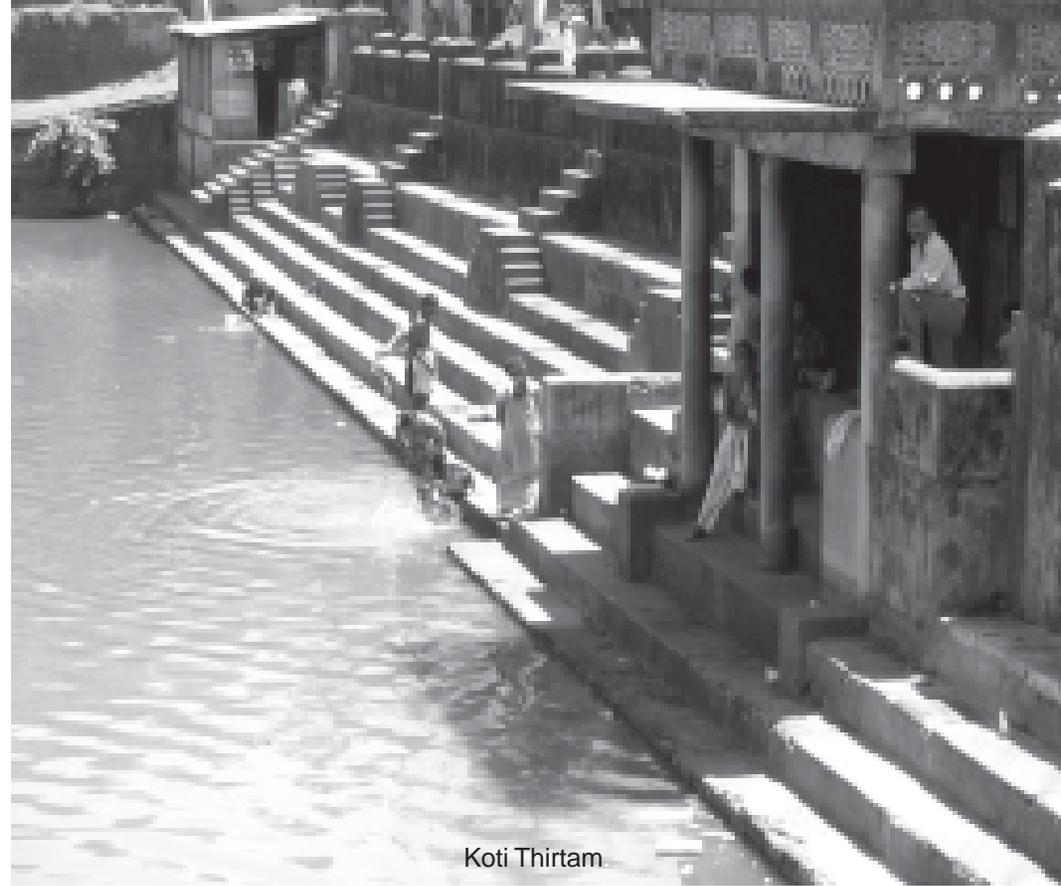
after the advent of the internet, cell phones, and signboard advertising is encouraging. That ancient ways have not been altogether forgotten is heartening. No doubt things are changing in Gokarna as well — unmistakable signs are there — yet this community remains a vibrant testimony to a simpler time centred on prayer, worship and the Vedas.

Gokarna is a *Purana kshetra* and figures highly in the ancient history of Bharat. Meaning ‘cow’s ear’, Gokarna is said to have gotten its name from Lord Rudra, who, having gone to *patala loka* to do penance, returned to earth through the ‘ear’ (*karna*) of Mother Earth (symbolised by the cow). Likewise Mother Ganga is said to have descended to earth and come to rest in Siva’s plaited hair by virtue of Bhagiratha’s penance which he performed in Gokarna. Thus there is an ancient link between Gokarna and the Ganga at Kashi. Local tradition says that while in Kashi there is the Ganga, in Gokarna there is *Koti thirtam*. But in the “scales” of the Gods, Gokarna “weighs more” as it has the full weight of the ocean in addition!<sup>1</sup>

The story of Gokarna is told in the *Skanda Purana* like this: Ravana’s mother, Kaikasa, who regularly performed puja to Lord Siva on the seashore by constructing sand *lingams*, became distraught with the tides which would invariably come and destroy her *lingams*. Deeply devoted to his mother, Ravana assured her that he would please Lord Siva and secure His *atma linga* for her to use in her pujas. After intensive *tapas*, Ravana secured the desired boon, the *atma linga*, from Lord Siva but with the condition that it would be transported directly without setting it down anywhere. If Ravana even set it down just once during his journey home, he would be unable to lift it again.

Meanwhile the Gods who were constantly being troubled by Ravana worried that, once possessing the *atma linga*, Ravana would be unconquerable. They appealed to Vishnu for help and the latter devised a plan. When Ravana had reached the area that is Gokarna, Vishnu utilized his sudarshana disc to block the light of the sun and

<sup>1</sup> Details here are taken from G. Kameshwar’s very readable and insightful temple travelogue of the South Indian West coast called *Tulu Tales: A Soota Chronicle*, Rupa & Co., 7/16, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002, p. 75.



Koti Thirtam

create the effect of sunset. Ravana, devout in saying his prayers morning and evening, stopped for his *sandhya* rites. At Lord Vishnu’s prompting, Ganesha appeared at Ravana’s side in the form of a young brahmin boy and, conveniently, the latter asked the lad to hold the *lingam* while he prayed. Ganesha said he would do so but, as he was young and small and the *lingam* was big and heavy, he would only be able to hold it for a short time. When he could not hold it any longer, he would call out Ravana’s name three times. If Ravana did not respond, the boy would then be at liberty to lay the *lingam* down on the ground. While Ravana was deep in meditation, Ganesha called three times: “Ravana, Ravana, Ravana!” Ravana was deep in meditation and did not want to interrupt it. For his part, Ganesha was free of his obligation and set the *lingam* down. At the instant the *lingam* touched the earth, it sent its roots down into the *patala* and spread them out broadly. Try as he might, Ravana was unable to

lift it again, though, through the intensive effort with his 20 strong arms, he broke pieces off the top of the *lingam*. Giving up in frustration, he hurled away the broken pieces<sup>2</sup>, and then struck the boy on the head for having failed him. (Hence the dent on Ganesha's head still visible today at the Gokarna temple).

After Ravana's departure, Siva and Parvati appeared on the scene. The Lord repaired the damage to the *lingam* and worshipped it as *Mahabaleswara* — 'Lord of great strength' — as it had humbled the prideful Ravana. Lord Siva declared that he would live in the *lingam* forever and assured blessings for all who came to worship it in earnest. He consoled young Ganesha and soothed his aching head, compensating him for his heroism by erecting a temple to him and declaring that thenceforth, all worshippers at Lord Siva's temple, wherever it might be, must first offer obeisance to Ganesha. The ancient *Mahabaleswara* Temple at the heart of town is the temple which enshrines the *atma lingam* and the nearby Ganesha temple commemorates Ganesha's role in securing the *lingam*.<sup>3</sup>

Pilgrims come to Gokarna from far and wide and many with the specific intention of performing *shraddha* rites — intercessory prayers and pujas for deceased relatives. By tradition, Gokarna is renowned as a place of purification and the nearby Aghanaashini River gives testimony to this by its very name which means 'destroyer of sins'.

Known as *Parashurama Kshetra* since Lord Parashurama did tapas here<sup>4</sup>, Gokarna has been visited by great figures in the pantheon. Arjuna came during his *tirtha yatra* as did Balarama, Lord Rama and Sage Gautama. Ravana came to do penance for 10,000 years to win a boon

<sup>2</sup> Four in all, the broken pieces landed nearby and formed Siva *kshetras*. *Murdeswara* is one such *kshetra*.

<sup>3</sup> Every 40 years, a special khumbhabhishekam is performed where the *atma lingam* is partially unearthed. During these regular rededication rites, there has never been an occasion when the *lingam's* base was successfully reached even though priests have dug down as much as 10 vertical feet.

<sup>4</sup> Gokarna is also one of the 108 *Shakti peethams*. The Goddess is Bhadrakali. See *Devi Bhagavatha*, 7th Skanda, 38th Chapter, v. 27 for the details of Parvati's martyrdom.



Mahabaleswara Temple

from Bramha, and later, Lord Rama came to atone for the sin of killing Ravana who, though an *asura*, was a Rishi's son.<sup>5</sup> King Mitrasaha, known as Kalmasapada, became a demon by Vasishtha's curse but by coming to Gokarna and worshipping in its holy temple, attained *moksha*.<sup>6</sup> In the Purana it is stated that, "by mere entrance into Gokarna, one becomes liberated from hundreds of sins. And one is free from rebirth by merely beholding the sight of the *atma lingam*, by hearing the roar of the sea, or bathing in *Koti thirtam*."<sup>7</sup>

### Present Day Gokarna

To this day, a hidden power remains in this small hamlet and it is recognizable even to short-term visitors like us. One gets the impression

<sup>5</sup> *Tulu Tales*, p. 98; Arjuna, see *Adi Parva*.

<sup>6</sup> *Puranic Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Dictionary with Special Reference to the Epic and Puranic Literature*, Vettam Mani, Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, p. 294.

<sup>7</sup> This quotation from *Gokarna Purana* in *Tulu Tales*, p. 60.

that time forgot this small village and left it in peace to shine forth the splendour of a more wholesome period in the past. Its geography no doubt played a part in preserving its ancient mystique. Until recently, reaching it was not easy. The bay to the immediate west of town does not lend itself to the anchoring of sea vessels and so during British rule, a port was never constructed. To the east are a number of rivers which precluded vehicular access up until only a few decades ago when a suspension bridge was constructed. Prior to that, pilgrims had to cross by ferry boat and travel the remainder by foot over densely vegetated terrain. Further east are the magnificent Western Ghats cloaked in thick woodlands and pristine rain forest. The Ghats' high annual rainfall made permanent land routes difficult to establish up until the last century.

Even with the Mogul invasion of the subcontinent, the region in which Gokarna is situated forestalled colonisation for some 150 years by virtue of the strength and power of the Vijayanagar Empire. Several hundred years later, during Mogul rule, a Brahmin King governed the area and was able to preserve Gokarna's Vedic character, going so far as to grant lands to resettle some 250 Brahmin families from Uttar Pradesh to take responsibility for maintaining its temples and shrines. Their descendants make up the modern community we see today.

### Gokarna and Bhagavan Sri Ramana

The hosts of our stay at Gokarna knew we were Bhagavan devotees and were quick to point out numerous connections between Gokarna and Bhagavan Sri Ramana. For example, Tamil Nayanmars Jnanasambandar and Appar, the great poet-saints whose poetic verse and spiritual pre-eminence Bhagavan regarded so highly, had visited and sang of the glory of Gokarna. More recently, Kavya Kanta Ganapathi Muni came (in 1913) by steamship and spent at least several months, (and by some accounts, several years), doing *tapas* at *Uma Maheshwara*. Still today local community memory recalls Kavya Kanta's stay in Gokarna. When Kavya Kanta first came, some local pundits admitted to having eyed the wiry-framed foreigner with suspicion. But when the Muni responded to their queries in pithy, clever Sanskrit phrases that revealed his profound knowledge, their suspicion instantly turned to respect.

One account tells how in the early days of Kavya Kanta's stay, he asked to borrow some books from one of the local pundits with whom he had become acquainted. At the time, the Muni was interested in Vidhyaranya's commentary on the Vedas. A prodigious work bound in over a half a dozen large Sanskrit tomes, the Muni would borrow one volume each day and return it the successive day, each time requesting another volume. The pundit who owned the books became perplexed and mused to himself in this vein: "No one can read and study such lengthy, difficult Sanskrit texts in a single night". So he berated the scholar: "What is it you are *doing* with these books?" When the Muni answered that he was simply reading them in the night, the pundit was unconvinced and subjected him to an impromptu oral exam. What the examination revealed was that not only had the scholar been reading an entire volume of the Sanskrit work cover to cover each night, but, to the local pundit's utter astonishment, the Muni had *total* recall of every page.

After hearing his discourses and devotional lyrics, it wasn't long before the community at Gokarna recognized Kavya Kanta's greatness. By and by disciples gathered around him.<sup>8</sup>

Another close connection between Gokarna and Sri Bhagavan is Sri Daivarata Gajanana Sarma, the Gokarna native who immediately became a student of Kavya Kanta. Already the young Daivarata had learnt the *Rig Veda* by heart and had had initiation in mantra from Ramdas Maharaj. But from Ganapati Muni, he learned the secrets of Vedic mantra and, in time, became a 'seer' of mantra himself. His *Chhandodarsana* was marvelled at by the Muni who said that in 1917, at the age of twenty five, Daivarata, in a "state of *samadhi*, began to [spontaneously] utter Vedic metrical expression[s]. They continued to come for sixteen [consecutive] days" and were written down by him. Ganapati Muni claims that these *mantras* (450 in all) were revealed to Daivarata on account of his "having attained the super-sight of a *Rishi* through *Tapas*." Kavya Kanta subsequently introduced Daivarata to Bhagavan Sri Ramana and the latter instantly became a devotee of Sri Bhagavan. He composed melodious hymns in

<sup>8</sup> This account related by local residents.

<sup>9</sup> *The Mountain Path: Book Reviews*, Vol. VI, No. 3, 1969 and *Ashram Bulletin*, Vol. 12 No. 4, 1975.



praise of Sri Ramana<sup>10</sup> as well as *Srimad Ramana Maharsher*, a concluding verse to *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam*. Later Bhagavan adapted the idea of Daivarata's verse in a concluding venba, *Arunagiri Ramanah*. Sri Daivarata's questions and the numerous replies given by Bhagavan form the third chapter of *Sri Ramana Gita*.

### Mahasivaratri

The occasion of our visit was not during *Mahasivaratri* time, so we were unable to witness Gokarna in her full glory. But in our short stay we got to participate in the chariot processions which take place each *amavasya*. Our procession car was Gokarna's smaller chariot which we had the honour of pulling along the ancient avenue from Ganesha Temple to Venkataramana Temple. Meanwhile the mighty *Mahasivaratri* chariot stood silently by, towering above us, watching and waiting for the great moment when it would make its appearance, nobly bearing the Lord during the supreme festival of springtime. Indeed, on *chaturdasi* of the dark moon in February-March each year, tens of thousands descend on this holy sight to praise Lord Siva during this most auspicious of occasions. They, as well as those of us who have come at other times of the year, are blessed to be part of a majestic lineage of pilgrims that goes back to Brahma Himself and includes abundant Maharsis, Bhutas and Yaksas<sup>11</sup> — all who have come at one point or another to worship Lord Siva in this holy place. ▲

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<sup>10</sup> *Hymn of Eight Verses*.

<sup>11</sup> *Vana Purana*.



# From Vak-Vichara to Atma-Vichara

RUSTOM P. MODY

*The author first came to Sri Ramana's ashram at the age of 18. He returns whenever possible and makes a few rounds of Annamalai. In 1998, he stayed for a year. Sri R. Rajamani kindly offered to help explain some of Ramana's texts. This article represents the fruit of these valuable interactions.*

## The Assumption of Translatability

**O** *Bhagavan!* we say.  
How do we translate this? 'O' can of course be left as 'O'. But for someone completely unfamiliar with the Indian context 'Bhagavan' needs to be somehow dealt with. We could therefore indicate words like God, Lord, Master. We could give the six characteristics that Ganapati Muni gives for one who may be called 'Bhagavan'. And we could narrate innumerable stories of how Bhagavan is bhagavan-ish.<sup>1</sup> But now if our interlocutor were to ask: "Please

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<sup>1</sup> Bhagavan in Sanskrit means the one who possesses six characteristics of excellence called in Sanskrit as *Bhaga*. The six qualities are: i. All Powerfull (*aishwarya*); ii. Righteous (full of *dharma*), though some replace it with valour (*veerya*); iii. Fame (*yasa*); iv. Wealth (*sri*); v. Knowledge (*jnana*); vi. Detachment and dispassion (*vairagya*).

give me one English word for Bhagavan,” what would we give? All the words earlier indicated like God, etc., can be used but somehow are unsatisfactory as a replacement for Bhagavan.

Clearly the demand and the attempt to translate rest on the assumption of translatability.

When we find that we cannot translate one crucial word how come we are so sanguine in assuming that the *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, *The Collected Works*, etc., are valid as Bhagavan’s word rather than someone’s rendition thereof?

It should be noted here that the assumption of translatability, so universal in the secular sphere, is rarely upheld in the sacred realm. Some examples:

1. Hindus regard Sanskrit as the language of the gods. This obviously implies that Sanskrit sacred texts, especially mantras, are untranslatable.
2. Islam actually bans translations of the Koran. If you make a translation, you may call it a commentary but not a translation.
3. The Egyptian master Hermes asserts that the force of his words would get diluted if translated from the Egyptian.
4. In the Jewish custom (at least till a few decades ago) there were two languages, Yiddish and Hebrew, the former for mundane affairs and the latter for religious. The reason given was that the spiritual domain should not get polluted with worldly matters.
5. Muruganar has said *mozhi peyarttal endral muzhi peyarttal*, i.e., translations are like seeing the beauty of the face after removing the eyes. And if we may be permitted to take the two meanings of ‘translate’ as cognate rather than merely coincidentally related, *achala* means untranslatable!

So, although the religions and spiritual traditions of the world accepted that the medium contributed in some significant way to the message,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Sri Ramana had read the Bible and Shakespeare and yet he almost always spoke in Tamil or some other South Indian language, letting a translator translate. I wonder whether this strengthens or weakens my argument!

mainstream science and other ‘respectable’ areas frowned on such a consideration. Until...

### Benjamin Lee Whorf

The great American linguist B. L. Whorf brought to our attention *the fallacy of the assumption of translatability*. His work can be summarized in two principles:

*Linguistic Relativity* states that we create the world according to the lines ingrained in our language.

*Linguistic Determinism* states that our language conditions our thinking.

I consider these ideas as holding great hope for those of us who are struggling to fathom and practise Sri Ramana’s way. When we read books like *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* we are all subjected to a peculiar tension. On the one hand there is this strange sense that what Sri Ramana is conveying is very simple and direct and is completely devoid of sophistication and arcane learnedness. On the other, it’s quite evident that his audience has great difficulty ‘getting’ what he is saying. This is in no way to suggest that I understand any better – in most cases I find myself on the awestruck but baffled side of the questioner! Yes, sometimes the light does flicker on for a while but that’s more the exception than the rule.

So we sit before Bhagavan and ply him with questions. In response, he relentlessly drives us back to something called ‘The Self’. We are bewildered. What is this ‘Self’ with a capital S? We try to probe him further. He elucidates as follows:

At the root of all one’s cogitation is one’s I-sense. This I-ness is not just the foundation of one’s psychology but our whole world is only its projection. In short, the I – Self – is the root of everything.

The argument is unimpeachable. “But it does not satisfy!” is the chorused response.

One finds two typical ways out of this predicament:

a) What do you expect after all? All of us karmically bound individuals cannot expect to really understand the standpoint of the

*jnani*. If we did, we would be *jnani-s* ourselves. Many lifetimes are required to attain that state!

b) There are no lifetimes and no one who does not know. We are all *jnani-s* only we don't know that we know.

The first position is negative-emotional and destroys hope, the second gives false hope based on a disconnected intellectuality. *Is there no third alternative?*

Sri Ramana's approach is to relentlessly drive me to make an objective study of my subjectivity. But I find my subjectivity a completely uninteresting area of research! I want a lollipop. Bhagavan is not obliging me. So I bawl – first option. Or else, I am smug – second option – somehow convincing myself that Vedantic verbiage will sweeten my mouth.

The problem is that Sri Ramana's I-AM scorched his thoughts right from the time he was sixteen till the end of his life. My I-Am-ing also works... but for 2-5 seconds only!

Perhaps we should just, at this point STOP, sense the fullness of I-AM in my whole body, and see?

So if we say that Sri Ramana is too difficult and that we can't understand him, that's false and dishonest. What we really mean is: "I only asked for a lollipop and I've been given this spinach (self-enquiry). BAWL!"

When my bawling is done and I am again in a mood to listen to Bhagavan he (as always) tells me to pay attention to the sense of I-AM. I may have finished my bawl but the fact remains that I don't like the taste of the spinach.

When I find this, my I-AM, too too immediate and sheer for my comfort, I slip into one of the following sorrowful consequences:

i) Bhagavan! I am too simple, unlearned, weak... (adjectives *ad libitum*) Can you not recommend me some other practice? Some prayers, japas, pujas, etc.?

ii) I lapse with jerk from the pure subjectivity of Self shown by Sri Bhagavan into pure objectivity – Science, Politics, Social Work, Technology, etc.

iii) Struggle!

We see that the first is once again the bawling option and the second is the smug option in a different guise. For i), we can say that a fair reading of the Ramana literature would show that while he is not against practices per se, *he is completely against practices as a replacement for understanding*. As for ii), we know that attaining satisfaction through all these avenues is as plausible as satisfying one's thirst with mirage-water because they are all based on *an unexamined naïve assumption of the reality of the objective world*. Yet, we keep slipping into this because we find no middle ground between the diverse objects of the myriad fashionable fields of study and the ever self-same subject of Sri Ramana.

Whorf offers hope because he eases the third option.

### Language Enquiry a stepping stone to Self Enquiry

His language-enquiry avoids both the above mentioned sorrowful consequences: It does not replace understanding with action nor does it take the objective to be the real ignoring one's subjectivity. While not as final as Sri Ramana's Self-enquiry, it provides some aid to our tottering psychological apparatus.

Language-enquiry may appear to call into question the extant translations. To some extent, this may happen in passing but the focus is really the assumption of translatability and the consequent limitations to our understanding. My purpose is not to find fault with some details that could be improved but to point out those aspects that simply cannot be satisfactorily translated.

So to start our enquiry we ask: Did Sri Ramana make any statements in the Whorfian direction? Not directly but here is an explicit reference to (Tamil) grammar.

*Self-Enquiry* Q. 4. When one enquires into the root of 'self-conceit' which is of the form 'I' all sorts of different thoughts without number seem to rise; and not any separate 'I' thought.

M: Whether the nominative case, which is the first case, appears or not, the sentences in which other cases appear have as their basis the first case; similarly all the thoughts that appear in the heart have as

their basis the egoity which is the first mental mode 'I', the cognition of the form 'I am the body'.<sup>4</sup>

So, the entire manifold structure of our thoughts is rooted in the I-thought *and this is analogous to and is reflected by* the case structure of Tamil (*vetrumai*) in which the various cases are built upon the first nominative case.

The analogy is more convincing for Tamil than for English because short of 'he', 'him', 'his' English has no real cases. The others' jobs are done by prepositions: to him, with him, by him, etc. Evidently then the force of the analogy is stronger for Tamil than for English.

While the above is an obvious but not very important example of linguistic relativity, the previous question in the same text, one of the more significant passages in Sri Ramana's written works, has a statement about statements whose force in Tamil is completely lost in the English but which the English reader unacquainted with the Tamil would never suspect.

Q 3: How is one to enquire 'Who am I?'

M: Actions such as 'going' and 'coming' belong to the body. And so when one says 'I went' 'I came' it amounts to saying that the body is 'I'. But can the body be said to be the consciousness 'I'...

An examination of the Tamil original shows that the sentences 'I went' 'I came' are renderings of the Tamil *single word sentences*, 'ponen', 'vanden'. Where is the 'I'?

The discrepancy arises because just as Tamil is more strongly cased than English, its verbs are also more strongly inflected. The single word 'went' cannot stand alone in an English sentence because it could be 'I went,' 'You went,' 'He went,' 'She went,' etc.

But in Tamil, they are all different: *nan vanden*, *ni vanday*, *avan vandan*, *aval vandai*, etc.

The inflexion of verbs in Tamil is sufficiently detailed to indicate the subject unambiguously, *which is therefore commonly dropped*, an option not available in English.

<sup>4</sup> *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2004, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

If therefore we were to translate the sentence *vanden* strictly, it would be: '(I-implicit-but-not-said) came.'

But here the pedantry is worse than the earlier inaccuracy because it grossly thumps out something that is very subtle in the original: One utters many sentences; these make a whole world – without saying 'I'. That world nevertheless is rooted in the I.

What happens to this in the English? Evidently quite lost! Clearly, *the fact* is true for all languages because it is true for all humans. But *the example* hinges on subtleties of Tamil and does not translate smoothly.

### Path of Knowledge?

In continuing our study of how much has slipped off in translation, we now look at *Who am I?*, the little text that Sri Ramana often suggested as containing the gist of his teachings.

This first para is a compact summary of the whole work and is therefore a very important passage in Sri Ramana's teachings. It runs as follows:

"As all living beings desire to be happy always, without misery, as in the case of everyone there is observed supreme love for oneself and as happiness alone is the cause for love, in order to gain that happiness which is one's nature and which is experienced in the state of deep sleep where there is no mind, one should know one's self. For that the path of knowledge, the enquiry of the form 'Who am I?' is the principal means."

The passage is important because it shows that the imperious call to self-knowledge follows from the universal fact of self-love (and not because the word *jnana* makes me feel very self-important!) In other words, the path of knowledge is a corollary to our love for self; its not primary.

But does Bhagavan say 'path of knowledge'?

The Tamil original of the second sentence is:

*adarku nan yar ennum jnana vicharme mukhiya sadhanam*

Literally it means: For that "I – who" *jnana vichara* [emphasis] (is the) principal means.

Here *jnana vichara* has been rendered as ‘path of knowledge’. But we know that *jnana* is knowledge and *vichara* is enquiry. *Where is ‘path’?* Evidently, we have here an elliptic translation.

So then we ask: What is the deep import of *jnana vichara* that is lost in ‘path of knowledge’?

Clearly, *jnana* and *vichara* are very similar words: enquiry leads to knowledge, knowledge is the fruit of enquiry. So then Sri Bhagavan has chosen a strange repetitive (or more correctly recursive) form here. Why?

If we render *jnana* as knowing and *vichara* as trying to know, *jnana vichara* may be rendered as *attempting to know the knowing*.

It may be appropriate here to mention that in Rinzaï Zen, the seeker is asked *to cultivate the doubt sensation*, which means *moving towards the sense of the question*. That is, one must intensify the questioning rather than seeking to end it by finding an answer.

This is *jnana-vichara* – in two words Sri Bhagavan has compressed the entire teaching. The sciences also ‘know’ but they know outward things. Sri Bhagavan asks us to seek to know the knowing – his clarion call for recursion on one’s subjectivity.

It would I think be fair to state that even for a Tamil speaker, the density packed into *jnana-vichara* may well be lost on first reading. But at least it is available when the requisite subtlety of mind is attained. But for the English reader reading ‘path of knowledge’ it is irretrievably lost.

### *Seshtai*

The following passage is from *Who am I?*

Q 17: Is not everything the work of God?

M: Without desire, resolve, or effort, the Sun rises; and in its mere presence, the sunstone emits fire, the lotus blooms, water evaporates, people perform their various functions and then rest. ... Like the worldly actions not affecting the sun, no karma attaches itself to God... God has no resolve.<sup>6</sup>

A common religious question is asked. At first the answer seems to be taking off at a tangent – more in the lines of a physics book giving

<sup>6</sup> *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2004, p. 42.

a description of the energy cycle – the Sun as ultimate propellant for all the earth’s activities. Only at the end is ‘God’ brought in emphasising his (its?) distance from human concerns.

Now in this panorama of earthly life, let’s see where we fit in – it is ‘function’. What is the Tamil for function? *Seshtai*. While ‘function’ may do as translation, the more literal meaning is ‘frolic,’ the suggestion being that of children who perform all kinds of cute activities but with no consistent intent or direction; the playing is its own purpose.

And suddenly we feel the majesty and gentleness of Sri Ramana’s station. Like a being from some other planet (or Sun?) he looks upon us in a kindly manner. The fundamental mainstay of our collective life – our much vaunted ‘civilization’ – resting on the deepest assumptions of our individuality – that I am something, that my normal consciousness is really consciousness, that my actions are purposeful (or otherwise!), that I can ‘DO’ – I suddenly have a glimpse of some stellar viewpoint from which it’s all just frolic!

### The Self

We now come to the central teaching of Sri Ramana. It has been stated – and rightly so – by many knowledgeable persons that ‘The Self’ is the central and most important aspect of Sri Ramana’s teachings; everything else is more or less peripheral. And so in keeping with the spirit of reaching *atma-vichara* through *vak-vichara* (language-enquiry) we ask: What is ‘The Self’ in the Tamil original?

And now we are in for a big surprise: there is no single word in Tamil answering to the English ‘The Self’.

The concerned English reader may react: “What! Bhagavan does not talk of anything equivalent to the Self?! Are we poor hapless English readers being had?”

Well, not exactly. Sri Ramana uses a number of Tamil words – three of them: *atma*, *swarupa* and *tan* occurring most frequently – all of which are rendered by the English ‘The Self’. The rendering is not wrong: one can translate all three as ‘The Self’. The problem is that such a translation irons out nuances of differences in the original and

gives the reader the impression that Sri Ramana used ‘The Self’ as a bludgeon to hammer hapless interlocutors into silence.

But what is the case then?

The three words – *atma*, *tan* and *swarupa* – each rendered as ‘The Self’ – have individually different colours. Lets look at each of these in turn.

### *Atma*

This is a Sanskrit word and has a strong Sanskrit flavour. Just as a direct biblical reference in English gives a churchy colour, to the Indian ear, *atma* has an unmistakably spiritual tone.<sup>7</sup>

Of all forms of ‘The Self’, *atma* is the highest sounding (the *paramatma* colour) but for that very reason, it carries the disadvantage that an Indian hearing it involuntarily cogitates thus: “I am just an ordinary person... not very religious... these are high and difficult matters...” ie. the religious line looks impracticable to the typical ‘ordinary’ person. So, we turn to the second form that Sri Ramana uses.

### *Tan*

*Tan*, also rendered as ‘The Self’ has a very different colour from *atma*. It is a fully Tamil word. Just as in English, an Anglo-Saxon word has a more earthy flavour as compared to Latin; *tan* too has a *real* non-religious quality. A Tamilian would use *tan* roughly as the ‘oneself’ in the English: “To know for sure, one should see for oneself.”

So when Bhagavan sometimes uses the Sanskrit *atma* and sometimes the Tamil *tan*, he is like a mother helping us make what is for us spiritual toddlers a difficult leap: *the atma – great Self, God – is in fact the same as our ordinary self – tan*. Just disregard the ‘limiting adjuncts.’

However, even for the most earnest and resolute Ramana-disciple (and especially for such) this leap that spans the transcendental and the

temporal is unsettling and usually quite unacceptable. It is here that Sri Ramana uses *swarupa* as a mediating and reconciling factor between the transcendental which we seek but don’t believe and the ordinary which we are but don’t value.

### *Swarupa*

*Swarupa*, which we can render as nature or essential nature or perhaps just essence, is the midpoint. If my attention is drawn to *atma* – “trailing clouds of glory we come from God who is our home” I just blink – Eh? Who?! Me?! Conversely, when I am told that my mundane I – who eats and walks and writes articles — is all I need to seek, I get no satisfaction.

But *swarupa* is neither. It is not our mundane self. But neither is it the absolute but abstract *atma*. It is very particularly and specifically me but at a level of significance that is beyond my egoic individuality. It is the seed planted in the ordinary life, which flowers into the life divine.

When we find our *swarupa*, we find that point of action, which expresses our individuality but has cosmic significance. It is the carrier of that destiny which we are born to fulfil – if only we could see past the superficial accidents to the underlying writ of the gods. What really is me – my essence – beneath the accumulated driftwood of my personality?

We now begin to appreciate the gentle subtlety with which Bhagavan introduces me to my schizophrenia. “Who? me? I, a schizophrenic?” I hear myself protest. Yes, witness my three I’s: the mundane I – *tan*, the abstract I – *atma* and the essence-ial I – *swarupa*. It is commonly represented that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi’s teaching is “Who am I?” But does Bhagavan ever say, “My teaching is ‘Who am I?’” Whenever we approach him with a question, the question invariably originates in one of such identifications. And then, Natesa-Ramana light-footedly dances ‘Who am I’ with these many fragmented I’s – a dance of pitting these multiple I’s against each other so that the substrate of the one real I that I ever am takes birth.

The Tamil is *naan yaar* literally ‘I – Who?’ which somehow makes the question more generic and less oriented than the standard English

<sup>7</sup>There is one happy case where the translation betters the original. The English Talks has: “If God were apart from the Self, he would be a selfless God, which is absurd.” The Hindi translation (of the English) has: “If the paramatma were anatma that would be absurd.” The absurdity which is not at all evident in the English is patent in the Hindi.

rendering. It points to that diffused deep point of anguish about the sense and significance of my existence. It may be “Why am I here?” “Where will I go after I die?” “Why do I suffer so?” “Who is truly my own?” or any number of other forms.

But regardless of what form these question takes, depending on our individual type, we each will have our own song. For example, when in my mundane life I forget that there must be some other purpose for which I was born, Bhagavan reminds me of ‘my’ *atma*. Now I easily spout Vedanta and he brings me back to the sense and experience of my essence. Then I make a habit of meditation techniques and he gently chides ‘Reality is ever realized. Who is practising?’

I do not believe that Bhagavan asks us to parrot ‘Who am I?’ but rather to keep the dance of my very own question alive and not let it get dulled by forgetfulness or get quelled by language-based answers. Vichar-ing – the verb<sup>8</sup> – is what counts not the abstract noun *Vichara*, whatever that might mean.

Sri Bhagavan hints that if we keep this question alive inside us than outside – the play of our lives – will surprise even our wild egoic fancies:<sup>9</sup>

“In all manner of ways possible one should endeavour gradually not to forget one’s true self (*swarupa*) that is God (*atma*). If that is accomplished all will be accomplished. The mind should not be directed to any other matter.”<sup>10</sup> ▲

<sup>8</sup> Or should I say verbing?

<sup>9</sup> Ramana Maha-rshi literally translates as playful great sage.

<sup>10</sup> *Self Enquiry* Q13, *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2004, p.14.

## VERSE

## On the Welling Bust\*

MUKESH VATSYAYANA

Each cell of this face shelters a sun  
so tempered and serene it will hold the gaze,  
turned outside forever tied to illusion’s tail,  
till the errant gaze melts in the yielding eyes  
and God’s peace attends the ungodly heart.

Caught in the lustrous spell of this face,  
Welling’s camera revealed the good image  
——Bhagavan, you are the light——  
enough to make an immaculate portrait  
and bless the orphaned gaze to come.

This face a gentle nod to liberty  
initiates a natural releasement  
from the mind-cage of mud-made men,

\*G. K. Welling, a professional photographer from Bangalore took a series of photographs of Bhagavan in circa 1949, one of which is the renowned ‘Welling Bust’.

even beyond the earth-locked meanings  
they give the word in their muddy idiom.

This face balanced on an ambivalence —  
a maternal mindfulness circumscribed  
by an air of illimitable sanctity —  
you approach with love, pause, stand in a hush,  
awed before the blazing Self hymned in flesh.

This face forever in the right gathers  
our duelling facets scattered in the wrong,  
hoist with our Jekyll and Hyde petard,  
and high above the schizoid terra  
houses us whole in a convent of stars.

O grace-fed, grace-feeding face,  
wrapping infinity in the folds of your skin,  
hold us graceless in the alchemy of silence,  
place a drop of ambrosia on our tongues,  
knowledge distilled to the point of compassion,  
that your presence may shine in our O absent hearts. ▲

# Internet Resources

DENNIS WAITE

*The following forms an Appendix to the book 'Sources of Truth' by Dennis Waite, scheduled for publication by O Books in 2007. Dennis is also the author of The Book of One, The Spiritual Path of Advaita, O Books 2003, ISBN 1-903816-41-6 and An Essential Guide to Sanskrit for Spiritual Seekers, Black & White 2005, ISBN 818932000-9.*

## Internet Resources

In the past ten years, the information relating to Advaita that is available on the Internet has multiplied dramatically. In 1995, a few discussion groups enabled interested seekers to share their understanding and discuss their experiences but there were few actual web sites. Web search technology was also in its infancy, so that it was not easy to discover the little information that might be found. Today, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2005, typing the keyword “advaita” into the most popular search engine (Google) returns precisely 302,000 results. More careful

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selection of search criteria can recover information about virtually any aspect of the subject. Even entire classical works can be downloaded for study off-line, such as the unparalleled *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recently made available at Sri Ramanasramam.

This article aims to provide a very brief introduction to the sort of material that may be found. The source is my own web site – [www.advaita.org.uk](http://www.advaita.org.uk) – part of whose purpose is to link to those sites that I have found to be particularly good in their related classification. As editor of the Advaita category for the Open Directory Project - [http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion\\_and\\_Spirituality/Advaita\\_Vedanta/](http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Advaita_Vedanta/) - the aim is that I should be aware of all sites dedicated to Advaita, whether about specific teachers, organizations, publications, philosophy or history. [Note that, because site owners may change their web hosts, or even cease to maintain a site altogether, the addresses given below may change and it is always best to check with site directories such as the one above to ensure that the most up-to-date address is used.]

### Organisations

These are locations which provide specific teaching on Advaita, usually in the form of regular talks or discussion groups. They may also publish their own books or at least provide a bookstore from which books on Advaita may be purchased. Some of the larger ones may operate from many locations, possibly throughout the world. Whilst their principal aim is to advertise their facilities and encourage new members, many also provide information on-line for the casual “browser”. This may be anything from biographical information of founders to complete downloadable books (usually in PDF format for ease of reading on-line).

#### 1. UK-Based

*Shanti Sadan* was founded by Hari Prasad Shastri in London in 1929. Free talks are organised on most Wed. and Fri. Evenings at W11. There is a bookshop and a quarterly journal is issued. <http://www.shanti-sadan.org/>

*School of Economic Science*. Also known as the Philosophy Foundation or School of Practical Philosophy in the US, this is one of the most widespread organizations, with centres in a number of

countries around the world, especially in the UK. There are also branches in Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Trinidad, Venezuela and South Africa. The principal emphasis is on karma yoga.

Most of the ideas are presented in the first term of 12 lectures but students are encouraged to continue attendance indefinitely. Eventually, stable groups may form to practise and discuss the philosophy, attending regular ‘residential’ courses of 2 - 10 days at a time, in addition to their 36 weekly meetings per year, to enable more concentrated practice. Transcendental Meditation is introduced after two years. It is also a world-class centre for the study of Sanskrit.

The school provides a valuable introduction to Advaita and can be highly recommended. There are several shortcomings but these only become apparent after some time, namely the absence of a ‘residential sage’, an obsession with conquering the ego and the confusing of Sankara-based Advaita with teachings from other traditions. <http://www.schooleconomicsscience.org/>

*The Saraswati Society* has held satsang in Sutton, Surrey for the past 15 years. They combine Sufi teaching with Advaita and practise Mevlevi whirling (Sema) to traditional music along with meditation and teaching from the Bhagavad Gita. <http://www.saraswati.soc.btinternet.co.uk/>

*School of Meditation*. Another organization based in London, this also has branches in several parts of the UK as well as in Greece and Holland. Its origins are in the same tradition from which the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s Transcendental Meditation school derives. It adheres to the tradition however, whereas the TM organization has adapted the original techniques. It is the School of Meditation that “initiates” members of SES into meditation. The principal of this School used to be a senior member of SES and visited the same Shankaracharya for guidance. Contact is still maintained between these schools along with the Study Society. They hold weekly meetings, primarily to discuss the practice of meditation and its background. Guidance is available for life for all who have learnt meditation with the school. There is also the opportunity to attend two residential weekends each year.

## 2. US-Based

*Arsha Vidya Gurukulam* is an institute for the traditional study of Vedanta and Sanskrit, located in the Pocono Mountains, at Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania. It offers studies in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Brahma-sutras, and other classical Vedic texts. It was established in 1986 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. There is also a home study course for Bhagavad Gita (\$210 in US) and for Sanskrit (\$55 in US) and an excellent bookstore. <http://www.arshavidya.org/>

*Transcendental Meditation.* This main site provides details of what TM is, scientific research carried out to validate its benefits and where you can be initiated (you submit an online form and someone from your nearest branch then contacts you). There is information about Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the TM program and frequently asked questions and answers. It is very much advertised as a means for achieving relaxation and as a benefit to bodily and mental health, with no obvious references to Advaita or any other philosophy. i.e. it appears to be for 'me', not for realizing the Self. You may also enroll in the Maharishi Open University, which offers Internet Video Broadcasts and courses in 'Yogic Flying' amongst other things. <http://www.tm.org>

*Meditation Station.* *The Meditation Society of America* has produced these pages, which look likely to contain everything you ever wanted to know about meditation, including descriptions of 108 different techniques, concepts, words of wisdom and a message board. There are also newsletters, CDs... and a tee-shirt! <http://www.meditationsociety.com/>

*Aloha Satsang* offers free weekly meetings in Honolulu. Also a resource for Advaita teachings in Hawaii, offering a growing, free lending library of taped talks, books and other media. Site contains a number of articles on Advaita, an interview of Sri Poonja by Catherine Ingram, links and details of forthcoming events. There are also some beautiful photos at the site! <http://home.earthlink.net/~alohasatsang/>

*The Advaita Yoga Ashrama* was set up to spread the teachings of yoga and Advaita according to the lineage of Sri Swami Sivananda. The site introduces many aspects of Advaita and gives details of activities

and retreats at affiliated centres throughout the world. <http://www.yogaadvaita.org/>

## 3. India-Based

*The Divine Life Society, Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, Himalayas, India.* This organization, led by Swami Krishnananda until his death in 2001, has books by Swami Krishnananda on yoga, meditation, spiritual practice, Gita, Upanishads, mysticism and philosophy. Many books and discourses may be downloaded free of charge. <http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/>

Another *Divine Life Society* site - <http://www.sivanandadlshq.org/home.html> - dedicated to Swamis Sivananda, Chidananda and Krishnananda has much information available for free download: teachings, "inspiring messages", saints and mystics, Gods and scriptures together with many discourses. A large number of the full-length books have already been made available in html or pdf format for free download. (The former are readable by any web browser, the latter by Adobe's free Acrobat Reader.)

A related organization is the *Yoga Vedanta Centre*, established by Swami Vishnudevananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda. <http://www.sivananda.org/>

*Swami Omkarananda Ashram, Rishikesh.* There are lots of articles and information to download, including a comprehensive summary of Western Philosophical thinking on the nature of reality, with definitions of all of the "isms" etc. This is the organization that produces the excellent, free PC utility for generating Sanskrit script from ITRANS text for copying into any word processor. <http://sanskrit.bhaarat.com/Omkarananda>

*Vedanta Mission.* This huge, professionally produced website has a wealth of information on the Vedantic scriptures and Advaita philosophy. The mission itself was established in 1992 by Poojya Gururji Sri Swami Atmananda Saraswati. There is an ashram at Indore where a free three-year course in Advaita may be taken, with donations at the conclusion. There are centres at other locations in India offering week-long courses. There is a free monthly 'ezine' (i.e. electronic magazine),

containing various articles and details of talks, camps etc. All back issues may be downloaded. A glossary of common Sanskrit words and an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) are under construction. There are also two on-line courses based upon Sankara's *Tattva Bodha* and on the *Bhagavad Gita*. There is a further channel containing information relating to Hinduism. <http://www.vmission.org/>

*Yoga Malika*. This is an institution in Chennai, India, guided by Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Paramarthananda Saraswati. It provides classes in Vedanta, trains teachers, maintains a library of books and cassettes etc. Some talks by Swami Dayananda and Paramarthananda may be downloaded, including an excellent one on japa. A few are also available in Real Audio format. There is a year-long 'self-help' program that can be studied at the site for ten-minutes per day with a different practice each month. <http://www.yogamalika.org/>

*Vedanta Life Institute*. Founded by Sri Parthasarathy, who has been touring the world for the past 20+ years giving the most wonderful lectures on the *Bhagavad Gita*, full of profundity and humor and illustrated by many excellent metaphors and stories. The 'Vedanta Academy', near Mumbai in India, offers a three year residential course on Vedanta, based on study, contemplation and practice. It is open to those aged 16 - 30. Short-term, practical residential courses are also available for business men and professionals on topics such as stress and time management. Books may also be purchased (though not by credit card) and there are Vedantic Centres at various locations around the world. <http://www.vedanta-edu.org/>

### Mathas

Sankara, the Sage who formalized classical Advaita, established four 'seats' in India in the N, E, S and W of the country, their purpose being to provide living Sages throughout history to pass on the teaching and answer questions from any seeker of the truth. These four mathas or monasteries still exist today at Puri in the East, Sringeri in the South, Dvaraka in the West and Jyotir Math at Badari in the North, and a fifth math, Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, at Kanchipuram.

*The Sringeri Matha* - <http://www.sringeri.org/> - is currently headed by Swami Bharati Tirtha. Also see <http://www.srisharada.com/welcomefinal.htm> where there is an on-line book by M.K.Venkatarama Iyer (1976), entitled *Contribution of Bharati Tirtha and Vidyaranya to Development of Advaitic Thought* with chapters on metaphysics, jiva, maya, knowledge, truth and error, ethics and religion, and moksha. A commentary on the *Vivekachudamani*, by Sri Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal, is also under construction.

*The Self Realization Fellowship* - <http://www.yogananda-srf.org/> - established by Swami Paramahansa Yogananda, maintains traditional links with the Puri matha. Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham - <http://www.kamakoti.org/index2.html> - has more than 1000 pages of information on Hinduism and Advaita. See their site map for links to everything about Hindu dharma, together with many articles and tributes to Shankara and his lineage. The Jaganath Puri Site - <http://www.jagannathpuri.com/index.html> - is essentially a tourism site and contains details about such things as the architecture and the worship that takes place at the temple. The Jyotir matha - <http://www.templenet.com/Tamilnadu/df067.html> is briefly described here, one of the pages of 'TempleNet' - <http://www.templenet.com/>, that has information on Indian Temples in general.

*The Adi Sankara Advaita Research Centre* - <http://advaitacentre.org/index.htm> - is related to the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. It is concerned, as the name suggests, with carrying out studies relating to Advaita as taught by Sankara. It publishes a newsletter and journal and organizes talks and seminars. There are several articles on-line and a number of publications may be purchased.

### Related to Swami Chinmayananda

*The Chinmaya Mission*® is an International Non profit Organization that "helps people bring the essence of Vedanta and Upanishads into their daily lives". It was established by Swami Chinmayananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda and Tapovan Maharaj. It's mission statement is "To provide to individuals, from any background, the wisdom of Vedanta and practical means for spiritual growth and happiness, enabling them to become positive contributors to the society." Chinmaya Mission® has centres in Africa, Australia, France,

Canada, Hong Kong, India, Singapore UK, USA, and many more. The site at <http://www.chinmayamission.org/> contains links or email addresses to some of the major centres and retreats. Books and tapes, magazines etc. may also be purchased from within the organization.

One of the local centres, for example, is the *Chinmaya Mission Washington Regional Centre* at <http://www.chinmayadc.org/>. They organize talks, study groups, lectures on Sanskrit, dance, etc. etc. in various locations in Maryland and Virginia. The UK branch of the organization at <http://www.chinmayauk.org/> has study groups on the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Atmabodha* and on Swami Chinmayananda's own book on Self-Unfoldment at various locations in London. There is also an excellent html-based package for studying the *Bhagavad Gita*, containing the complete commentaries of Swamiji. Many other local branches are listed at [http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion\\_and\\_Spirituality/Hinduism/Gurus\\_and\\_Saints/Swami\\_Chinmayananda/](http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Hinduism/Gurus_and_Saints/Swami_Chinmayananda/)

### Related to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

There are even more organizations throughout the world established in the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna Math at Chennai is perhaps the root site for all of the others. It has biographies, books, news, events, audio and video and articles from the English version of the magazine *The Vedanta Kesari*. <http://www.sriramakrishnamath.org/>

*The Vedanta Society of Southern California* - <http://www.vedanta.org/> - has information about Vedanta in general and the Ramakrishna order in particular. There are links to other centres around the world, a calendar of events, recommended reading and pointers to bookstores, and photographs for purchase.

*The Vedanta Centre UK* at Bourne End in Buckinghamshire - <http://web.onetel.net.uk/~suman11/index.htm> - began its life in London in 1948 but moved to its present location in 1977. Discourses are held on Sunday by its head, Swami Dayatmananda. Lectures are also held at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in London. A wide selection of books may be purchased from this site and, being mostly published in India, these are very reasonably priced.

Addresses and telephone/ fax/ email addresses for all of the centres throughout the world are obtainable from [http://www.sriramakrishna.org/foreign\\_c.htm](http://www.sriramakrishna.org/foreign_c.htm).

The Ramakrishna and Vivekananda site at <http://www.geocities.com/neovedanta/> contains more general information on Advaita, as well as specific material on these two sages. There are lots of articles to read on such subjects as the upanishads and gita, maya, states of consciousness etc. and there is also a poetry section.

See <http://www.ramakrishna.org/> and <http://www.vivekananda.org/> for information specifically on Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and on Swami Vivekananda, respectively.

Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna - <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/1863/disciples.html> - provides biographies of all the direct disciples and brief extracts from their teaching.

For many more sites, see the Open Directory listings at [http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion\\_and\\_Spirituality/Hinduism/Gurus\\_and\\_Saints/Sri\\_Ramakrishna,\\_Sri\\_Sharada\\_Devi,\\_and\\_Swami\\_Vivekananda/](http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Hinduism/Gurus_and_Saints/Sri_Ramakrishna,_Sri_Sharada_Devi,_and_Swami_Vivekananda/).

### Related to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

The main organization related to Ramana Maharshi is Sri Ramanasramam, the ashram at the foot of Mount Arunachala at Tiruvannamalai in India, where he lived for practically the whole of his life. The mountain is believed by his followers to be the oldest and holiest place on earth, itself capable of bringing about self-realization to one who stays there. <http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/>

There are links to books, videos, photographs etc., relating to Ramana Maharshi and most of his works may be downloaded for study offline. There is information for those wishing to visit Sri Ramanasramam and about the ashrams in New York, US and Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada.

*The Society of Abidance in Truth* (SAT) is in Santa Cruz, California, under the supervision of Master Nome. There are lectures and retreats based on the teaching of Ramana Maharshi. <http://www.satramana.org/>

*Vidya Bharata* - <http://www.vidya.org/> - founded by Raphael, Ashram Vidya Order, Italy, is another organisation based upon the teachings of Ramana Maharshi. Note that this site is principally in Italian - see the New York based Aurea Vidya Foundation - <http://www.vidya-ashramvidyaorder.org/> - for an English site about Raphael.

*The Ramana Maharshi Foundation* UK was affiliated to Sri Ramanashramam but is now independent. There are members

throughout the world but meetings are principally held at Hampstead in London on the afternoon of the second Saturday of each month. There are short readings on a particular theme, interspersed with periods of silence and followed, in the second half, by an open, moderated discussion. Topics alternate between bhakti and jnana emphasis. <http://www.ramana-maharshi.org.uk/>

The organization publishes an informal A4 newsletter two or three times per year containing general information about the group and lists of forthcoming talks and residential retreats.

*The Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning* at Bangalore publishes a monthly magazine, *The Ramana Way*, as well as a number of other books and pamphlets on the teachings of Ramana, principally by A. R. Natarajan. <http://members.tripod.com/~rmclb/index.htm>

*David Godman* is the author of one of the best books relating to Ramana Maharshi – *Be As You Are*. This site contains interviews, a biography of Ramana and details of David's books amongst other things. <http://www.davidgodman.org/>

There are a number of pages covering Ramana's biography and extracts from his teaching at the Gnostic and Mystical Philosophy site. [http://www.hermetic-philosophy.com/ramana\\_maharshi1.htm](http://www.hermetic-philosophy.com/ramana_maharshi1.htm)

Books may be borrowed from the *Ramana Maharshi Online-Lending-Library* for Europe. Biographies and Teachings etc. may be borrowed for 4 weeks. Cost is the forwarding postage to the next borrower. Books are available in English, German and French. [http://www.geocities.com/ramana\\_library](http://www.geocities.com/ramana_library)

*Ramana Maharshi and Us* has articles about Ramana, personal stories and a free lending library. <http://www.ramanamaharshi.info/>

Finally, there is a very useful page of links to Ramana related sites and Egroups, etc. at <http://www.geocities.com/bhagavanramana>.

For even more sites, see the Open Directory listings at [http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion\\_and\\_Spirituality/Hinduism/Gurus\\_and\\_Saints/Ramana\\_Maharshi/](http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Hinduism/Gurus_and_Saints/Ramana_Maharshi/). ▲

## HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

# A Haven: Sri Ramanasramam

SUSAN VISVANATHAN

When I first came to Ramanasramam, it was for reasons of curiosity. I had just completed a book on a French devotee of Ramana Maharshi called Henri Le Saux, who had authored many works on Arunachala and Bhagavan. I wanted to see the place I had written about for so many years from 1990 to 1995.

It was in May 1995 that I first visited the Ashram. The holy hill was, I remember, stark against a hot May sky, and the gardens around Ramana's home were green where thousands of people have been, but I never got the opportunity to return till 2001. The intervening years were spent in reading about Ramana and hoping that I could return.

In October of 2000, I suffered a cerebral stroke which left me paralyzed and speechless. Family and friends assisted me with the care I needed. Because of instantaneous hospitalization, I survived. The

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interesting thing for me was that there were so many death experiences. (Stroke victims who survive will testify to this: The burning up of neurons which results in coma or death). It is only as Bhagavan describes — that death is but dreaming. I was saved by Ramana who appeared to me at the final point when I felt Arunachala lay its weight on me. The weight of the hill is hard to describe, who can describe *rigor mortis*?

I now remember the weeks after I returned from the hospital as days of journeying through space and time; the will to survive was the grace that I was given during that very difficult period.

In January 2001, I wrote to V. S. Mani, one of the trustees of the Asramam, with whom I had been corresponding, and who somehow replied to my barrage of letters. He said that coming to stay at the Ashram for a while would help me. So, in June I traveled back to Ramanasramam. I was still very ill, but over the period of ten days, I recovered well enough to know that the dreams and landscapes of fear I had traveled had one conclusion, which was to bring me to a safe harbour.

Like most stroke victims, I never know from one day to the next what life has in store for me. But *abhaya* is the greatest gift that Bhagavan gives.

I return to Ramanasramam because I am happy here. The hill, now, after many strenuous years of work by the local greening societies breathes for me a language of sheer joy. Friends who have lived here for more than thirty years, like Apeetha Arunagiri, tell me that they loved the hill. When it is hot and bleak, it is a divine experience in its own right as testified by the photographs of Bhagavan, in which the hill in its splendid bareness appears. But for myself, I love the grass and the young shrubs and trees, and the joy of an eternal tranquility. ▲

# Govardhana

RAMESH MENON

A peaceful month after the slaying of Dhenuka, there is trouble from another quarter, which Krishna brings upon himself. He does not want the cowherds to make their yearly offering to the king of the Devas at an Indra yagna, as has been their custom since time immemorial, since before their fathers crossed into the land of Bharata.

“Why should you worship Indra when I am born among you? The Deva’s head is swollen because the kin of Vishnu’s Avatara still bring him offerings.”

“Listen to me,” he tells his confused cowherds, who are not yet used to him being the Incarnation. “It isn’t right for you to make offerings to Indra, when it is Mount Govardhana that protects us. Your immortal souls suffer because you worship a lesser god.

“Indra feeds on your offerings and on your spirits. Snared by his lascivious dreams of Devaloka, you forget the direction of your lives. This is more dangerous than being attacked by rakshasas; it delays your moksha by a hundred births.

“Why don’t you worship Govardhana instead?”

They puzzle over this novel philosophy, never expounded in the world before: that the worship of lesser gods is an impediment to salvation. But once they have examined his argument, they can’t fault what he says. In their hearts they know they have become Indra’s devout slaves; and the Deva does keep them fettered, childlike. Nor does he even deign to help them in their times of need and danger.

Nanda says to Krishna, “We are afraid to stop worshipping Indra. We fear his fury if we seek Govardhana’s blessing instead.”

Krishna smiles. “Indra is powerless to harm the least among the faithful. And you are the chosen. I will protect you from the Deva, and then perhaps you also will believe in me.”

“But why worship a mountain?”

“The mountain is replete with the Brahman. Unlike Indra, the mountain wants no worship. It is an ancient master living on earth to show you the way to moksha.”

Krishna senses his battle half won already, another knot coming loose in the sacred thread he has come to unravel. False worship may not be an obvious sin, but it is enshackling. The Avatara has come to set men free from the bonds of light, as much as those of evil. He has come to break all bonds.

“The mountain is beyond desire!” Krishna cries. “Make your offering to the mountain.”

Thousand-eyed Indra is livid. He summons Samvartaka, his host of thunderclouds.

“*Bhoh! Bhoh!*” Indra roars at the belligerent thunderheads. The lord of Devaloka is frightened. What will he be reduced to if mortal men stop worshipping him, as that upstart is encouraging them to?

Even to the gods, Krishna is still much of a mystery. The Devas have always enjoyed ancient sway over mankind, and Krishna is only a human boy after all, of very transient flesh and blood. Of course, the ones of light know about the prophecy that Narayana himself shall be born as a man, at this conjunction of the ages. But what real proof was there that Krishna, who is no kshatriya as Rama was, but just a cowherd, is the Avatara?



“Arrogant Nanda has abandoned my yagna,” cries Indra. “He thinks Krishna can save him from my wrath. The cowherds must be taught a lesson they will never forget.

“Fly to Vrindavana, my stormtroop; drown their miserable herd with a storm like they have never seen. Let them feel the anger of the king of the Devas. Go. I follow on Airavata.”

Samvartaka descends on Vrindavana. The world goes dark around the jungle and the cowherd village, as bank upon bank of sinister cloud scud rumbling into the sky. It is the day after the cowherds had diverted their offerings from Indra to Mount Govardhana. It was easy enough for Krishna to talk, but how can mere gypsies stand up to the might of the king of the Devas?

The villagers flee home from the pasture when they see the omens. They huddle within their huts, herding as many of their cows and calves with them as they can squeeze indoors.

Once they fill the sky within the circle of the horizon, the clouds erupt in earthshaking thunder, and whiplashes of lightning which shred the darkness into shards of fear.

White cows low piteously in the gloom, women and children scream; and then the rain comes down in sheets. Earth and sky seem as one in that downpour. All creation seems to be made from just the element of water: deluge without beginning or end, *Pralaya!*

The herd panics. Lowing in fright, it dashes out from the frantic claustrophobia of the huts, where man and beast mill together in equal terror. The cattle would rather die, out in the familiar open.

Gopi women scream themselves unconscious. Children clutch their fathers' hands; their shrieks are drowned by the roar of the storm.

Outside, all is flood. The water swells angrily into the meagre huts. At first just calves are washed away by the current. But quickly, the Yamuna is in vicious spate, breaking her banks, flashing across pasture and forest.

Cows and bulls begin to perish as well, swept away by the cataract. The storm rages on in darkness, with heart-stopping cracks of thunder and gashes of blue lightning that connect heaven and earth.

Someone cries shrilly, “Where is Krishna?”

At that moment, a voice speaks from the sky, a God's voice.

“This is what you get for worshipping Indra for generations. It is only your offerings and your cringing that the Deva loves. But come and see how the mountain loves you.”

The rain has stopped. Thunder still echoes, but weak and distant. Only Yasodha and Nanda venture from their hut to answer Krishna's call. When they do, standing knee-deep in the flow, faces turned skywards, they begin to laugh at the sight which greets them outside, to laugh like children. Hearing them so full of joy, the others also emerge, and they too witness the miracle of Indra being thwarted in his revenge.

High above them, suspended between heaven and earth, Krishna holds aloft the mountain in his hand. He holds Govardhana inverted above Vrindavana, a living awning of earth, rock and forest.

Grown into a God, Krishna with the mountain dominates the sky. As the cowherds watch, they see:

His body was no longer mere flesh and blood, but made of light, as he absorbed the lightning from Indra's storm. Krishna shone with the electric network coiled around him like writhing serpents, and his laughter echoed above the thunder, belittling it.

Then, the mountain in his hand began to glow within itself with a fabulous flame. Suddenly, it was no longer made of its earth, rock, tree, and forest, with mists and streams in its valleys; but of sheerest crystal. Govardhana had turned into an iridescent pyramid in the Avatara's hand: an archetypal pyramid of infinite faces, refracting spectral beams down whenever the lightning pierced it.

He too, Krishna vast beyond imagining, was made of the same lucent stuff; though he was flesh and blood as well, as was Govardhana in his hands. The cowherds stood transfixed.

That breathing pyramid, which covered the sky so no drop of rain fell down to the earth below, began to change colours. The mountain glowed virescent emerald first, then resonant turquoise, then breathtaking, luciferic crimson; and quickly, every other fluorescent hue, changing faster and faster: a symphony of light.

The gopas saw that deep within it, at its blinding core, a heart pulsed. Krishna also glowed with that splendour, within and out his God's body.

Now, crystal pyramid and Blue God began to blaze brighter than suns, until at flashpoint the mountain and he were a single coruscating Being out of purest fantasy. The God was the mountain and the mountain the God; both of them neither stone nor flesh, yet these too, and more: out of dreams.

Then Krishna's huge laughter, the living mountain's immense laughter, transformed itself into Pranava, a reverberant AUMmmmm. All the world and the sky with all its stars were just the precious syllable. At its immaculate end, its echo was the sublime point, holy Bindu which contained the galaxies within itself, their beginning and end.

Then, silence: perfect, complete. Earth, sky and stone were transported to another realm when time scarcely was. Within that chasmic, blissful silence the villagers stood spellbound, unaware of themselves.

At the very seed of the silence a song sprouted, a song which was that primeval silence, a lone flute song, plaintive, yet full of the gayest celebration. The mountain reappeared in the sky, now Govardhana again of great crags and forests, of waterfalls and clouds clinging to his peaks.

The heavenly pyramid was gone, and Krishna, too, had vanished from the air. He had grown human-sized again, and wandered among sky-floating Govardhana's green forests. They rang with his timeless song, drowning Indra's storm, lifting the cowherds out of their terror, and out of themselves entirely, on a tide of ecstasy.

The seven days of vision that the mountain and the God stay aloft, shutting out the storm, seem no more than some moments to the gopas. Until Indra, raging impotent on high, turns his white elephant home, his battle lost, his bonds on the minds of the cowherds broken forever.

Not unmoved, the king of the Devas swears, "This cowherd is the Brahman!"

The day after Indra's vengeful storm the world seems washed clean. Safe again under cerulean skies, the gopas are not certain whether Krishna's dazzling miracle was any more than a hallucination.

They, not Nanda but the others, say to Krishna, "You quelled Kaliya, you killed Dhenuka, and now you've lifted the mountain to save us. You are Nanda and Yasodha's boy, but your deeds are Godly. Why, you vanquished the king of the Devas before our eyes.

"Krishna, what are you? Are you a Deva, a Danava, a Yaksha, or a Gandharva? We must know today."

Krishna grows very quiet; his sermonic aspect of the past few days has vanished. After all, he has taught not only the simple cowherds a lesson but the king of the Devas one. So now he pretends to be piqued by what they ask. Perhaps he is really annoyed that the people among whom he has grown find it so hard to accept him for what he is: a phenomenon, certainly, but all the same just their Krishna.

"If, gopas, you aren't ashamed to be related to me," says the Blue God to them, "why think of me in any other way? I am neither Deva nor Gandharva, not Yaksha or Danava. If you love me and I deserve your love, you must think of me as your kinsman. I have been born into your clan, haven't I? Then, that is the only way to look at it."

He turns and walks out of their council. They sit in silence for a while, each wrapped in thoughts too deep to share.

Then from a way off they hear Krishna's flute. The birds of the jungle all burst into song in sympathy with him, and the sun breaks cover from behind the last straggles of Indra's storm. ▲



# Bhagavan, Manikkavachakar and the Tiruvachakam

## Part Two

ROBERT BUTLER,  
T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN  
AND DAVID GODMAN

*B*hagavan mentioned earlier that spontaneous and uncontrollable weeping could occur in jnanis. He also sometimes said, as the following story by Devaraja Mudaliar reveals, that crying for God could be an effective sadhana:

...in the early days Bhagavan encouraged me whenever I was singing with deep feeling. He would have such a look on his face, with his radiant eyes directed towards me, that I would be held spellbound, and not infrequently, at some especially moving words in the songs, tears would come and I would be obliged to

Robert Butler lives in England and has devoted his life to the study and translation of Sangam Tamil literature. He has to his credit many texts including *Sri Ramana Anubuti*, *Padamalai*, *Annamalai Venba*, *Arunagiri Antadi*, and a life of Manikkavachakar, the *Tiruvadavur Adigal Puranam*.

stop reciting for one or two minutes. Bhagavan told me that such weeping is good, quoting from *Tiruvachakam*, 'By crying for You [God], one can get You'.

I recollect here that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa once said, 'If you will only cry for God with a tenth of the fervour with which you cry for your wife and children, you will see God in no time'. It was in connection with Mrs Eleanor Pauline Noye, an American devotee, that Bhagavan quoted to me the above line from *Tiruvachakam*. She had contributed an article on Bhagavan to *The Golden Jubilee Souvenir* published by the Asramam in 1946 in which she mentioned that, when after a stay of about two months with Bhagavan she had to return to America and was weeping inconsolably, Bhagavan was kind enough to assure her in so many words (a thing very unusual with him, from my fairly long contact with him) that she was not to grieve and that he would be with her wherever she might go. She writes in the *Souvenir*, 2nd edition, page 362, 'Bhagavan said, "I will always be with you wherever you go".'

It was a peculiarity with this devotee that she would often weep before Bhagavan when she was in the hall. Referring to this I told Bhagavan that Mrs Noye had captured Bhagavan by means of her tears. It was then that Bhagavan quoted the line from *Tiruvachakam* [given in the next quotation] and asked me if I did not know it.<sup>1</sup>

False am I; my heart too is false,  
and my love also is false.  
Yet, bound by tainted karma,  
I can win You by crying for You.  
Honey! Nectar! Essence of the sugar cane!  
Sweet Lord! Grant to me in grace, your devotee,  
the path that leads to union with Thee!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>2</sup> 'Tirucatakam', 9.10.

*In the summary of Manikkavachakar's life that Bhagavan gave earlier, the final incident that was narrated was the disappearance of Siva. Bhagavan now describes what happened next:*

**Bhagavan:** Fully convinced that He who had blessed him was no other than Iswara Himself, Manikkavachakar was stricken with unbearable grief and fell on the ground weeping and saying, 'Oh, my Lord! Why did you go away leaving me here?'

The villagers were very much surprised at this and began a search for the person who was till then working in their village as a schoolteacher, but could not find him anywhere. Then they realised that it was the Lord's *leela*. Some time later, Manikkavachakar got over his grief, decided to act according to the injunctions of Iswara, sent away his retinue to Madurai, spent all the gold with him on the temple and stayed there alone.

Hearing all that had happened, the king immediately sent an order to Manikkavachakar to return to Madurai. But how could he go to the king without the horses? If he wanted to purchase them then, where was the money? Not knowing what to do, he prayed to Lord Siva for help. That night Lord Siva appeared to him in a dream, gave him a priceless gem and said, 'Give this to the king and tell him the horses will come on the day of the Moola star in the month of Sravana'.

Startled at that vision he opened his eyes but the Lord was not there. Manikkavachakar was however overjoyed at what had happened. He put on his official dress and went to Madurai. He gave the gem to the king, discussed the auspicious time when the horses would be arriving and then was anxiously waiting for the day. He did not however resume his official duties. Though his body was in Madurai, his mind was in Tirupperundurai. He was merely biding his time.

The Pandyan king, however, sent his spies to Perundurai and found out that there were no horses there meant for the king and that all the money meant for their purchase had been spent in the renovation of the temple. So he immediately put

Manikkavachakar in prison, making him undergo all the trials and tribulations of jail life.

Meanwhile, as originally arranged, on the day of the Moola star, Iswara assumed the guise of a horseman, transformed the jackals of the jungle into horses, and brought them to the king. The king was astonished at this, took delivery of the horses and according to the advice of the keeper of the stables, had them tied up at the same place where all his other horses were kept. He thanked the horseman profusely, and after sending him away with several presents, released Manikkavachakar from jail with profuse apologies.

The same night the new horses changed into their real forms, killed all the horses in the stables, ate them, created similar havoc in the city, and fled. The king grew very angry, branded Manikkavachakar as a trickster and put him back in jail. Soon, in accordance with Iswara's orders, the waters of the River Vaigai rose in floods and the whole of the city of Madurai was under water. Alarmed at that, the king assembled all the people and ordered them to raise the bunds of the river. For the purpose, he ordered that every citizen should do a certain amount of work with a threat of dire consequences should he fail to do his allotted work.

There was in Madurai an old woman by name Pittuvani Ammaiyar. She was a pious devotee of Lord Siva. She was living alone earning her livelihood by daily preparing and selling pittu [sweetened powdered rice pressed into conical shapes]. She had no one to do her allotted work on the river bund nor had she the money to hire a person to do it. She was therefore greatly worried and cried, 'Iswara! What shall I do?'

Seeing her helplessness, Iswara came there in the guise of a cooly with a spade on his shoulder and called out, 'Granny, granny, do you want a cooly?'

'Yes,' she said, 'but I don't have even a paise in my hand to pay you. What to do?'

He said, 'I do not want any money and would be satisfied if you gave me some portion of pittu to eat. I shall then do the allotted work on the river bund.'

Pleased with that offer, she began making pittu but they did not come out in the full shape but were broken. Surprised at this she gave all the bits to the cooly. He ate as many of them as he could and went away, saying that he would attend to the bund-raising work. Surprisingly, the dough with the old woman remained intact [i.e. the same amount] even though she had prepared and given bits of the pittu to the cooly. The cooly went to the work spot but instead of doing the work, lay down there idly, standing in the way of others doing their work.

The king went round to inspect the progress of the work and found that the portion allotted to Ammaiyar remained unattended to. On enquiry, his servants told him all the pranks of that cooly.

The king got infuriated, called the cooly and said, 'Instead of doing the allotted work, you are lying down and singing.'

So saying, he hit the cooly on the back with a cane he had in his hand. The blow recoiled not only on the king himself but on all living beings there and all of them suffered the pain on that account. The king immediately realised that the person hit by him was Parameswara himself in the guise of a cooly. The king stood aghast.

Parameswara vanished and soon a voice from the sky said, 'O King! Manikkavachakar is my beloved devotee. I myself did all this to show you his greatness. Seek his protection.'

Soon after hearing that voice, the king went to see Manikkavachakar and on the way he stepped into the house of Pittuvani to see her. By that time she had already got into a *vimanam* [a heavenly chariot] and was on her way to Kailash. The king was greatly surprised and saluted her and from there he went straight to Manikkavachakar and fell at his feet. Manikkavachakar lifted him with great respect, and enquired of his welfare.

The king entreatingly said, 'Please forgive me and rule this kingdom yourself.'

Manikkavachakar, looking at the king, said with kindness, '*Appab!* [a term of endearment]. As I have already agreed to

serve the Lord, I cannot be bothered with the problems of ruling a kingdom. Please do not mistake me. Rule the kingdom, looking after the welfare of the people. Henceforth you will have nothing to worry about.' So saying, smilingly, he put on the dress of a *sannyasin*, and went about visiting holy places, singing the praises of Siva.<sup>3</sup>

### Manikkavachakar's visit to Tiruvannamalai

*Manikkavachakar had been specially commissioned by Siva to tour the Tamil region and sing songs in His praise. One of the places he visited was Tiruvannamalai, which even then (in the 9th century) was a major Saiva pilgrimage centre. The Tiruvadavuradigal Puranam, a colourful and poetic retelling of Manikkavachakar's life, includes the following verses that describe his visit:*

After worshipping at that shrine [Tiru-Venney-Nallur],  
with love in his heart he departed,  
following the righteous path,  
passing through the middle lands,<sup>4</sup>  
traversing tall forests and mountains,  
where lions and fearsome elephants dwelt,  
until he drew near to enduring Arunai's city.<sup>5</sup>  
When he saw the palaces and *gopurams*,  
the strong walls, decorated with jewels and pearls,  
the great gateways festooned with banners,  
towering up in the midst  
of a cool densely wooded grove,  
in a forest of tall areca trees,  
he joyfully made obeisance,  
experiencing great bliss.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, by Suri Nagamma, pp. 7-10.

<sup>4</sup> The territory between the Chola and Tondai lands.

<sup>5</sup> Tiruvannamalai.

'You [Siva] who abide in the form of a mountain  
which appeared on that day as a column of flame  
for the two to seek!

Blissful life which fills our hearts!'

Thus did he worship the Supreme Mountain Lord,  
receiving His grace, before proceeding forth  
to enter Arunai's prosperous city.

Leaving behind the groves, the city walls,  
the streets decorated with many beautiful banners,  
and the various shrines of the gods,  
and taking the path which led to the holy presence,  
he bowed down before the temple of the One  
who wears in His locks a kondrai garland,  
datura flowers, the moon and the snake,  
and then did he perceive the form of Him  
who on that day had enslaved him.<sup>6</sup>

'Praise be to the dark-throated One  
who swallowed the poison halahala  
when Brahma, Vishnu and the rest of the gods,  
crying out in distress, appealed to Him for protection!  
Praise be to the Mountain of cool ambrosia,  
mixed with the milk of green-hued Unnamulai,<sup>7</sup>  
which men and gods alike drink down  
to cure the overpowering malady of their birth and death!

'Praise be to the great ocean of grace of Him  
who placed His feet upon my head,  
the feet which tall Mal could not see,

<sup>6</sup> This line has been taken by some people to mean that Manikkavachakar had a vision of Siva in the Arunachaleswara Temple. T. M. P. Mahadevan in his *Ten Saints of India* (1971 ed., p. 55) has followed this interpretation.

<sup>7</sup> The local name of Siva's consort in Tiruvannamalai.

though he burrowed deep into the earth  
in the form of a powerful boar!  
Praise be to the Mountain of burnished gold,  
at whose side sits the slender  
green-hued form of Unnamulai,  
who is the earth's protectress!

'Praise be to Him who granted His grace  
to the victorious Durga,  
when She worshipped Him and begged Him  
to absolve Her from the sin  
of killing the powerful buffalo-headed demon!<sup>8</sup>  
Praise be to the beauteous Lord Annamalai,  
who came to me on that day and held me in His sway!  
Thus worshipping and praising the Lord  
out of heart-felt love,  
he dwelt there for some days.

It was the month of Margazhi,<sup>9</sup>  
when, in the ten days before the ardra asterism,<sup>10</sup>  
the beautiful maidens go from household to noble household  
calling each other out in the early dawn,  
just as the darkness is dispersing,  
and, banding together, go to bathe in the holy tank.

On observing their noble qualities  
he sang the immortal hymn 'Tiruvembavai'  
which is composed as if sung by the maidens themselves.

Later, seeing them dance and sing  
as they played the pretty game 'Ammanai',  
he composed the song 'Ammanai' in the same manner.<sup>11</sup>

*As the final verse in this sequence indicates, Manikkavachakar composed two of the Tiruvachakam poems, 'Tiruvembavai' and 'Ammanai', on his visit to Tiruvannamalai. There is a tradition in Tiruvannamalai that both poems were composed while Manikkavachakar was doing pradakshina of Arunachala. A small temple on the pradakshina road in the village of Adi-annamalai is supposed to mark the spot where the two poems were composed and sung. Bhagavan confirmed the validity of this tradition when he told Suri Nagamma: 'He [Manikkavachakar] then stood at that particular place and addressing Arunagiri [Arunachala] sang the songs "Tiruvembavai" and "Ammanai".'<sup>12</sup>*

*There is a festival in winter in which devotees go to their Siva temple very early in the morning to sing songs to Siva in order to wake him up. In 'Tiruvembavai' young girls move from house to house, waking up their friends, and encouraging them to come to the temple to perform this rite. Though, ostensibly, it is merely a poem about young girls encouraging each other to go and worship Siva, their trips to the temple are interpreted to be emblematic of the soul's journey towards union with Siva. It is thus a poem which encourages enthusiasm for the ultimate pilgrimage that culminates in the experience of Siva. There are also more fanciful interpretations that see in its lines various allegories for the Saiva view on how the world is brought into being.*

*The 'Tiruvembavai' is one of Manikkavachakar's most famous poems. Indeed, judging by the number of commentaries that have been written on it and from the number of meetings that are held to expound its*

<sup>8</sup> The story of Durga killing the buffalo-headed demon Mahishasura appears in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*.

<sup>9</sup> The month of Margazhi runs from mid-December to mid-January in the western calendar.

<sup>10</sup> In the Hindu calendar there is a cycle of twenty-seven days each month. Each day is named after a particular star. Ardra is one of these star days.

<sup>11</sup> From *Tiruvadavuradigal Puranam*, 'Tiruvambala Sarukkam', vv. 376-384, by Katavulmamunivar. This text was written several centuries after the *Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam*, the source that Bhagavan earlier utilised to summarise the main events of Manikkavachakar's life.

<sup>12</sup> *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam*, by Suri Nagamma, 1992 ed., p. 2.

meaning, it can justly be regarded as one of the most famous poems ever written in Tamil. Part of its fame can be attributed to its mystical obscurity, which has inevitably prompted a large number of differing explanations, but one cannot ignore the contribution made in recent times by the former Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami. The poem was a particular favourite of his, and he did much to encourage public awareness of it. Sri G. Vanmikanathan, who was personally encouraged to write commentaries on the Tiruvachakam by the Sankaracharya, has written that, each year, in the Tamil month of Margazhi, the 'Tiruvembavai' poem is sung throughout the length and breadth of the Tamil-speaking world and 'conferences and meetings in hundreds are held in that period to expound it'.<sup>13</sup> Now that the Sankaracharya has passed away, the meetings are far fewer, but the poem still remains a favourite of millions of devotees, and it is still widely recited in the early morning in the month of Margazhi. During Bhagavan's lifetime there was a special early morning parayana during Margazhi when devotees chanted 'Tiruvembavai' and other poems of Manikkavachakar.

Though it has a distinguished place in Tamil literary history, and a strong local connection, there is only one recorded instance of Bhagavan citing a portion to a devotee.<sup>14</sup>

Even as the gems that thickly cluster  
upon the crowns of gods on high,  
when they bow down, will lose their lustre  
before the lotus feet of Lord Annamalai,  
likewise the sun, with bright-eyed gaze  
dispels the darkness with his rays,  
making stars flee, their cool light fade.  
Thus does He [Siva] stand before us  
as woman, as man, as androgyne,  
as the space that co-exists with the effulgent sun and moon,

<sup>13</sup> *Pathway to God through the Tiruvaachakam*, by G. Vanmikanathan, pp. 217-218.

<sup>14</sup> *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, by Devaraja Mudaliar, p. 52.

as earth, yet from all these separate,  
ambrosia to the eye made manifest.  
So sing you then of His holy feet, O Maid,  
and in the flowery flood, plunging, bathe!  
*El or empaava!*<sup>15</sup>

*The young girl who is addressed is being encouraged to go to Siva, sing His praises, and merge in His feet. The final line, which has no particular meaning, is generally held to be a cry made in children's games of that era.*

*Suri Nagamma has reported that Ramaswami Pillai once recited this verse to Bhagavan at the end of the usual Tamil parayana. Bhagavan had wanted to get up and leave, but Ramaswami Pillai knew that he could probably detain Bhagavan for a few extra minutes since he knew that this was one of his favourite verses.*<sup>16</sup>

*Bhagavan told Devaraja Mudaliar that he particularly appreciated the line in this verse which states that Arunachala-Siva is 'ambrosia to the eye made manifest'. Devaraja Mudaliar has also reported that Bhagavan also liked a very similar phrase that appeared in 'Potritiruvahaval':*

Annamalai, our Father,  
praise be to you!  
Ocean of nectar that delights our eyes,  
praise be to you!<sup>17</sup> ▲

*(The concluding part of this article will appear in the next issue.)*

<sup>15</sup> 'Tiruvembavai', verse 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, by Suri Nagamma, 13th December 1946.

<sup>17</sup> Both of the Mudaliar citations come from *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 52. The third and fourth lines of the 'Potritiruvahaval' translation (line 150 in the original poem) are the ones that Bhagavan liked. The previous two lines (149 in the original) merely give the context.

# ASHRAM CALENDAR

Sri Vidya Havan	Sunday	05-02-2006
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Saturday	12-02-2006
<b>Maha Shivaratri</b>	Saturday	26-02-2006
Telugu New Year Day	Thursday	30-03-2006
Sri Rama Navami	Friday	06-04-2006
Tamil New Year Day	Friday	14-04-2006
<b>Bhagavan's Aradhana</b>	Tuesday	25-04-2006
<b>Maha Puja (Mother's Aradhana)</b>	Sunday	21-05-2006
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Monday	10-07-2006
Krishna Jayanti (Gokulashtami)	Monday	16-08-2006
<b>Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day</b>	Friday	01-09-2006
Navaratri Festival commences	Saturday	23-09-2006
Saraswati Puja	Sunday	01-10-2006
Vijayadasami	Monday	02-10-2006
Deepavali	Saturday	21-10-2006
Karthigai Festival commences	Friday	24-11-2006
<b>Karthigai Deepam</b>	Sunday	03-12-2006
<b>Sri Bhagavan's 127th Jayanti</b>	Thursday	04-01-2007

# Pronunciation of Common Sanskrit and Tamil Words

SWAMI SHANTANANDA

## Arunachala

## अरुणाचला

English	ARUṆĀCALĀ that is A-RU-NAA-CHAL-AA
Sanskrit	ARUṆĀCALĀH
Tamil	ARUṆĀCALAM
Hindi	ARUṆĀCAL

The second 'a' of arunAchala and last 'a' of arunachalA are pronounced like 'a' in *car*. The last 'A' is pronounced long like 'a' in *car* in the following two cases:

- When addressing or calling on Aruṇachala in prayers or song: 'Oh Arunachala!'
- Where Aruṇachala is used as an independent subject (i.e. in the third person, for example, 'Arunāchalā is a mountain').

Swami Shantananda is an eminent Sanskrit scholar with a deep knowledge of Vedic and Puranic texts. He is a much respected *sadbhak* and sometime resident of the ashram.

When Arunachala functions as an adjective modifying another noun i.e. in 'Arunachala Siva' or 'Arunachala Ramana', the last 'a' is pronounced short as in 'o' in *come* or 'u' in *cut*.

In Tamil either 'm' or 'n' is added to all nouns ending in A for example:

English	Tamil
RĀMA that is RAA-MA	RĀMAN
SIVĀ that is SI-VAA	SIVAN
RAMAṆĀ that is RA-MAN-AA	RAMAṆAN

In Tamil while addressing, personally or in prayer, the 'm' or 'n' suffixation in 'Raman', 'Sivan', 'Ramanan', and 'Arunachalam' is dropped and they become 'Rama', 'Siva', 'Ramana', and 'Arunachala', etc., the final 'a' being pronounced long as in 'car'.

Normally 'n' is added to nouns denoting masculine gender while 'm' is added to nouns denoting neuter gender. As Arunachala is a mountain, it is written in Tamil as Arunachalam. (But no doubt there may be some exceptions to this rule).

The first and the third 'a' in ArunachalA is pronounced short like 'o' in *come* or 'u' in *cut*. The syllable 'n' in aruNachala is pronounced heavily in a cerebral mode like 'n' in the words *ground* or *bound*.

\*\*\*

<b>Ramana</b>	<b>रमणा</b>
English	RAMAṆĀ that is RA-MAN-AA
AA	Sanskrit
Tamil	RAMAṆAN
Hindi	RAMAN

The last 'a' in RamanA is pronounced long like 'a' in *car* but it should not drag. In Telugu, the word tends to be extended beyond the normal range of Tamil. Elongation applies when addressing 'Ramana' or while using it as a subject (in third person).

Like Arunachala, when Ramana is used as an adjectival prefix qualifying another succeeding noun, e.g. in 'Ramana Sadguru' or 'Ramana Maharshi',

all the 'a' s including the last 'a' are pronounced short like 'o' in *come* or 'u' in *cut*. It becomes RamanA and not RamanAA.

The syllable 'n' is to be pronounced in a cerebral manner like 'n' in *under*, *ground* or *bound*. In the word, RAmAna, the first and second 'a' are pronounced short like 'o' in *come*.

In Tamil, as per tradition, an 'n' is added, hence rAmAnaN. 'Ramana' means the one who revels (in the Self).

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### Arunachala Ramana अरुणाचल रमणा

As elaborated above, Arunachala is used here to qualify a subsequent noun, in this case, 'Ramana'. The last 'a', in arunachalA is short and pronounced like 'o' in *come* or 'u' in *cut*, so are the first and third 'a's. The second 'a' (arunAchala) is long like 'a' in *fall*. The word means 'Ramana of Arunachala'.

Similarly, in 'arunachalA Siva', the last 'a' in 'Arunachala' is pronounced short like 'o' in *come*. In Tamil, it becomes ArunAchala RamanaN.

\*\*\*

### Maharshi महर्षि

English	MAHARSHI	that is MA-HAR-SHI.
Sanskrit	MAHARṢIḤ	that is MA-HAR-SHIH.
Tamil	MAHARISHI	that is MA-HA-RI-SHI
Hindi	MAHARSHI	

All 'a's are pronounced short like 'o' in *come* or 'u' in *but*. 'I' is pronounced like the last 'i' in *India* or the final 'i' in *Hindi*.

'Maharshi' is one compound word formed by joining two separate words *Mahān* ('great') and *Rshi*, meaning 'sage'. 'R' in Sanskrit lies somewhere between 'ru' (as pronounced in *rupee*) and 'ri' (as in *ridiculous*). This process of compounding words is complex and involves the details of Sanskrit grammar (*vyakarana*) pertaining to what is called *samasa*. So when Mahān and Rshi are joined, they become 'Maharshi', whereas the second 'a' in MahAn becomes short like 'o' in *come*. The 'r' resembles the English post-vocalic 'r' such as in 'cart' or 'art'. The 'n' in MahāN is omitted.

The alphabet sounds equivalent to the English ‘h’ or ‘r’ do not exist in Tamil. So in pure Tamil, ‘k’ (pronounced as Ka) instead of ‘h’ is used. Some communities have borrowed the letter ‘h’ from a hybrid script called *grantham* devised for use by Tamilians not conversant with the Devanagari script.

Instead of ‘r’, Ri (as in *ring*) is used. So, in Tamil the word becomes Makarishi.

\* \* \*

<b>Bhagavan</b>	<b>भगवान्</b>
English	BHAGAVĀN that is BHAG-A-VAAN
Sanskrit	BHAGAVĀN
Tamil	BAGAVĀN <sup>1</sup>
Hindi	BHAGVĀN

‘Bh’ is pronounced as in the word *bhang* or *abhor*. The first two ‘a’s are pronounced short like ‘o’ in *come* while the last ‘a’ is long as in *car*. While in Sanskrit ‘g’ is pronounced as Ga, in Hindi, it is pronounced as in ‘bug’ or ‘rug’. Hence it is ‘Bhagvan’ in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and other north Indian languages.

Bhagavan in Sanskrit means the one who possesses six characteristics of excellence called ‘Bhaga’ in Sanskrit. The six qualities are:

- i. All Powerful (which includes omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence) (*Aiswarya*);
- ii. Righteous (full of *Dharma*), though some replace it with valour (*Veerya*);
- iii. Fame (*Yasas*);
- iv. Wealth (*Sri*);
- v. Knowledge (*Jnana*);
- vi. Detachment and dispassion (*Vairagya*).

\* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> Though the phonemes (sounds) B, Bh, G, Ga do not exist in Tamil, many pronounce it as Bhagavan which is correct in any language.

**Ramanasramam****रमणाश्रमम्**

English	RAMAṆĀŚRAMAM
	that is RAMANA-ASHRA-MAM
Sanskrit	RAMAṆĀŚRAMAH
Tamil	RAMAṆĀŚRAMAM
Hindi	RAMAṆĀŚRAM that is RAAMANAA-ASHRAAM

The third ‘a’ is pronounced long as in *car* while the other ‘a’s are pronounced short like ‘o’ in *come*, ‘u’ in *cut* or *but*. ‘S’ is pronounced something like ‘s’ in ‘sure’, ‘assure’ or ‘ship’ but no letter in English has an exact equivalent. The ending in ‘Ramanasramam’ has been adopted from Tamil where nouns of neuter gender have ‘m’ added at the end.

‘Ramanasramam’ is also one compound word formed by joining two separate words, ‘Ramana’ and ‘Asramam’. As per the rules in Sanskrit, the *samasa* (the conjoining into compound words) has been adopted to some extent in Tamil too, where in joining the end syllable ‘a’ of the first word RamanA and the first syllable ‘a’ of the second word, Asramam, the two ‘a’s are replaced by one long ‘a’ as in *car*.

‘Ramanasramam’ means a monastery or sanctuary dedicated to Ramana.

\* \* \*

**Tiruvannamalai****तिरुवनमलै**

English	TIRU-VANṆĀA-MALAI
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This word is purely Tamil in origin while all the previous words are of Sanskrit origin. There is no corresponding equivalent in English. Here the ‘r’ is pronounced soft as in *think* or *through*.

The second ‘a’ is pronounced long as in *car* while the other ‘a’s are short like ‘o’ in *come* or ‘u’ in *but*.

Both n’s are to be pronounced heavily as in the word *annoyed*, *bound*, *ground* or *bond*.

‘Tiru’ is a short term of respect used before the names of holy or respectable persons or places – e.g., ‘Tiru Ramana Maharshi’. It is the equivalent of Sri, a Sanskrit term adopted by the Government of India and in all states except Tamil Nadu, which uses ‘Tiru’ instead.

In 'Tiruvannamalai', two words 'Tiru' and 'Annamalai' have been joined as per the *sandhi* rules of Tamil grammar. According to these rules, when the two vowels, 'u' (pronounced as in *full*) of 'Tiru', and the first vowel 'a' of 'Annamalai', are joined, then a semi-vowel 'v' is introduced in the middle to seam them. ▲

**Guru Vachaka Kovai:  
Collection of the Guru's Sayings**

GVK is the most comprehensive collection of Maharshi Sayings composed and stung together artistically by the poet Muruganar. In the massive work of 1282 stanzas (1254 being Muruganar's handiwork and 28 the Maharshi's), each stanza presents a finely polished setting, a pearl that fell from the Master's lips. Most of them were seen and approved by the Master, who has supplied some links and restatement of His own to emphasise or clarify the argument.

The Collection equals the *Talks* in comprehensiveness and authenticity. The *Talks* are informal and present the Maharshi's Teachings against the background of the questions posed by enquirers. This book focuses the light on what the Maharshi said regardless of when or why he said it.

Sri Sadhu Om finalised the arrangement of stanza giving this final form during the second edition of the Book in Tamil.

This book now in English (translation & commentary by Sri Sadhu Om) will shed more light and help to clear many misconceptions and confusions that aspirants may face in their journey to enlightenment.

The book is now available for sale at Sri Ramanasramam. Price: Rs120, pp. 443.

# Eco-sense on Arunachala

## The Annamalai Reforestation Society's Vision

P. R. SURYANANDAN & J. JAYARAMAN

The year 1979 was the year of celebrations commemorating the birth Centenary of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and the year when the Forest Department initiated a tree-planting project on sacred Arunachala's south-eastern slopes. This, and the issuance of a postage stamp and so on were the nation's tribute to an Upanishadic Maharshi's appearance in modern times.

Afforestation of the holy hill had been a pet dream of Prof. K. Swaminathan, the Chief Editor of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* and well known in Ramana circles. C. Subramaniam, then Finance Minister at the Centre and an architect of the Green Revolution, at the behest of Prof. 'KS' his mentor, got the 'greening' going at Arunachala. Much of the Government's one-time effort has since been lost to the ravages of encroachments due to urbanisation,

and the few surviving majestic mono-culture trees are today witness to that great effort.

Puranic record states that Parvati's penance here was amidst thick forests. It is well known that the child-saint Jnana Sambandar trudged 20kms from Tirukkoilur through dense forest to reach Arunachala and sang of its environs as heaven on earth, a mystic haven pulsing through pellucid streams, which he himself saw being courted by hordes of elephants and bears.

A few citizen's ecological-existential *angst* resulted in the birth of ARS in 1989 as a legal entity committed to respecting diversity and the equal right to fulfillment for all domains of life on sacred Arunachala.

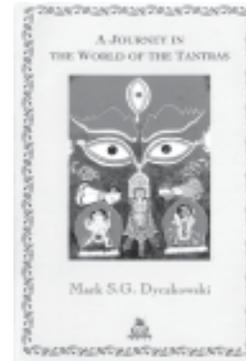
Bhagavan Ramana has given us the key to karma yoga which can reveal all the necessary guidance in self-conduct for all situations. He would refer to those who "have been here earlier...", and we are aware of our responsibility to preserve and maintain the sacred environment of the hill. All our ethical conduct in respect to the hill follows this premise.

It is the regaining of this vision that ARS has been seeking as a global prototype centered at Tiruvannamalai. It has received consistent help from Australian, European and American Arunachala Ramana devotees all through its 15 years of Hill re-afforestation. The Forest Department designated the Secretary of ARS as Honorary Tree Warden on June 6, 1994. ARS runs a Perma-culture model farm which is serving as a viable link to raise awareness and demand for organic market standards and products. It runs a 2-week meditation camp every winter.

A walk up the south-eastern slopes to Skandashram now reveals a self-growing, free habitat for creatures other than us. It is indeed a proven prototype for others to emulate and to bring public-pressure on administrations to adopt.

ARS is authorized to receive foreign contributions through banks. Donations are eligible for claiming tax-deductions. For details contact: Secretary, ARS, Tiruvannamalai 606603, India [afforest@sancharnet.in](mailto:afforest@sancharnet.in) +91.4175.236645 ▲

## BOOK REVIEWS



A JOURNEY IN THE WORLD OF THE TANTRAS by Mark S.G. Dyczkowski. Indica Books, Varanasi. <[indicabooks@satyam.net.in](mailto:indicabooks@satyam.net.in)> 2004, Rs 325, pp. 315.

The author is an authority on Kashmir Saivism. His books such as *The Doctrine of Vibration* explain in fine detail the central characteristic of this tradition, the creative impulse of the all-pervasive Consciousness, Siva. He has numerous other books to his credit including a translation of the important *Spandakarika*, 'Stanzas on Vibration', with its various commentaries. His books are learned and lucid in their exposition.

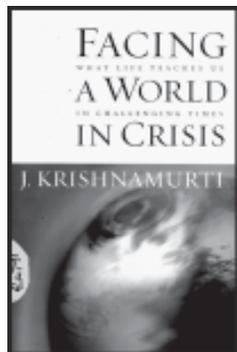
The book under review consists of three short essays on Kashmir Saivism (KS) and two long essays on Tantra. The first essay concerns the pure universal 'I' consciousness (*ahambhava*). In Advaita the reality of the world is questioned while KS does not deny the reality of the world or the status of *Isvara* as an independent entity. In Advaita Brahman is supremely impersonal. KS speak about the union of opposites. In Advaita there is 'one without a second' so where is the question of resolving diametrically opposed forces or concepts such as male/female and subject/object? KS regards Advaita as being deficient because it posits a consciousness so inert that its consciousness nature is negated. KS speaks of a 'cognitive' consciousness which generates itself into the world. The essay makes for fascinating reading.

The second is a short digression into an obscure doctrine of *abhavavada*, the doctrine of non-being. The third is about the *Samvitprakasa*, an unusual text on Vainava monism. The concepts are quite knotty and require some learned background in this field.

The final two essays are on Tantra. The first considers sacred geography as enumerated in the Puranas and Kaula or Sakta texts, the question of pilgrimage and the identification of places as being sacred, both on the terrestrial and celestial planes as well as within the human body. For those keen on pilgrimages and want to understand deeper the theory of sacred places they will find this article instructive. The final essay, by far the longest, some 110 pages, deals specifically the secret goddess, Kubjika, patroness of the Malla kings who ruled the Kathmandu Valley up to mid-1600. The cult is now principally focused in the town of Bhaktipur and the Newar community who continue to practise the esoteric rites of this ancient goddess who first came from India. The author traces the origin and intricate development of the cult which has been made possible by the release into the public domain of a vast number of tantric texts held in Nepalese Government archives.

This is a book for specialists.

— T.V. Ramamurthy



FACING A WORLD IN CRISIS: WHAT LIFE TEACHES US IN CHALLENGING TIMES by J. Krishnamurti. Shambala, Boston & London, 2005, US\$13.95, pp. 191.

It has been nearly twenty years since JK left this world. To use a cliché, it seems like yesterday. It was a memorable moment when I first read of his death in California. JK had such a profound influence on people for several generations. The annual talks at *Vasant Vihar* in Chennai was a regular and memorable meeting place for many seekers. The impact of those talks was strong and lasting. There was something special in the atmosphere and the listener each time went on a journey with him.

So, to hold a copy of a new book of talks evokes more than a twinge of nostalgia. It brings up a flood of memories about this powerful, and for us regular attendees, mysterious man. Though his influence was undeniable, I for one had not read anything further of his talks and dialogues after his death until now.

The well-edited talks, question and answer sessions took place in England, presumably at Brockwood Park, in 1985. They were the final ones he conducted there.

The first impression is that his teachings have not dated. His responses and talks are alive and incisive. He packs so many penetrating ideas into a short space. They seem, at first, rather simple but very clear. I take it that perhaps to some degree, I, like many others who were callow at the time, have finally understood something of what he passionately wanted to convey. It is to his credit he inspired us to think and consider the big questions he asked, no, demanded of his audience.

Reading him afresh, I was drawn into his journey because, I now realise that is what he does with us hushed listeners and readers. He speaks directly to each as an individual and draws us into his vision and carries us along with the breath of his concerns and the urgency of his commitment to convey what he considers of vital importance.

For those who read his books or heard him speak, I would suggest you pick him up again. You will not be disappointed. For those who are yet to taste his razor-sharp questioning, you will benefit from a provocative experience.

—Peter Pichelmann



THE SUFI DOCTRINE OF RUMI: ILLUSTRATED EDITION by William C. Chittick. World Wisdom, Inc., P.O. Box 2682, Bloomington, Indiana 47402-2682, USA, <[www.worldwisdom.com](http://www.worldwisdom.com)>, 2005, \$U.S. 18.95, pp. 104.

Rumi is the great jnani of the Sufi tradition who disseminated a vision of reality and teaching not by any discursive means such as formal philosophical and theological systems but through metaphor, verse, parable and poetic symbol. He stands as a towering figure in the east and still today, the Mevlevi order of Sufis that grew up around him is active and thriving.

Rumi was born in Khurasan in 1207, the son of a noted Sufi master of the day. Following in his father's footsteps, the youth studied under a number of notable Sufi teachers. At the age of 37 he met a wandering Sufi named Shams al-Din of Tabriz. The meeting impacted him greatly and he was never the same again. Later, his son wrote of the change in

his father: “Never for a moment did he cease from listening to music and dancing; never did he rest by day or night. He had been a *mufti*: he became a poet. He had been an ascetic: he became intoxicated by love. It was not the wine of the grape: the illumined soul drinks only the wine of Light.”

For the rest of his life he wrote voluminously and trained students eager to find the Way. He died in 1273.

While the present volume is well-researched and footnoted, it does not get bogged down in unnecessary scholarly detail but succeeds in capturing the master’s deep mystical insight and the potency of his spiritual understanding. William Chittick is a great voice in Rumi scholarship and this colour-illustrated edition does justice to a fine commentary.

— M. S. Balasubramanian



**SRI DAKSINAMURTI STOTRAM OF SRI SANKARACARYA** by Swami Tattvavidananda. D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., ‘Sri Kunj’, F-52, Bali Nagar, New Delhi 110 015 <dkprintworld@vsnl.com>, 2002, Rs 280, pp. 164.

During Sankara’s rather short life, more than four hundred works including commentaries and sub-commentaries, independent works and hymns, poetry, and praises of deities have been attributed to him. The *Sri Dakshināmūrti Stotram* holds an important place as it is a hymn of praise elaborating on Lord Sri Dakshināmūrti as an embodiment of the Supreme Reality. In the Advaita Vedanta tradition, Dakshināmūrti is known as the Adiguru, the teacher of teachers, the primordial teacher, the Guru of all gurus. In this work, the *Sri Dakshināmūrti Stotram* by Sri Sankarācārya, translated with transliteration by Swami Tattvavidānanda, is presented a detailed, critical, verse by verse commentary. Many translations of the *Dakshināmūrti Stotram* exist but this book is unique in that the Swamiji presents an elaborate introduction tracing the sources of the *Dakshināmūrti Stotram* to the *Suta Samhita* of the *Skanda Purana*; explains the uniqueness and significance of Dakshināmūrti’s ‘silent teachings’; discusses theories of creation, both ancient and modern; explains the ultimate Truth through various analogies, examples, and experiences; and enumerates the various stages of a spiritual aspirant’s journey to liberation. The Swamiji’s fluent and easy-to-

understand style provides the reader with insights into the most profound religious and philosophical truths. His commentary is wonderful, profound, deep, and easy to understand. This is an outstanding, simply outstanding work on Advaitic thought.

— T. M. Chandrasekaran

**DAKSINAMURTI STOTRA WITH MANASOLLASA** by Swami Harshananda. Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, 560 019, 1999, Rs 35, pp. 154.

Swami Harshananda’s edition of *The Dakshināmūrti Stotra with Manasollasa*, contains Devanagari script, English verse by verse translations, as well as explanatory notes and an informative, scholarly, and insightful preface. *Dakshināmūrti Stotra* is a masterful condensation of Advaitic thought in a simple beautiful style. It compares this world to a city reflected in a mirror; it compares the Reality to a mighty tree hidden inside a tiny seed. In ten verses the essence of Advaita is presented. Suresvara’s commentary helps to elucidate the inner meaning of the verses and Swami Harshananda’s commentary further assists the reader in this endeavour.

— T. M. Chandrasekaran

**RAJAMAHENDRI RAMAYANA PAINTINGS: NAYANABHIRAMANUSELANA** by Sistla Srinivas. Drusya Kala Deepika, 4-61-7 Lawson’s Bay Colony, Visakhapatnam 530 017 India, 2005, Rs 395, pp. 200.

A book can be the result of an obsession and as a consequence, a labour of love. The book under review is such a one. It presents for the first time in print all the 53 paintings of the *Ramayana* produced by Nandigam Nagesam and Kamaroutu Venkatesam, two local, obscure painters at the time when the French, English, the Nizam of Hyderabad and local warlords tussled for control of the Rajamundry area in 1757-58. The book of paintings finally ended up at a museum in Hamburg from which the author was able to gain a set of black and white photos of the manuscript in 1994.

The author has melded together an amazing range of knowledge concerning the historical political background; the extensive Ramayana literature —thirty versions in number according to the author, which have influenced the paintings; the development of the Ramayana literature during the Mogul period; and the artistic influences which inspired each of the paintings.

The level of research and work which has gone into this book is remarkable, and for Telugu readers in particular there is much to learn about their heritage. I feel for the author who with limited resources at his disposal — the lack of colour images of the paintings is a case in point—has presented a book of fascinating insights into a turbulent time in Telugu history.

— Amrit Ray

**VEDANTIC MEDITATION: LIGHTING THE FLAME OF AWARENESS** by David Frawley. Full Circle, Delhi 110 095, 2002, Rs 195.

David Frawley, the only westerner to be recognized as a *vedacharya*, has written more than twenty books on Vedic tradition and education. In this book he clarifies that Vedanta revolves around one premise: to become self-realized through the practice of Self-Enquiry. The author emphasizes the practical side of Vedanta as a way of meditation. The book is divided into four sections:

The first section examines the background of Vedanta and its main method of Self-Enquiry; the second deals with prime issues and concerns of the contemporary spiritual Path; the third contains short discussions about issues and methods of meditation Practice; and the fourth section presents the teachings of Ramana Maharshi.

Vedanta is the oldest spiritual teaching in India. Some scholars see Buddhism as a modification of Vedanta. Vedanta is a yoga of knowledge or a path of meditation. But it does not prescribe any particular form of meditation. Yes, there is no standard formula for Vedantic meditation.

The Self is the only reality ultimately. Only Self-Enquiry reveals the Self. To trace back thoughts to its root is its basis. Our thoughts consist of two components: the first is a subjective factor 'I', me or mine. The second is an objective factor—a state, condition or object with which 'I' is involved. The subjective factor, upon enquiry, turns into cleansing and revelation. The Self-Enquiry has no real stages. The easiest way to determine progress is by detachment, peace and equanimity of mind. Mind's way is the way of the Actual and the Self's way is the way of the ideal. Reality is the ideal beyond.

The author outlines the essence of instruction of Ramana Maharshi in two chapters at the end. The terms *mantra vichara* and *prana vichara* are used. *Atma vichara* is the Vedantic meditation, concludes the author.

— Dr. T.N. Pranatharthi Haran ▲

## RAMANA KIDS CORNER



**O**n the day before Bhagavan's Jayanthi (birthday), some of the members of the Ramana Kids Club, were having a meeting. They were planning a grand birthday celebration for Bhagavan. Let's see what happens, shall we?

**Sam:** Let's start planning for Bhagavan's birthday party!

**Priya:** Sure, I prepared the guest list, it is for 650 people.

**Sally:** Oh good, I have already ordered the 10 layered cake, which is made with the richest ingredients.

**Madan:** Check out all the gold ornaments to adorn Bhagavan's figure!

**Sam:** We are going to be so busy arranging for this function that we might not have time to do our usual prayers.

**Priya:** Since Bhagavan is the greatest of greatest saints, we have to do a very extravagant celebration, to please Him.

**Madan:** All this will cost thousands of rupees, but our parents will be willing to pay for a good cause.

**Sally:** After all, this is for Bhagavan.

**Sam:** I have already ordered tons of flowers from the florist shop. However I am also going to pluck flowers from all my neighbour's gardens.

**Priya:** I am sure, they won't mind, it is only for Bhagavan.

As they planned excitedly, they heard a knock on the door. Guess who was there! Lo and behold, it was Arunachala Paati! They eagerly conveyed their plans to Arunachala Paati. How do you think Arunachala Paati reacted?

You guessed right, she was shocked beyond measure!

Instead of acting violently, she gently taught the kids the true meaning of Bhagavan's Jayanthi.

**Arunachala Paati:** Bhagavan was the epitome of simplicity. If He had desired He could have had all the money in the world. Instead He chose to lead an utterly simple life. What do you think would please Bhagavan most? Is it gold ornaments, cake, flowers, lots of wasted money and time OR is it abiding in silence and complete surrender to God? Think about it. Did Bhagavan want anything from His devotees?

**Sam:** Paati, now I understand. It is wrong to take the life of a flower, in the name of Bhagavan. Bhagavan would never have approved of hurting any living being.

The kids were very inspired with what they heard from Arunachala Paati. They immediately sat down to recite the Aksharamanamalai in complete devotion. This truly set the mood for the most joyous celebration of their dear Bhagavan's birthday in each of their Hearts!

\* \* \*

### Activity

**Arunachala Paati:** Children, listen to the words of Bhagavan, relating to the celebration of Bhagavan's birthday.

"At least on one's birthday one should mourn one's entry into the world (samsara). To glory in it and celebrate it is like delighting in and decorating a corpse. To seek one's self and merge in the self: that is wisdom."

Children, discuss the meaning of the above words of wisdom with your family, and celebrate Bhagavan's birthday in your Hearts! ▲

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



### Neo-Advaita

I read in the *Letters to the Editor* of the last *Mountain Path* issue ( vol. 42, no. 4) a defence of neo -Advaita against one of the articles which appeared in a former issue.

I feel compelled to reply to that defence, stating my full agreement with Alan Jacobs' article. I have personally attended two series of these so-called satsangs — which were, by the way, far from inexpensive — and I know exactly what to think about them.

In one of them, which exhibited Ramana Maharshi's picture, the 'illuminated' teacher denied that Ramana belonged to Advaita. He also made fun of Sankaracharya. So much for the deep rooted traditionalism of the teacher.

The prevailing atmosphere in the room was one of sentimentality and self-indulgence, exactly as Alan Jacobs describes it in his article.

To talk, as the defender does in his letter of "the feeble stirrings of the novice heart" is a flight from the fact that the deformation of Tradition is of no profit to anyone. As René Guénon pointed out long ago, these pseudo-spiritualities mislead serious seekers, leading them away from serious research.

Whatever other qualities these self - appointed gurus may have, and whatever their intentions, which may be pure, warning against them is most welcome in this last phase of Kali-yuga! — Eduardo Segre

### Nova Scotia Kid' Camp

I would like to share with your readers my experience at the Kid's camp in Nova Scotia, held between August 22 and 25 of 2005.

Sri Ramana's Children's Ashrama at Nova Scotia was a good experience. We got to do a lot of hands-on activities. One of the activities was finding chocolate coins in a treasure hunt. We had fun searching in the woods for the little bags of chocolate. After we had all settled down, one of the teachers read us something that Bhagavan had said. We all should share, and we all should have equal portions of the chocolate, because we are all equal living beings.

Also, we went canoeing, swimming, and hiking. The canoeing inspired me to try something that I had never done before. It was a great experience because it taught me that team work is very important. We all had to keep the weight even on both sides of the boat so that we wouldn't tip over and fall into the water!!

When hiking, I learned that you had to keep pushing yourself to get to where you want to be. We were climbing up a pretty steep bunch of rocks. Not looking behind me, I just pulled myself up, rock by rock, until someone told me to look behind me. Glancing over my shoulder, I felt like I had fallen 20 stories. We were so high up, I didn't even realize! There was a spectacular view, but I didn't want to look back until I got to a flat area. I had to keep telling myself to keep going, because there were people climbing behind me, and I couldn't make them wait. Finally, I reached a flat area where I could rest, and I was very proud of myself for not giving up.

Along with these great activities, we also learned some yoga, songs, dances, and how to do Pradakshina. These classes were fun also, because we got to be with our friends. The thing I will probably remember most about the camp though was the play. I was Bhagavan in the play 'Bhagavan and Lakshmi'. We had only a few days of rehearsal, but everyone worked hard. When we put on the play in front of an audience, most everything was perfect. Our hard work really did pay off.

Coming into this camp, I thought it would be non-stop chanting and memorizing facts about Bhagavan's life. None of that happened, which is why I think I learned a lot more. We got to do things that kids love to do, but we also had to search deep inside ourselves for the

lesson we had learned while doing these activities. I had so much fun, and I got a lot smarter because of the Nova Scotia Kid's Ashram camp.

— Swaroopa

### Mountain Path

It was a very hot and unforgettable day in June 1964, when we walked for the first time under that now so familiar 'Sri Ramanasramam' arch into the hard trodden courtyard.

Arunachala loomed large above, the ashram buildings were framed by palms and tranquillity reigned — not only due to the heat.

From an office on our right a tall, erect and obviously English gentleman approached with a smile as if to ask: "Can I help you?" "We would like to know about Ramana Maharshi", I said.

Under one arm he had a bundle of magazines. He pulled one out and handed it to me with "When you read this, you will get to know him a little," and kept on his way. It was the very first edition of *The Mountain Path* and we had met its editor Arthur Osborne, a staunch devotee of Sri Bhagavan and a lucid exponent of his teachings.

Forty years later, the same arch, the courtyard, the palms, the peacocks. Arunachala lofty and protective, unmoving radiating perfect security. Sadly, no Arthur Osborne, but his creation, *The Mountain Path* endures and flourishes.

For me a strong and vibrant life-line to Sri Ramanasramam during all those years since its inception. Always ably guided and produced, always blessed with a great variety of inspired writers, always devoted to Sri Bhagavan's example and teachings, as well as to other faiths with their various paths up the mountain.

Not only do the erudite editors and writers elucidate and revive memories, but its totality brings about a strong feeling of devotion and essential encouragement towards self-realisation.

When I open *The Mountain Path* I see Bhagavan, I hear him, and I am with him. There is no doubt of the strength I gain — and the happiness I feel, gratefully.

And once again *The Mountain Path* is in able hands and continues to inspire.

— Gerd Ledermann





## Samvatsara Abhishekam

Following *Mahakumbhabhishekam* of Sri Ramaneswara and Matrubhuteswara Temples in November last year, special abhishekam was performed for 48 days with Mandalabhishekam on the last day. This year, to mark the completion of one year since Kumbhabhishekam, special puja and homam were performed on Punarvasu Day, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Anujnai, Sri Vigneswara Puja, Kalasasthapanam, Maha Ganapati Homam, Aavahanthi Homam, Medha Dakshinamurthy Homam and Sri Ramana Moola Mantra Homam were all performed with great fervour. A enthusiastic Mahabhishekam was undertaken in the evening accompanied by a number of guest Vedacharyas from Coimbatore chanting Sri Rudram in ghanam mode.

## Deepavali

All over India Deepavali, the 'festival of the lights', is celebrated with presents and fireworks. Also known as *Naraka Chaturdasi Snaanam*, the

festival commemorates the destruction of the demon Naraka by Sri Krishna on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of *Aswija*. It is said that anyone who thinks of Krishna on this day will receive His grace. Likewise undertakings on this day are sure to succeed. When asked to explain Deepavali's significance, Bhagavan offered the following verse:

He who seeks whence is Naraka,  
Who this hell-like world is ruling,  
Mistaking the filthy body  
For the Self, and after kills him  
By the means of Wisdom's Wheel,  
Is Narayana. And that day  
When he does it, is auspicious,  
Called Naraka-Chaturdasi.  
Know Deepavali is shining  
As the real Self, having sought for

Naraka, the mighty sinner,  
That one who deteriorated  
Taking for the Self the mansion  
Of this hell-like, guileful body,  
Having sought him and then slain him.<sup>1</sup>

### Navaratri Music

On three of the nine days of this year's Navaratri celebration, Karnatic music concerts were held in the dining hall each evening. After special pujas for Yogambika each night, devotees were blessed to attend these performances, which, for many, was an experience of joy and bliss. The third night was especially memorable and featured Master Sri Thayumanavar whose ensemble performed with unmatched devotion and earnestness. The highpoint was by many accounts a musical epiphany, where "the mind seemed to stop and spontaneity took over. Because the performers so enjoyed themselves, their joy infected the audience. Indeed it was only when the audience became one with all this that it became a heavenly experience." Devotees thank the sponsor of these concerts, Mr. Kandasamy from Tiruchi.

### Karthigai Deepam

The significance of Deepam is well known. It finds its origin in Lord Siva's manifestation as a column of light (*jyothi*) to reveal the folly of Brahma and Vishnu (representing the intellect and ego) who disputed one another as to who was the greater. The sacred fire symbolises the victory of light over the darkness of delusion. The meaning of sighting the beacon atop the hill was described by Sri Bhagavan this way:

"Getting rid of the 'I am the body' idea and merging the mind into the Heart to realize the Self as non-dual being and the light of all is the real significance of *darshan* of the beacon of light on Annamalai, the centre of the universe."<sup>2</sup>

In commemoration of Siva quelling the pride of Brahma and Vishnu, a huge cauldron of ghee and camphor is lit on the summit of Arunachala on Kartikai Day (December 13th) when the sun sets. (The month is Kartikai and the star of the day too is Kartikai). It burns for some 7

<sup>1</sup> 'On Deepavali' from *The Poems of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sadhu Arunachala (Major A. W. Chadwick), 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Sri Ramanasramam, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> 'Significance of the Beacon', *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2004, p. 79.

days (or more), being daily replenished with ghee and camphor offered by devotees. Visible even at a distance of 20 to 25 miles, devotees take great delight in having the darshan of this Deepam flame.

At the Ashram, Kartikai Deepam is always celebrated by lighting a small cauldron of ghee simultaneously with the one on the hill. Priests chant *Na Karmana*, perform *arati* to Sri Bhagavan's photograph, while devotees sing *Aksharamanamalai*.

### Sri Bhagavan's 126th Jayanti

The 126th Birthday of Sri Bhagavan is being celebrated at the Ashram this year on December 18th. Since Jayanti falls in the month of Marghazhi (December-January), the function begins with special *dhanurmasa* puja in the early morning. Devotees then sing hymns on and by Sri Bhagavan. Soon after, there is the morning milk offering and after breakfast, Mahanyasa puja. Special *abhisheka* with milk, curd and vibhuti is performed and *Ramaneswara Mahalingam* is specially decorated with garlands and *kavacham*. Unmistakably, the Ashram atmosphere is surcharged with Bhagavan's presence on Jayanti Day and this year should prove to be no exception.

### Other Functions This Season

Muruganar's Aradhana celebration at Ramanathapuram (his birthplace) and Chennai took place on Sept 3-4. In Chennai, there was chanting of *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and at Sri Ramanasramam, usual puja and chanting sponsored by Smt. Kanakammal.

*Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Sanmarga Jnana Ratham* sponsored by UNIRAAM Trust got under way on Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> and visited 1008 villages in South Tamil Nadu until Nov. 23, 2005.

A New Vedapatasala at the Janaki Matha Ashram, Tanjore, was inaugurated on Aug. 22-24.

### Obituaries

#### Sonti Anasuyamma

Sonti Anasuyamma (age 78) died on Tuesday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, Punarvasu Day. From Vijayanagaram, Anasuyamma grew up with a love of Sanskrit. Her delight was reading literature rich in human insight and poetic splendour. Equally, she was in love with Prakriti — the open spaces, the beaches and the waves upon the ocean — which held her captive. It was natural to this gifted woman that she should revel in the poetic fragrance of Rabindranath Tagore, the novels of

Neville Shute, who probed the moods and destinies of mankind, and also the teachings of saints, Vivekananda foremost among them.

Her inherent literary grace in Telugu, harmony with idiomatic English, and her subjective feel of spiritual concepts made her translations a thing of beauty, while remaining faithful to the original text. Just the day before her passing, her latest translation arrived from the printer. It was the biography of Ganapati Muni called *Mahatapasvi: Life Story of Kavya Kanta Ganapati Muni* which she translated into English from her native Telugu. Her translations include, among others, Who's *Maha Yoga* and into Telugu, Paul Brunton's *Bhagavan and His Message*.

### **Sri J. Krishnamurthy: An Ideal Devotee**



Sri J. Krishnamurthy, the role model of an ideal devotee, has now reached the holy feet of Bhagavan. Closely associated with Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad, and Dr. K. Subramaniam, his devotion to Bhagavan was truly immense. At the very mention of Bhagavan's name, tears used to well up in his eyes. His very breath had Bhagavan in it. Anybody who visited his house found entire walls pasted with photos of Bhagavan. He never discarded even an invitation letter if it had Bhagavan's picture on it but would preserve it

for dear life. Although he served prestigious organizations like UNDP and UNESCO, he was ever humble and used to take all as a gift from Bhagavan. Let us pray to Bhagavan that we are all blessed with the same deep devotion that J. Krishnamurthy so glowingly exemplified.

### **Punita the Cow**

We are sorry to report the passing of a popular, prominent cow in the Ashram gosala. 'Punita' was gifted to us as a heifer by Sri Aurobindo Ashram from their 'Gloria Farm'. Belonging to the pure Gir breed with a rich brown coat, broad forehead downward-curving horns, long pendulum ears and a stately build, Punita was distinctive in appearance. Endowed with a gentle, endearing nature, she was well-liked by all and especially by children. In fact, parents could persuade reluctant children to drink their milk by telling them, "It is Punita's milk!" Punita whose numerous offspring now populate and enrich the Ashram gosala, passed away peacefully having lived a long, full life. ▲