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## Ramana Ashtottaram

### 54. ओं ईड्याय नमः

*Om Idyaya namaha.*

Prostration to the one worthy of praise; the one able to elevate those who honour him.

Many devotees from far and near came to him and found comfort, strength, illumination, peace and joy in his presence.

### 55. ओं भूमविद्याविशारदाय नमः

*Om Bhumavidyavisaradaya namaha.*

Prostration to the one well-versed in *bhuma-vidya*.

*Bhuma* is the ground and *Brahma* is the Name of Being-Awareness, the blissful experience of the pure I AM, where one sees no other, hears no other, knows no other. This is the supreme knowledge which, according to the *Chandogya Upanishad*, the sage Narada sought and secured from Sanatkumara, youth eternal. In south Indian poetry and folklore, Subrahmanya, Muruga, youth eternal, communicates this supreme knowledge to even common people. If poets and people see in Sri Ramana the modern manifestation of the six-faced God ever revealing the future, it is because they find him ready and able to perform the special function and play the revolutionary role of broadcasting the highest wisdom to all and sundry and doing this without dilution or distortion. For the Truth is joy in widest commonality spread. ▲

## Marching to the Sound of a Different Drum

By one of those curious quirks of history there is a connection between the ancient philosophy of India and a group of American citizens of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century who became known as the Boston Brahmins. Among this distinguished clan were two individuals who more than any others resonated to the call of India and wrote exceptional works that made a deep impact on the generations that followed. These two were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. It is the latter on whom we focus our interest, for his life and literary works, particularly *Walden*, are still read today for their common sense and wonderful descriptions of nature. It is remarkable that one man who apparently had little or no ambition — much to the despair of his friends, even Emerson in whose house he was a guest at one time —, should in his short life of 43 years of dawdling amongst the woods of Concord, New England, write a masterpiece of literary greatness which has influenced writers and philosophers ever since. Thoreau and Emerson's influence on Mahatma Gandhi can be seen when he established his co-operative farm in South Africa, and in particular Thoreau's short article *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*

which gave Gandhi and later, Martin Luther King the intellectual justification for their confrontation with authority and injustice. It is indeed a twist of fate that Gandhi would draw inspiration from the Boston Brahmins.

People, particularly Westerners who felt one must 'do something' often asked Bhagavan what he was doing to 'help' the world. He generally replied by another question asking, 'Who is there who is other than oneself in this dream world?'. If the questioner could not grasp this notion, he would come to their level and say in effect, 'How do you know I am not helping?'. Bhagavan's very presence was sufficient to influence anyone in the world whose mind and heart are open to a higher realm of understanding. Spiritual truths are not inhibited by time and space as anyone who has come into contact with Bhagavan's grace today knows. Bhagavan may have been a historical figure but it would be foolish to think it all ended in 1950 when his physical body died. If anything, his influence has only grown with the passing years and particularly in the last decade when his face and words are so readily available in innumerable books and on the world wide web. And from what did all this come? It was an incident at Madurai in 1896 which occurred to a teenage boy of no obvious and specific ability. We know the history which followed but what is of interest to us is how a human being can influence succeeding generations without seeming to do anything?

There was the special charisma which Bhagavan naturally displayed; for how many stories have we read or heard about someone who was utterly transformed by one piercing look from his eyes. What else made an impact on people? It was his words both in speech and print. Aside from his photographs, we now have just the words. For many when they first read something by Bhagavan are struck by the truthfulness of the statements. They are self-evident and resonate deep in the heart far away from the crowded world of explanation in which our normal mind indulges. We just know they are true.

With Thoreau there is a similar timbre in his descriptions of nature and observations about human nature. These simple words, by a man who was admired by a small circle of contemporaries who were

nonetheless puzzled by his lack of seeming purpose, have come down to us today as treasures which we reflect on and which nourish us. W.E. Channing who was a close friend of Thoreau and his first biographer, commented after his death that, "No man had a better unfinished life." For what are we to make of a man with great talents who apparently loafed his way through life? One of the most memorable statements by Thoreau concerned this very issue, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."<sup>1</sup> Here was a person who in the face of social and peer pressure resolutely listened to his inner call and fulfilled his *swadharma*, not as someone who visibly accomplished something in the world but one who walked the woods and observed the beauty and precision of nature. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." His insights and lucid descriptions have inspired generations of writers too numerous to list here.

Thoreau's example challenges us to ask what then does it mean to lead a fulfilled life in which all one's virtues and skills are exercised to the limit of human possibility? Is it in the accumulation of wealth, social power and respect by one's peers? Is it in doing good deeds and helping the less fortunate? For those who read this magazine this line of argument is understood and acknowledged as being valid. So the question here is not why so much as how. How can we lead a simpler life in this day and age with its superfluity of impressions, desires and fears brutally shoved into our faces by inane electronic equipment in our homes as well as at work? There seems no escape if we want to live a prosperous life where we and our children are taken care of. But we do have choice and it is not necessarily a radical one of renouncing the world and living in association with an ashram or similar institution. Our daily life is composed of small choices over which we have some

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<sup>1</sup> This quote and the following are taken from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and other works. Or in the various biographies about him.

degree of control. We do have choice whether or not to switch on a television; we have choice and can say no when offered the latest gadget which will make us the envy of our friends. Even in situations where we have no room for manoeuvre we still have a choice whether to indulge in despair or anger, or remain calm.

The question we need to ask is: what is the most important thing we need to do with our lives? Leave aside the duties of supporting and raising a family. Leave aside the necessity of earning a living. The most important duty we have to our selves is to be true to our nature, our *swadharma*, and this at whatever the cost for who does not agree with Thoreau's observation that, "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them."

Bhagavan did not encourage people to renounce the world. He advised dispassion and questioning of the assumptions we automatically make of ourselves and others. We lead for the most part a mechanical existence whether we are aware of it or not. We take our opinions from the newspapers and the current fashion in thought. Our choice of words is dictated by the latest craze. The word 'fun' for example denotes for many younger people their approval for whatever activity they are engaged in. Knowing the right phrases is not necessarily a passport to intelligence; it can merely be an indication of second-hand, imitative thinking. What Bhagavan advised was discrimination between what is eternal and what is ephemeral.

We should be wary of an easy escape by thinking we can do nothing. Thoreau said, "As if you could kill time without injuring eternity." Time is precious, it is ultimately, the most valuable 'commodity' we own. Bhagavan's daily routine was fixed by the clock. He would go for days without speaking and yet the ashram would be unaffected because there was a discipline and purpose to each activity which gave the day momentum and meaning. People were inwardly nourished because their hearts were open to learning and change. In the midst of all this activity Bhagavan sat in silence and moved as if alone. There was a solitude to him which was impervious to the round of events. He was the sun around which the devotees spent their days and thoughts. His constant and unfathomable abidance in, for want of a

better word, what we call the Self, was a source of joy and awe for those who were open to its manifestation. The few words he spoke, the small amount of literature he wrote, were all cherished for nothing was wasted. Each word was meant, each gesture had significance.

One wonders what Thoreau would have made of an encounter with Bhagavan. It is interesting to occasionally indulge our imaginations and apparently ask irrelevant or speculative questions. They can open doors we normally regard as impractical yet they can hide treasure beyond the narrow scope of our vision. One imagines Thoreau would have found in Bhagavan the answer to his search for meaning and in a face to face encounter words would be discarded. There is a wonderful sentence in Thoreau which makes one think that this apparently provincial man from another century and another time, could appreciate the mysteries which lay in wait for one who opens up to the eternal reflected in human form. For he wrote, "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?"

The manner of a person's passing from this world to the next is often an indication or summation of how they led their lives. Thoreau slowly faded away over a number of years due to tuberculosis. From his invalid bed he continued to correspond and write in his journal. His friends were alarmed by his progressive deterioration and astonished at his calm acceptance of the inevitable. His clear, deep voice remained unmistakable. When his aunt asked him in his last weeks, if he had made his peace with God, Thoreau simply replied, "I did not know we had ever quarrelled." Among his last dying words were, "Now comes good sailing."

Here was a man who built himself a single-room cabin measuring 10 feet by 14 feet in which he wrote over less than two years a classic book about his observations of what he called the 'higher laws' at Walden Pond. His small world became immortalized not because he did great deeds but because each day as he walked among the woods he keenly observed ordinary scenes that awakened in him the eternal.

Let us leave Thoreau the final word, "It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see." ▲





# Diving into the Heart

ALAN JACOBS

Just as the pearl diver ties a stone to his waist, sinks to the bottom of the sea and there takes the pearls, so each one of us should be endowed with non-attachment, dive within himself and obtain the Self-Pearl.<sup>1</sup>

The first clear statement pointing to the practice of Diving into the Heart appears in Sri Bhagavan's second written work entitled, *Who Am I?*, composed in 1901 and it is thus the chosen quotation of the seminal work quoted at the head of this article.

Ramana used different metaphors and phraseology to describe this practice, which forms one of the key approaches to Self-enquiry, but

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<sup>1</sup> Who Am I?, section 19, p.43. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001. Unless otherwise indicated all publications in this article are published by Sri Ramanasramam.

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the metaphor of the ‘Pearl of Great Price’, pointing to Liberation, is one also used by Jesus Christ and is often found in the poetry of Jalal al-din Rumi, Jami and other Sufi mystics.

It is however, in the *Ramana Gita* that we see the essence of this practice. In 1915 Ganapati Muni and his *sishyas* (students) asked Bhagavan a series of questions. The second verse in chapter two has become immortalised by Sri Ramana himself, with the answer which is popularly named the *Eka Sloki*. Of over three hundred verses in the *Ramana Gita*, all questions and answers were transcribed by the Muni into Sanskrit verse, with the exception of this one, which was composed metrically by Bhagavan himself, in 1915, also in Sanskrit. This was his first composition in that language, rather than Tamil. In the *Supplement to the Forty Verses* (1928), it was repeated by Sri Bhagavan, but now in Tamil:

In the centre of the Heart-Cave  
There shines alone  
The one *Brahman* as ‘I,I’ the *Atman*.  
Reach the Heart  
By Diving deep in quest of the Self  
Or by controlling the mind  
With the breath,  
And stay established in the *Atman*.<sup>2</sup>

In the following verse 3 of *Ramana Gita*, the Muni writes, “This verse is the utterance of Bhagavan Maharshi himself and is the essence of the Upanisads and Vedanta. He that fully understands this verse, has no room for any doubts whatsoever.”<sup>3</sup>

Then in verse 47 of the Marital Garland of Letters (*Akshara Mana Malai*) Bhagavan writes, “Let me by Thy Grace, dive into Thy Self, wherein merge only those divested of their minds and thus made pure, O Arunachala!”

<sup>2</sup> *Supplement to Forty Verses on Reality*, verse 8., p.123. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. 2001. There is an interesting footnote explaining the origins of the verse.

<sup>3</sup> *Ramana Gita*, ch.2, verse 3. 1998.

In two verses in *Forty Verses on Reality* composed by Bhagavan we read:

Controlling speech and breath, and diving deep within oneself — like one who, to find a thing that has fallen into water, dives deep down — one must seek out the source whence the aspiring ego springs.

Cease all talk of ‘I’ and search with inward diving-mind whence the thought of ‘I’ springs up. This is the way of wisdom. To think instead, ‘I Am not this, but that I Am’, is helpful in the search but it is not the search itself.<sup>4</sup>

S.S Cohen, makes the cogent point, in his commentary on verse 28, “Deep Diving is a metaphor that implies salvaging the ego from the depths of ignorance into which it has fallen, not amateurishly, but very expertly and unremittingly, or else success will be sporadic and even doubtful.”<sup>5</sup>

However Kapali Sastriar’s commentary on these verses 30 & 31 in the *Sat Darshana Bhashya* is exhaustive, inspiring and powerful, also gives directions. On page 26 of this same book, in one of the introductory chapters, entitled ‘On Sadhana and Siddhi’ he writes, “It throws the whole being into a consuming fire as it were, takes hold of the life breath which is lost in the bodily feeling, and separating it from the bodily grip, enters it into the Heart...such is the real *Jijnasa*, the genuine earnest desire and search for the Self....”<sup>6</sup>

Before moving onto the actual approach and experience of this great practice, it is necessary to point out that there are numerous references to Diving or Plunging in the celebrated *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* in Talks 252 and 616 during which Bhagavan says, “The aim of the seeker must be to drain away the *vasanas* from the heart and let not the reflecting medium obstruct the Light of Eternal

<sup>4</sup> *Forty Verses on Reality*, verses 28 & 29, p. 119. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Commentary on Forty Verses’, p.139 from *Ramana Shankara And The Forty Verses* by S.S. Cohen. Watkins Publications London 2002.

<sup>6</sup> *Sat Darshana Bhaysa* by Kapali Sastri, p.26. 1993.

Consciousness. This is achieved by the search for the origin of the Ego and by Diving into the Heart. This is the direct method for Self Realisation.....”<sup>7</sup>

It is however, in *Padamalai*, that the richest haul for the aspiring Pearl Diver may be found.<sup>8</sup> To give but one example from the admirable *Padamalai*, all of Muruganar’s *Guru Vachaka Kovai* verse 46 is given in which he quotes Ramana as having commented, “Put aside completely the extremely extensive Vedas and Agamas because their true benefit is getting established in the enquiry of diving within oneself.....”<sup>9</sup>

So we see the extent that Sri Bhagavan repeatedly points to the importance of this practice over and over again. To cap it all we find the *Eka Sloki* was mounted during Bhagavan’s lifetime, obviously with his consent, above his ornate marble couch in the New Hall, where the verse is engraved in gold Sanskrit letters on a tablet of polished black marble!

Before discussing the practice, from my own experience, from all I have read, and discussed with other devotees, it is necessary to point out that it is only one of the different approaches to atma vichara, given by Sri Ramana to suit the dispositions of different seekers according to their temperaments and maturity.

In my own case I found it very difficult, like many western seekers, to maintain the attention needed for the Self-enquiry approaches initially prescribed in *Who Am I?* but when I came across ‘Diving Into the Heart’ it was a revelation as here was a radical practice I could pursue, by stopping my restless mind through breath control and regulation. I have been enjoying this form of Self-enquiry for some years and have great faith and personal evidence in its efficacy. In my enthusiasm I even composed a long narrative poem, published privately called *The Pearl Fishers*, which describes the practice. Of course

<sup>7</sup> §616, p.576. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. 1996.

<sup>8</sup> See pp., 92, 101, 146, and 234. *Padamalai* by Muruganar. ed. David Godman. Avadhuta Press. 2004.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210, no.34.

Ramana’s long essay ‘Self-Enquiry’ at the beginning of his *Collected Works* summarises the different approaches and the necessary, optional support practices, including regulation of the breath,<sup>10</sup> and in chapter six of the *Ramana Gita*, and chapter 2, verse 4 of *Spiritual Instruction*. Here they are expanded as aids for necessary mind control.

Each practioner of Self-enquiry will be drawn to that which he finds the easiest and appeals to him most. Some even have several arrows in their atma vichara quiver with Aum as their bow. When however we come to Diving into the Heart, there is a useful treatise called *The Technique of Maha Yoga* by Sri N.R.Narayana Aiyar, which describes his own practice of Diving into the Heart, enjoyed by this earnest sadhaka.<sup>11</sup>

Briefly this short work summarises in general terms, his own experience and understanding of Self-enquiry and support practices in the first twenty six pages. But on page 26 he leads one into his own personal sadhana of Diving into the Heart. He then quotes in section 10 of chapter 7 called ‘The Locus of the Self’, the famed quotation from the *Supplement to the Forty Verses*, “Two digits to the right of the centre chest is the Heart like a lotus bud. Breath, mind and the Light of Consciousness originate from here.”<sup>12</sup> There are many supporting passages in the Ramana literature where Bhagavan indubitably affirms this location from his own direct experience. However in *Talks*, §131 Sri Ramana states, “Of course there is also the practice of meditation on the heart centre. It is only a practice and not an investigation. Only the one who meditates on the heart can remain aware when the mind ceases to be active and remains still....”<sup>13</sup>

From this statement, as a practioner of Diving or Plunging I have deduced, along with trusted and advanced devotees in Ramanasramam, with whom I have discussed the question, that the right side of the

<sup>10</sup> *Self-enquiry*, verses 21-26, p.20-21. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> *The Technique of Maha Yoga* by N.R. Narayana Aiyar. 1996.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>13</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.116. 1996.



chest MUST NOT be seen as an object to be focused on, but merely as a doorway or portal in which one can enter to commence the search for the source of the I-thought.

The point of entry may be found as the author of *The Technique of Maha Yoga* writes, and Ramana suggests too, “Watch the movement of the breath...and observe where breath rises and sinks inside the chest...” As in the *Upadesa Saram* (and elsewhere) Bhagavan writes:

Mind and breath (as thought and action)  
Fork out like two branches.  
Both spring  
From a single root.<sup>14</sup>

Earnest practitioners of Diving invariably find, as I have, that the Locus where a palpitation can often be felt is on the right side of the chest, where Sri Bhagavan himself affirms it to be.

Now regarding breath control and breath regulation, the *Eka Sloki* clearly states that this as an option. Diving can be practised with or without restraint of breath. We once held an Internet Discussion Group called atma vichara, with over two hundred subscribing members, world-wide. Many reported that ‘as soon as they approached the doorway of the Heart with devotion and attention, the sacredness of the inner shrine automatically made the mind go quiet, and breath regulation was therefore unnecessary for them.’

Many practioners, however, especially those like me, with the usual Western *rajasic*, restless mind, find breath restraint invaluable. Although breath control is summarised in *Self-enquiry* from verses 21-25, it is more fully detailed by Bhagavan in his answer to the Muni and his disciples in chapter six of the *Ramana Gita* called ‘Mind Control’. Ramana’s approach to this practice is very simple, and is not the extensive pranayama which needs the supervision of a competent teacher. One clear demonstration of full inhalation, retention and exhalation would be adequate. In verse 6, Bhagavan does recommend Hatha Yoga as an additional aid for those disposed

towards this health giving and purification practice, which would include some pranayama.<sup>15</sup> Many, like me, find it is a valuable support practice for atma vichara. Here a competent teacher is essential at the beginning.

In verse 7 we are asked to breathe out fully (*rechaka*) with the necessary time required, and then fully inhale for another unit of the same time (*puraka*). Then *kumbhaka* or retention may be held for four counts of the time taken for inhalation.<sup>16</sup> It is during this period of holding the breath, that I find is the best time to Plunge or Dive into the Heart by entering the portal on the right side of the chest using focussed attention; like a laser beam, from the chakra between the eye brows, to penetrate as deeply as one can, searching for the source of the I-thought; until one is forced to fully exhale, with a full diaphragmatic *bhastika*, which, more effectively, expels residual thought and *vrittis*.

This differs from the approach of the author of *The Technique of Maha Yoga* where he recommends, “Slowly exhale and watch the exhalation movement in the chest. With the sinking movement in the chest dive into the Heart.”<sup>17</sup> Here I assume he is relying on the pranic force to enter the heart, with focussed attention. But I find focused attention issuing from the *chakra* or pineal gland, between the eye brows, seems to me to be far more powerful and would include the Pranic Force on exhalation as well. But obviously as in all matters of sadhana it is for each sadhak to find his own most effective way which is most amenable for him, guided by the Sat-Guru within his own Heart.

Another interesting suggestion made to me is to strengthen the dive by mentally visualising a Yantra and then diving with full attention into the *bindu* (point) of the Heart, thus utilising the power of Tantra.

Chapter nine of the *Ramana Gita* in which the great *Eka Sloki* first appeared has a whole explanation on the *granthi bhedam* or severance

<sup>15</sup> *Ramana Gita*. Ch.6, verse 6, p.90. 1998.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 7, p.90-1.

<sup>17</sup> *The Technique of Maha Yoga* by N.R. Narayana Aiyar, p. 57.1996.

<sup>14</sup> *Upadesa Saram*, verse 12. p.111. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001.



of the knot. In verse three, Ramana states that the association of the Self with the body is called the *granthi* (knot).<sup>18</sup> It is my intuitive feeling that Bhagavan's powerful sword of Diving into the Heart will eventually cut this identification with the body-mind and sever the ganglion knot. A full explanation to the *granthi bhedam* can also be found in *Spiritual Instruction*, verse 12.<sup>19</sup>

Finally there is the question of posture and here Sri Bhagavan is very clear when he writes in verse 27 of *Self-enquiry*, "Of the eighty four main postures *siddha* is the most excellent."<sup>20</sup> This is when the left heel is placed over the genital area and the right heel over that.

Narayana Aiyer warns that this process of dedicated Diving into the Heart may take a number of years, and this writer fully agrees with it from his own experience, also over many years. One assumes it depends on the skill employed in the practice of concentrated probing, with devotion, and the force of attention available, and the strength of the occlusions and *vasanas* resisting expulsion, as well as the *gunas* active at the time. Obviously it will differ with each *sadhak*, and no Plunge or Dive, in the search of the source of the 'I-thought' can ever be exactly the same for everyone at any one time.

I find that each Dive is different in quality depending on the force of attention gathered, like an artist preparing to draw an object, or a mathematician concentrating on a difficult problem, or gazing into the wick of a lit candle. Or visualising a Yantra. In some cases one feels one strikes a wall, or a sheath, and the attention cannot penetrate. But invariably one finds one can penetrate deeper and deeper until one reaches the abyss when one can go no further. Then on the exhalation a great deal of residual thought or *vruttis* are expelled.

The more zeal, and determination one devotedly feels, that this is a most urgent vital and necessary effort one can make, the deeper it

<sup>18</sup> *Ramana Gita*, Ch.9, verse 3, p.115. 1998.

<sup>19</sup> *Spiritual Instruction*, verse 12, p.58-59. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> *Self-enquiry*, verses 27, p.22. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2001.

goes. One is immediately detached from any identification previously agitating the mind. I find it is quite easy to commence the day with three or four dives, and then the opportunity or energy to proceed may happen another three or four times during the day.

There is, however considerable grace involved, as this practice churns the *nadis* (subtle nerves), and the nervous system would be overstrained if achievement was too sudden. If there is a strain on the *nadis*, Bhagavan says, "That with persistence all will come right in the end."<sup>21</sup> This is expanded in the valuable chapter on 'Problems and Experiences' in David Godman's excellent anthology *Be As You Are*. Patience must be exercised for ripeness and maturity to fructify, and then grace mercifully chooses the right moment for appropriate glimpses of the real Self, in all its magnificence, as a forerunner to realisation, when no further *sadhana* is needed. There is, however, from my own experience, no doubt that the practice, whenever it is applied, gracefully weakens identification with troublesome thoughts. One notices *vasanas* coming out. Also pulsations are often felt on the right side of the chest, where a niche can be found in which one may rest for sitting in silent meditation. Again, however, every heroic adventure into deep sea pearl fishing will be different, for each *sadhak*, and unique according to his own endeavour.

A baffling question arises however, if when reaching the bottom of the abyss with concentrated attention, nothing is discovered, and the space probed seems empty. Wise, experienced devotees in Ramanasramam with whom I have discussed this question inform me that as long as the

<sup>21</sup> p.35, 'Obstacles and Hatha Yoga'. *Crumbs From His Table* by Ramanananda Swarnagiri, 1963. The full quote is: "The mind which was hitherto operating through the *nadis* to sense external objects and thus maintaining a link between itself and the organs of perception is now required to withdraw from the link and this action of withdrawal naturally causes a strain, a sprain or a snap attendant with pain, which people term disease and perhaps tests by God. All these would go, if you would but continue your meditation bestowing your thought solely on understanding your Self or on Self-realization. *There is no greater remedy than this continuous yoga or union with God or Atman*. There cannot but be pain as a result of your discarding your long acquired *Vasanas*."

practice is still done from the mind, nothing should be expected. But if at a certain point, after earnest and regular persistence in the practice, the enquiry moves into the Heart through grace, then atma vichara spontaneously arises, and one is drawn into the Heart, where the source of the I-thought may eventually be found with the necessary release. I have found this happens to me occasionally but I have not reached the stage where it becomes frequent or permanent.

I sincerely hope that this practice may be a great help for some devotees, as it is for me, especially for those who find other approaches too difficult because of lack of necessary yogic preparation, concentration practice, or inability to control the mind, even using mantra japa.

There is no doubt that the implication of the Maharshi's repetition of this practice, in his own writings and talks, is of major significance. It is as if our Ramana Sat-Guru appears and tells us: Dive within the Heart and realise the Self! ▲

#### Mountain Path Readers in India

Dear Readers,

Due to increased costs in producing the magazine, please note that from the 1st July 2008:

- i) The price per copy of the magazine has been raised from Rs. 20/- to Rs. 30/-;
- ii) The annual subscription has been raised from Rs. 80/- to Rs. 120/- ;
- iii) The Indian life time subscription has been raised from Rs. 1300/- to Rs. 1500/-.

# 'Save Me, God' or 'Save Me, Gravity'?

DWARAKNATH REDDY

*This article is adapted from the newly expanded reprint of the book The Dickey Problem of New Age Science (Einstein, Hawking and God at the Casino), published by Stirling Publishers. Some references are to Code Name God by Mani Bhaumik, noted physicist and inventor of the laser.*

When the concept of God is not totally denied as an impossibility, or dismissed as an absurdity, how does this concept unfold in the scientific mind? If it denotes the ultimate unified field of all energies, "as well as consciousness" as Bhaumik hedges (hesitantly?)<sup>1</sup>, are we assuming an assemblage or a seamless fusion? Is consciousness fundamentally constituted in our understanding on the same parameters as other energies, or is there a quantum gap?

<sup>1</sup> *Code Name God* by Mani Bhaumik. p.216. Penguin Delhi 2005.

Dwaraknath Reddy is the author of numerous books on spirituality. He is a long time resident of Ramanagar.

Consciousness is experienced in oneself, whether one be saint or scientist, and is the indelible, essential factor for knowledge of things. Whatever is identified by sound (name) and shape (form) is a 'thing'. Be it forces like gravity and electromagnetic radiation, be it objects like earth and the sun, we do not bestow self-consciousness on them. They know not themselves (or me), whereas surely I know them. That is to say consciousness knows them. Therein lies a quaint or mysterious angle (beyond science's geometry) to this factor. Which sets me musing. When in trouble or distress or pain or confusion, most of us tend to turn our minds to 'God'. But no one ever prays to gravity or electromagnetic radiation. I will wager that even Newton and Maxwell did not. The consciousness in me with an instinct for self-preservation admits the universal consciousness, posits in it a reachable relationship in real terms, and therefore invokes the higher potential of what is already possessed by me in lesser measure. Instinct seems to sense an inherent kinship and trust it.

New Age Science at its conciliatory best may grant that perhaps the experience of the mystics has an analogue in the 'unbroken wholeness' of quantum physicists, but will regretfully add that "the greatest obstacle to reconciling science and spirituality has been the personification of God."<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, I would say the sole obstacle is the failure of science to personify the 'unbroken wholeness'. Any number of force fields may be integrated through addition to arrive at an 'unbroken awareness', but the totality has to be known to exist. The force fields are inert, singly or totally. What is 'awareness' in the force fields? Consciousness brings them into knowledge. Knowledge is personal and paramount. Thus consciousness translates to knower, and a knower is personal (you personally know that). The 'personal god' is a consolation prize given to mental man who sees himself as a conscious entity and cannot set apart existence from knowledge of such existence. That is religion, the devout way of living, wherein man (mind) interacts with his personal god. Spirituality is not interaction, but integration; a quantum jump, a transcendence, and thereafter, who is there to personify what?

<sup>2</sup> *Code Name God* by Mani Bhaumik, p.214. Penguin Delhi 2005.

If walking in the hills I suddenly slip precariously, the inadvertent exclamation is "My God!" not "My Gravity!". Science may gag me on both counts, but shortlist me for a Nobel prize if I had shouted "My Neurons!" In the moment of crisis, when time-sequenced reason cannot articulate, my nature turns to a supremacy that, by inherent implication, is *present* and *knowing* and can (if it so wills) respond and intercede. By the same implication, Mr. Gravity, though present, knows not and therefore, kind though he be, cannot respond. Mr. Gravity is acting on my body but cannot react to my mind. Why this premonition that, maybe, Mr. God can?

If you do not mind (this word will not leave us!), let us be entertained (then enlightened) by this limerick (author unknown to me):

There was a young man who said, "God,  
To you it must seem very odd,  
That a tree as a tree  
Simply ceases to be  
When there is no one about in the quad."

And God replied:

"Young man, your astonishment is odd,  
I'm always about in the quad  
And that's why the tree  
Never ceases to be  
As observed by yours faithfully, God."

The essence of this limerick is not different from the Zen koan which asks, "When a huge tree crashes in the depths of an uninhabited mountain, does the fall make a noise?" After a pause (not idly to sip tea) return to the dictum that says, *inter alia*, what is not known to exist does not exist. Do not rush to rebuke angrily, "You mean to say ..." because the seers did not mean to say what you mean to say they meant to say! Words can be used differently. We shall, for the present, forsake habit and listen with an open mind.

Mind is consciousness in movement. The energy is of Consciousness, the moved blocks are thoughts (quanta of knowledge?),



## MOUNTAIN PATH

and mind is the field. From where is the talk of energy fields arising? Not in gravity. Gravity knows not its own existence. The talk arises in consciousness, in mind's energy-field that is self-aware, and *therefore* capable of being aware of all fields. If one word, one concept, one recognized reality shall have priority here by right of inheritance, is it not *consciousness*?

And yet science says our consciousness (which itself made the discoveries) is a product or epi-phenomenon of the brain, which is no more than molecules put together by Time and Chance, the molecules reducible to sub-atomic particles, in turn reducible to energy fields, the fields having no consciousness, of course. Of course, or off course?

Many an eminent scientist has not escaped these questions within himself. Max Planck said, "I regard consciousness as primary. I regard matter as derivative of consciousness". Arthur Eddington said, "All through the physical world runs that unknown content that must surely be the stuff of our consciousness."<sup>3</sup> Schrödinger and Heisenberg were convinced that there was a 'before' to the 'beginning', a beyond to energy-filled space. John Wheeler wants the concept of observer changed to a 'participator'. Fritjof Capra and Ken Wilber seem inclined the same way. So too Mani Bhaumik, whose hesitant concurrence (in *Code Name God*) has prompted me to shape these thoughts.

Bhaumik writes, "We have established *opportunity*."<sup>4</sup> Agreed — after all, Time provides it to patience that can wait a billion years. "We have identified the means." Agreed — after all, chance can create any configuration, given time. Did not someone say that a million monkeys tapping the keys of a million type-writers (monkeys can't yet handle computers) for a million years may reproduce a Shakespearean sonnet? Then Bhaumik writes, "But we are missing the motive."<sup>5</sup> Agreed again. But why does scientific rationality fight shy at this point? 'Motive' belongs to conscious thinking; call it will, call it intelligence, even call it intent or indulgence, all of which are facets of consciousness. But

<sup>3</sup> *Code Name God* by Mani Bhaumik. p.26. Penguin Delhi 2005.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p194.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p194.



John Maynard



then, as long as you insist on matter (the brain) being the source of consciousness, what is this talk of 'motive' in understanding the origin of creation? Can matter have a motive?

"With the startling assertion of new physics," writes Bhaumik, "science was tip-toeing to the threshold of spirituality."<sup>6</sup> A happy consummation devoutly to be wished for, but it will not happen. Not with this *mental* block which blocks the mind's origin itself; not while science amazingly persists with the contradiction that inert brain-cells constituted of matter produce consciousness which is the light of knowledge, the animation of the brain and body. Where, then, is the road ahead? Therefore the tip-toeing scientist will stand on the threshold, may even prepare to knock on the door, but will mumble to himself, "I have made a mistake. I have come to the wrong address," and quickly retreat. So near and *yet* so far!

And, in his own way, he will be correct. He will be true to himself and his frame of enquiry, which is relativity, linearity, continuity, connectivity. Viewed in those terms, the threshold reached would seem to be non-space for a foot-fall, non-time for a step forward, non-energy for any movement. It would be to his familiar feel and phrase, a *nothing* (no-thing), void, zero. It is then that the mind, deceived because of its own false expectations and evaluations, would feel, as in Bhaumik's beautiful sigh of melancholy, "Behind all the fine draperies, there is no longer anybody home."<sup>7</sup> But the owner was always home. It was merely the shadow that stood at the door, giving itself a false reality and declaring the real person's assumed absence. The relative denies the Absolute because it has credited itself with wholeness.

All the time, or timelessly, that for which we framed the word 'God', which is reality beyond relativity, which is Absolute Consciousness, has been inseparably one with us. That Eternal Presence can only remonstrate: Tip-toeing towards me? My children, I have been gently stepping on your toes always, but you refuse to recognise me. I am in you as the cognizing consciousness of your five senses; the

<sup>6</sup> *Code Name God* by Mani Bhaumik, p108. Penguin Delhi, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

touch (on your toes too), the sight, the smell, the hearing, the tasting. Your total knowledge has been derived through the five sense-organs, no more, no less. Their inputs collectively constitute your mind. I am in you. Look *in* your consciousness and find me. If you run or tip-toe *out* there, the search can only end in a void. (I will be there too, but not available to your vision.)

Where is the missed cue in the brilliance of scientific enquiry, in the collective intelligence of a procession of men of genius, in the meticulous adherence to observation, experiment and reconfirmation, that science could have got it wrong? Science does not claim that science has got it all today — it concedes that it still needs a tomorrow. Scientists only protest that if philosophers mean to say they themselves had it yesterday and that was not even on a parallel track ... then tell your story to the deaf, says science.

Feathers are ruffled unnecessarily. Please unplug and listen.

Whatever or whoever created the cosmos did not leave a wholesome ready-to-view picture of its origin or evolution but left some clues. Such a picture was cut into many zigzag bits and pieces which were strewn across the expanses of time and space. That was the gift that the mind of man received on attaining the adult-age of enquiry; enquiry beyond the problems of the temporal, into the depths of the infinite. The collective intelligence of material scientists has laboriously tried to put together the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, and a picture is emerging, but a problem is already discernible.

The emerging picture seems to be near completion but it holds no promise of revealing the origin of the cosmos. Missing pieces are yet being searched out and slotted into the picture, but *as yet* there are no clues about the designer of this challenging jigsaw puzzle. When all the pieces are in place, there will be a picture, but it will not be the picture that science laboured to complete. *When the task is completed the origin of creation will still evade definition.* The picture will resemble reality, and yet be deficient and therefore unreal. It might unravel creative *evolution*, but will not reveal the *creator* (whoever or whatever). Effects of energy-play are sequentially aligned, but the first-cause remains as a mystery to science.

I may walk around the globe, but in doing so, where and when did I cross the horizon? No answer can emerge, because the question is posed in the wrong terms. Earth and sky are perceived, but the horizon is only conceptualised. The failure to cross the horizon is the transcendental revelation that linearity returns to its source and makes a circle of its long progress. That is the truth and nothing else. Words lose their outlines in the flux of finality.

To believe that the determined scientific truth of 'creation' will spell out the truth of the 'creator' is flawed, but not foolish. Science must dispassionately evaluate the modified frame of enquiry. Entrenched in relativity, science cannot deny the absolute. Nor can it conveniently equate the two. A good clue for a re-think is proffered by the common, yet fantastic, phenomenon of optical reflection. This is the point of the jigsaw puzzle: i) creation is relativity; divided and therefore limited, qualified and quantified; ii) the first uncaused cause must be Absolute, beyond all terms of relativity (time, space, causality); iii) our personal minds correspond to *reflected consciousness* (which defines man, change, becomings); iv) 'God' would be our word for Absolute Consciousness (Pure Being).

The self-awareness of personal consciousness can take the I-am-ness beyond the mirror, beyond relativity to Reality. *Within*, not out there. Science journeys only out there. Science is walking the endless millenniums of time, and time is its measure of energy functions. But deep at the centre Time is not just a chime of a restive wall-clock, it is the key to the mystery of the Creator's secret lock.

Science has recognised that within the energy-fields that pervade all space, objectification happens. The object only seems to stand apart; truly, *it itself is the field* — objects are seen as plural; the field is unitary. Similarly, minds are plural; consciousness is unitary. The synonymity equating total consciousness and individual mind is the blind spot in the rationale of science.

Words cannot change beyond words, and the last word must remain a word, even if it be the word SILENCE. That last word has the overtone of being the first word. That *end* of sound is, in reality, the *source* of sound. Know this too, and decide. The supreme Silence of the sage's stilled mind is not the silence of the graveyard, it is life eternal. ▲

## VERSE TRANSLATION

## The Remedy

## The Sublime Teachings of Hazrat Ali to His Sons Imam Hassan and Hussain

TRANSLATED BY NAWAZUDDIN

The following Arabic poem is attributed to Hazrat Ali, the son in law of Prophet Muhammad. Regarding Ali, Muhammad once said: "I am the source of wisdom and Ali is its door." Hazrat Ali was the 4th Calipha of Islam after the demise of Prophet Muhammad.

There is a *hadith qudsi*, one of the Prophet's sayings in which God spoke through him: "I am as My servant thinks I am, and I am with him when he remembers Me." According to Islam we have the faculties of sight, hearing, touch only because God has them but we have them in so limited a form that we hover at the edge of dissolution. It is only the Divine that allows us to say 'I' as a pale reflection of that pure, unlimited Being. To think of God is to be at one with God.

According to Sufi tradition the seven faculties called Ummus sifat originally belong to Almighty Allah and we human beings reflect those qualities falsely as our own. These seven qualities are i) *hayy*, life; ii) *aleem*, knowledge; iii) *mureed*, intention; iv) *qadeer*, power to

execute an intention; v) *sameey*, hearing; vi) *baseer*, sight; and vii) *kaleem*, speech. When we pray to Allah and act according to what is right there is no breach between thought and action. Whatever tradition we may belong the small 'I' of our body and mind vanishes before the face of God. Our purpose in life is to be absorbed into that sense of 'I' imminent yet transcendent.

The more we study the heart of each living tradition we see that though the words may be different, the descriptions of the journey, the pitfalls, the helping hand of inexplicable grace, are sufficiently similar as to confirm they are speaking of the one and same task and purpose of human existence.

Let us listen to these wise and kind words of a father to his beloved sons. Sufis down the centuries have treasured them.

1. *Ya valadi fikruka feeka yakfika*  
*Falaisa shayun kharijan minka.*

O son, it is enough to reflect on yourself  
Because nothing is outside you.

2. *Vadayika feeka vama tash aru*  
*Dava uka minka vala tubsiru.*

Your malady lies within you & you know not  
Your remedy is to be found within you & you look not.

3. *Vatazamu innaka jismun sagheerun*  
*Va feeka antava aalimun akbar.*

You presume that you are a small body  
Whereas a grand universe is hidden within you.

4. *Va anta ummul kitabillazi*  
*Ma harrafahu yuzhirul muzmar.*

You are that Mother of the Book  
And you perceive its hidden alphabets to express the meaning. ▲

# Remembering Mahalakshmi Amma

T.R. KANAKAMMAL

From all the corners of the world countless devotees come to Arunachala seeking wisdom. The web of Bhagavan's grace, which abides in the form of the timeless hill, beckons all who are open to its influence.

Among the many that come are mature souls whose faces are aglow with the benefit of *tapas*, while there are others who seem ordinary, but who have discovered the pearl of great wisdom, and heed the call of Arunachala. These souls carry within in their hearts the smouldering fire of devotion. Their dedication is characterized by unshakeable rock-like faith in the *sadguru*, tenacity of purpose, mental fortitude, forbearance in the face of the vicissitudes of fortune and, above all, a mind at peace.

T.R. Kanakammal is a respected senior devotee and author of several books on the life and teachings of Bhagavan.

Mahalakshmi Amma belonged to this group of seekers. She was the wife of (Gangaraju) Mallikarjuna Rao, from the Vijayawada region of Andhra Pradesh. They were Telugu Brahmins. He had lost his mother at the age of three and subsequently suffered cruel treatment at the hands of his stepmother. When he grew up, disillusioned with life, he set up a workshop that was independent of his family and prospered. At this point he chanced to see a photo of Bhagavan belonging to his friend, Balagopala Rao, a devotee of Bhagavan who had stayed at Palakkottu, near Sri Ramanasramam. Instantly captivated, he questioned his friend and came to know about Bhagavan. His first darshan of Bhagavan was in 1931, and it proved to be yet another instance of “I came, I saw, I was conquered”. Bhagavan became his *sadguru*.

For Mahalakshmi, his wife, it was her mother who was, in a sense, her guru. She was a devout lady well versed in puranic lore that abounds in stories of ideal and chaste women, *pativratas* who looked upon their husbands as gods and served them appropriately. According to the then prevailing orthodox rules, Mahalakshmi was not sent to school beyond the fourth standard and spent a lot of time with her mother, who inculcated in her a love for that ideal of womanhood.

It was a great blessing for Mallikarjuna Rao when he married Mahalakshmi. To one who had never known as a child what love and kindness were, the solicitous concern and love that his wife and her parents showered on him was heavenly and she, true to the heritage imbibed from her mother, served him with reverence.

Her first *darshan* of Bhagavan in 1933 was a deeply rewarding experience for her.

Both became ardent *bhaktas* of Bhagavan and visited the ashram frequently, never missing the Mahapuja and Jayanti celebrations.

Bhagavan was, for them, their family deity. In their prayer room at home was a portrait of Bhagavan where they performed puja together daily with offerings of various kinds, as well as regular recitations of Bhagavan's works.

The ashram in those days was very small. Ladies were not allowed to stay beyond 6 pm nor to come before 4 am. Ramana Nagar had

just started to develop. Alamelu Athai and Pichchu Iyer (Bhagavan's sister and her husband) had moved to Ramana Nagar, and Mahalakshmi and her husband stayed nearby whenever they came.

During one such visit the festival of Sri Rama Navami occurred.<sup>1</sup> It is customary to celebrate that day with puja to Sri Rama with offerings of *panakam*, *neer mor* and *vadai paruppu*.<sup>2</sup> Having acquired all the ingredients for the offering, Mahalakshmi, getting up very early on the special day, prepared them on a large scale, performed her puja to pictures of Sri Rama and Bhagavan at the house where she was staying and then carried the offerings to the ashram. As she was not conscious of the time, on reaching the ashram she found to her dismay that she was too early and the attendant wondered why she had come much before 4am. As she was sure that if she went back her children would not let her come again, she requested the attendant to please let her stay in the ladies guest room till 4 am. Bhagavan, who suddenly happened to pass by just then, affirmed this by saying, “Yes, yes, stay there,” thereby relieving her of anxiety.

At 4 am she went into the presence of Bhagavan and placing her buckets of offerings before him, prostrated. Bhagavan looked at her with compassion and exclaimed, “Look! Lord Ramachandra has come to the ashram so early! Come on! Distribute the *prasad* (food offering) to everyone.” After Bhagavan partook of it, the *prasad* was given to everybody.

It was probably to bring to light the extraordinary purity of their devotion and loving faith that Bhagavan appeared one night in Mahalakshmi's dreams and asked, “Will you not make me some *mysore pak*?”<sup>3</sup> The very next morning, the euphoric Mahalakshmi prepared this sweet with ardent devotion, offered it to Bhagavan's picture and distributed it as *prasad* (sacred offering) to everyone around her. But

<sup>1</sup> The birthday of Sri Rama.

<sup>2</sup> *Panakam* is a mixture of jaggery (brown sugar) with water seasoned with ginger, cardamom and lemon. *Neer mor* is buttermilk with salt, seasoned with mustard seeds and chillies. *Vadai paruppu* consists of soaked green gram salted and seasoned with grated coconut, ginger, mango and cucumber.

<sup>3</sup> A special sweet made of dhal, ghee and sugar.

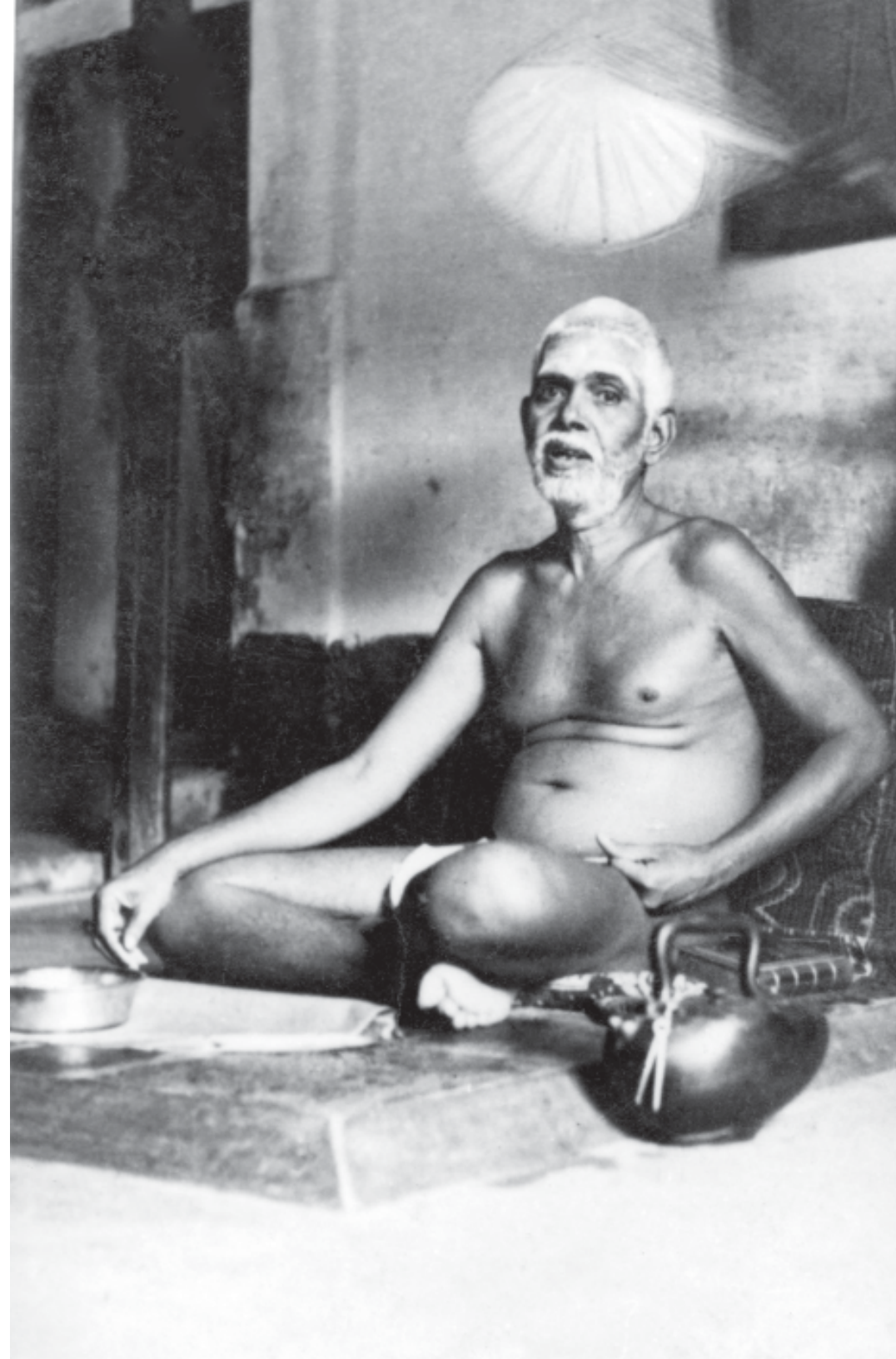


she was not content with just this. She felt that it would be far more appropriate if she made the offering directly to Bhagavan himself. Bhagavan after all was the embodiment of *chaitanya* (*jnana* or wisdom) like Arunachala Himself and though *achala* (still), he was freely available and moved about in a human form.

Shortly afterwards, she and her husband arrived at the ashram with all the necessary ingredients. They arranged for a *bhiksha* (feast) for Bhagavan and the ashram inmates. Makalakshmi got permission from the management and set about preparing mysore pak on a large scale in the ashram kitchen. Some objected to this, saying, "Don't you know that sweets don't agree with Bhagavan? He doesn't eat them anyway." She quickly rejoined, "Let us see! Won't he even eat a small piece? Anyway the others can enjoy it!" She did not divulge her dream to anyone. During lunch, she herself served everybody including Bhagavan with one piece of the sweet, along with everything else. Bhagavan ate it and exclaimed, "It is delicious! Will another piece be available for everyone?" While the inmates of the ashram looked puzzled, Mahalakshmi, who was in seventh heaven replied, "Why not, Bhagavan! It is available in plenty (*dhandikaundi*)." She then served Bhagavan and everybody else with an extra piece. It was only afterwards that she disclosed her dream to the other devotees, who were struck with amazement.

It was well known that Bhagavan never asked for a second helping and would get annoyed if he was served with extra food. He generally refused anything which was served to him as a sign of special treatment. The very fact that he had made an exception in this case and had asked for a second piece indicated that he approved of the devotion with which it had been offered, for their exceptional devotion elicited a response from him above the ordinary. He alone could discern the taste of pure devotion.

Mallikarjuna Rao was in the transport business and owned a fleet of buses. Though he and Mahalakshmi lived in a palatial house with all comforts, they were simple souls, however, unaffected by this opulence. Mallikarjuna was bereft of false pride and at peace with himself. Both he and his wife lived virtuous lives and were of generous and charitable dispositions.



Theirs was a prolific family. Mahalakshmi always had a small baby to nurse. At that time coming from Vijayawada by train entailed a long journey, with two changes of trains and often a wait of three hours for the connecting train. Despite this and their numerous children of differing ages, Mallikarjuna never grew tired of bringing the entire family again and again for he keenly desired that all his children should benefit from the glance of grace of Bhagavan.

They had five daughters and four sons. Unfortunately all the four sons died young. The grief of losing so many children in succession at so tender an age, made them miserable and it was difficult for them to come to terms with this tragedy. When a fifth son was born to them, Mallikarjuna Rao determined to have the *anna prasana*<sup>4</sup> of the child performed by Bhagavan himself. They brought the child to the ashram in his sixth month. When they expressed their desire, Bhagavan agreed saying, "Good." They arranged for a bhiksha and requested Chinnaaswami to provide *pal payasam*<sup>5</sup> as an item of bhiksha.

On that day, Chinnaaswami filled a small silver bowl, given by Mahalakshmi with *pal payasam* and placed it before Bhagavan when he sat down for lunch. Mallikarjuna Rao, holding the child, sat in front of Bhagavan who tasted a morsel and then fed the child with *payasam* three times. The child was indeed blessed. But, after reaching home, this child too unfortunately died.

Wondering whether they were destined to have any male progeny at all, they consulted various astrologer devotees and Vedic scholars who prescribed various rituals to overcome the astrological conditions. Sometime in 1947-48 a sixth male child was born to them. Mallikarjuna Rao decided to bring up the child only on begged food and dress him in begged clothes. Their friends who came to know of this kept them supplied with these items. It grew to be a healthy child. To ensure the survival of this son at least, they once again decided to perform *anna prasanam* in the holy presence of Bhagavan.

<sup>4</sup> The Hindu ceremony of introducing a child to *annam* or cooked rice for the first time.

<sup>5</sup> A rich sweet dish consisting of rice boiled in milk and sugar.

They arrived at the ashram with their family a week in advance of the auspicious day. They quietly stood and waited in front of the ladies guest house for Bhagavan's return from the post office. They prostrated and Mallikarjuna holding the child told Bhagavan the reason for their visit. Bhagavan playfully snapped his thumb and middle finger to attract the attention of the child. The child, leaning towards him and looking at him fixedly, firmly caught hold of Bhagavan's hand and started to suck his thumb. Bhagavan was amused and said to the child, "Won't you go?" Mallikarjuna forcibly drew back the child, not wanting to make Bhagavan stand for too long. Bhagavan agreed to their request. A *bhiksha* (feeding) was arranged for the auspicious day.

When there were just two days to go before the function, the child suddenly became ill, with high fever. Dr M.R. Krishnamoorthy, a devotee of Bhagavan, who was then at the ashram, treated the child but the fever did not subside.

As there was no sign of the fever abating, Mahalakshmi's heart became numb with fear. She was convinced that if Bhagavan were to touch the child and apply *vibhuti* (sacred ash) to its forehead, the child would survive. It was common knowledge that Bhagavan, at set times, went to the *gosala* (cowshed). She carried the child in her arms and with some *vibhuti*, waited for Bhagavan to pass by. When Bhagavan did come, she prayed to him that he touch the child and apply the *vibhuti* to it. Bhagavan remained silent. She repeatedly begged and beseeched him and Bhagavan, just to satisfy her, applied the *vibhuti* and went on his way.

Unfortunately the next day the child died. In the meantime, Mallikarjuna had gone to Madras and was due to return the next day. Bhagavan, with great compassion and solicitude, sent someone to the station to fetch him, with instructions to break the sad news only on approaching the ashram. When he did hear the news, he threw down on the road all the playthings he had bought for his child and wept, broken-hearted.

When this was reported to Bhagavan, he narrated the happening of the previous day, how Mahalakshmi had insisted on his touching the



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child to apply *vibhuti*. Bhagavan said, “Wondering why I just kept quiet in spite of her insistence, she begged even harder and so I applied the vibhuti. The next day the child died. Nayana used to tell all devotees, ‘Do not allow children to be touched by Bhagavan. If you do, he will liberate them at once!’”

But a slender hope lurked in Mahalakshmi who had boundless faith in and devotion to Bhagavan; she hoped that the child might, by Bhagavan’s grace, come back to life.

Those were the days when orthodoxy reigned supreme and orthodox rules forbade her to bring the lifeless body of the child into the presence of Bhagavan, although her maternal heart yearned for his grace.

A little distance away from the path to the gosala was a huge haystack. With great trepidation and hesitation she brought the lifeless child and laid it on the ground by the haystack and waited with abundant hope for Bhagavan to pass by. Varanasi Subhalakshmi Amma who was by her side consoled her and gave moral support to the grieving mother.

When Bhagavan did come, Mahalakshmi was hesitant to come near and prostrated from where she was. Bhagavan, the very embodiment of compassion, stopped and rested his eyes on the child with a long look of grace. He stood in silence for sometime and then proceeded on his way. The desolate mother took in the situation and stood speechless. She resigned herself to her *prarabdha* (destiny) from which she realised there was no escape. The next day they bathed the child and adorned it with garlands from the Matrubhuteswara temple. Later that morning, they buried the child.

They then packed for the trip home. Their train was leaving at 9 p.m. and at 2 p.m they came into the presence of Bhagavan in the Jubilee Hall in order to take leave of him and avoid the crowd which would gather around for the *vedaparayanam* in the evening. As if to do away with their grief, the divine will prompted a devotee to pose certain questions to Bhagavan, the answers to which brought soothing comfort to the sorrow stricken parents and lifted them from their despondency. Bhagavan’s responses gave them courage and fortitude and made them



feel consoled at the thought that, as the child had given up his body in the holy abode of Bhagavan, his short *prarabdha* spent, he must have attained a high state of being in his previous spiritual evolution.

This is the dialogue that ensued in their presence:

The devotee asked: “Swami! It is said that the body can be kept alive for a long time by the practice of *pranayama* and that a jnani can accomplish this. Is it true and is it good to do so?”

Bhagavan remained silent for some time and then solemnly said:

“Yes! If they do so, they’ll live long. But can one become a jnani, by just living for long? Adi Sankara lived for just thirty two years. Manikavachakkar attained *mukti* (liberation) at thirty two. Sundaramurti lived for just eighteen years and Jnana Sambandar for just sixteen. Are they not jnanis?

“A jnani, who is ever in bliss, has no attachment to the body and to him the body is just a disease. He only awaits the release from the body. Preserving the body is the practice of the *siddhas*.<sup>6</sup> When I was living up on the hill there were many who professed to follow the ways of the *siddhas*. If somebody went to see them, these men would enquire, ‘Where are you from? What is the name of your grandfather? Your great grand father?’ Then they would say, ‘When your great grand father was a small boy, I came here.’ People listening would be astonished at their longevity and health. They would prostrate to them, thinking they must be great mahatmas, make their offerings and go away. But all this was only to hoodwink the world. Can they be called jnanis?

“In *Yoga Vasishtam* when sage Vasishta was instructing Rama on the knowledge of the *atman*, a crowd of *siddhas* descended from the skies to hear it and exclaimed, ‘What a wonder is this! This young lad Rama, at so tender an age, has gained jnana.’ And they thought, ‘What is the use of our having lived so long?’”

Bhagavan then asked, “Do you understand?”

The devotee replied: “What Bhagavan says is true.” Another devotee remarked that some people very proudly proclaim, “I have lived for 80 years. What more do I need?”

<sup>6</sup> *Siddha*: A person who has acquired supernatural powers and is capable of working miracles.

Bhagavan smilingly said, “Yes! Yes! That is a vainglorious claim. Thereby hangs a tale. Once Brahma, who was puffed up with pride, exclaimed to Vishnu; ‘I, being the creator of everything, am the oldest of all.’ Vishnu replied, ‘There are people older than you.’ But Brahma adamantly demanded, ‘Who can be older than me, since I am the creator of all, including them?’

“Vishnu, promised to show him and took him to a sage called Romasa (who was so called because his body was full of *roma* — hair). On being questioned as to his age, he answered, ‘Four yugas on earth make one day of Brahma. His life span is a hundred years according to this scale. When one such Brahma dies, one hair from my body will fall. Many have fallen away and many more still remain. When all the hair on my body falls away my life span will come to an end.’<sup>7</sup>

“The astounded Brahma was then taken to Ashtavakra<sup>8</sup> and was again shaken by the response of this sage, who when questioned about his age, replied, ‘When one Romasa muni dies, one twist will straighten up. I will live till all of them become straight.’ On hearing this, Brahma’s pride was vanquished and he became humble.”

Bhagavan concluded by saying, “When right jnana is gained, who wants this body?”

The same devotee again questioned Bhagavan and asked, “Can jnana be gained without the grace of the guru? Did not Rama gain lucid knowledge only by the *upadesa* (spiritual instruction) of Vasishta?”

Bhagavan replied, “Oh! Is there any doubt? The guru’s grace is essential. Can anything remain unaccomplished by the guru’s grace, the glory of which is sung by many sages? The guru’s grace is no ordinary thing.”

The disconsolate couple from Vijayawada, who were listening to all these stories, exclaimed that their despondency had lifted, “Look, how we have been granted the grace of our guru. By deliberately

<sup>7</sup> There are four Yugas: Sathya or Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. The duration of each is respectively 1,728,000 years; 1,296,000 years; 864,000 years; and 432,000 years. The four together — 4,320,000 (human) years equal one day of Brahma.

<sup>8</sup> *Ashtavakra*: *Ashta* means eight and *vakra* means twists. That is, with eight crooked twists in the body.



## MOUNTAIN PATH

narrating these stories, he has made our grief-laden hearts light once more.” The gloom caused by the loss of their son faded away when they returned home.

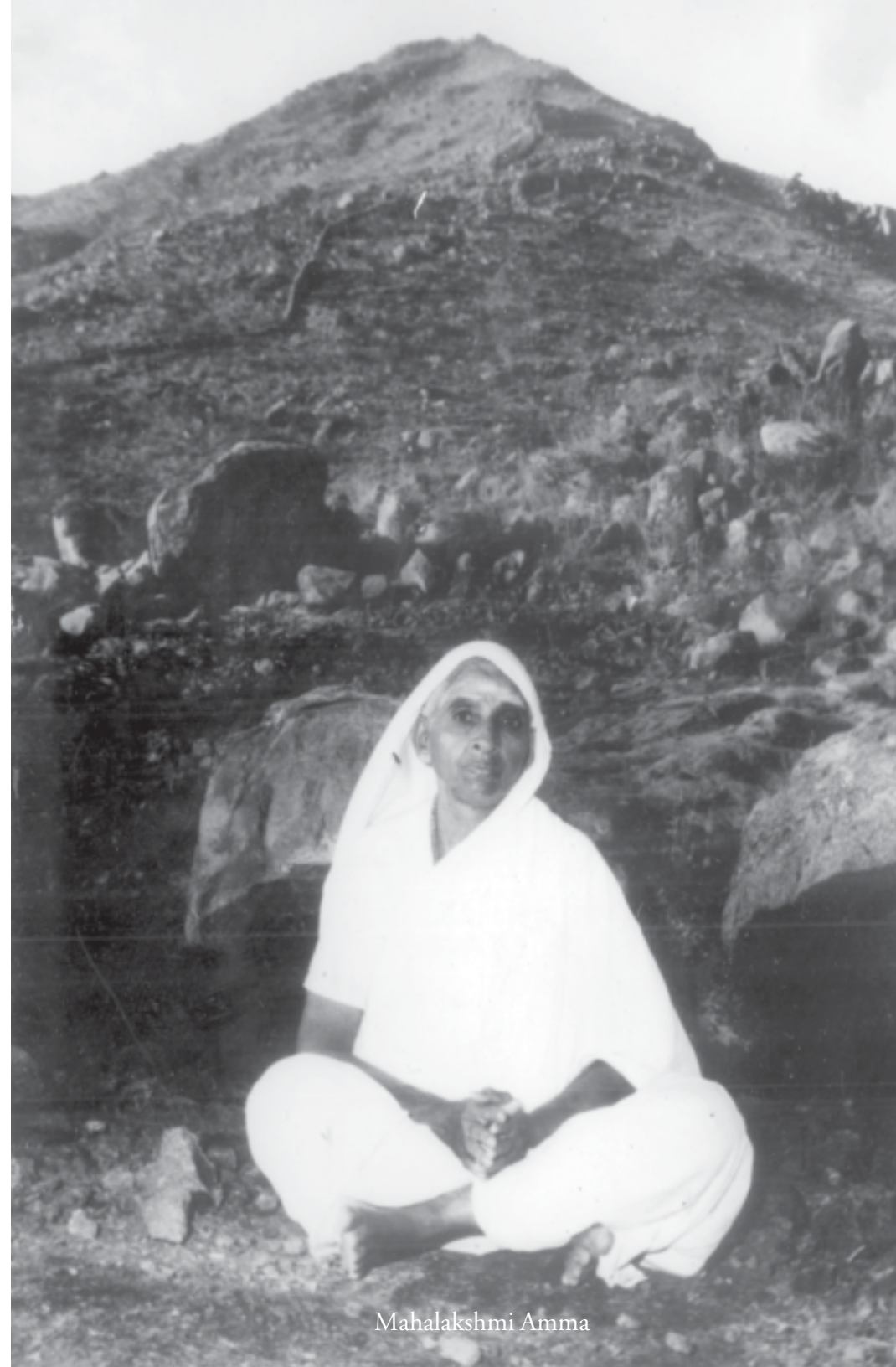
Early next morning, when Bhagavan enquired where the child had been buried, he was told, “Somewhere outside.” Bhagavan remarked, “The child could have been buried here, but if that had been done this place would become a general burial ground.”

When I (Kanakamma) narrated his comment to Mahalakshmi, during her next visit, she felt tremendously comforted and said, “The child’s spiritual future has been assured.”

Mallikarjuna was tall, hefty and robust-looking. Mahalakshmi was tall as well, but slim and delicate. Her frail frame belied her mental fortitude, resoluteness and indomitable inner strength. She wore a sari, in the Andhra Brahmin style, and like Suri Nagamma, was endowed with luxuriant, long, dark hair. But she lived an austere and orthodox life with self-imposed rules of physical and mental discipline (*yama* and *niyama*). She would get up at 3.30am everyday and after a bath, engage herself in puja and parayana and reciting her favourite book *Grantha Mala*.<sup>9</sup> Her major occupation during the day was telling the beads of a *mala* (rosary) with Bhagavan’s name. Even while engaged in household work, like cutting vegetables or cooking, she would be speaking mentally to Bhagavan saying, “Bhagavan, I am making such and such a vegetable today, as per your command.” Thus, with her mind focused on Bhagavan, and with all her constant thoughts and actions centred on Bhagavan, she created an atmosphere permeated with the presence of Bhagavan and revelled in it wherever she was.

She had a large family to attend to and whilst doing so she had the habit of executing all the household work as though commanded by Bhagavan. Whatever was cooked was eaten only after being offered to Bhagavan. While eating, whether at home or outside, she observed silence. Even in the ashram, due to her strict adherence to orthodox rules, she used to dine in the kitchen with the permission of the ashram management. When coming for lunch she would bring three small

<sup>9</sup>The Collected Works of Bhagavan translated into Telugu.



Mahalakshmi Amma

bowls in a bag. Receiving a small quantity of side dishes in the bowls and rice on a leaf plate she would never accept a second helping. Even the served food she ate only after offering it to Bhagavan.

She was to be found at all other times to remain in *dhyana* in Bhagavan's hall. Even after the tragedy narrated above, the couple with their other children frequently visited the ashram.

The entire family came to the ashram for the *kumbabhishekkam* of the Matrubhuteswara temple. The children, especially the older ones, who had for some time not had the opportunity to sit with Bhagavan during lunch, longed to sit beside him. The day of their return home was fast approaching. One day, Mahalakshmi managed to bring all of them just in time for lunch. Somehow she managed to find places for everyone except for herself and the eldest daughter, who was very disappointed as she was unsure whether she would accompany her parents the next time. Both stood at the threshold of the dining hall from where they feasted their eyes on Bhagavan. When lunch had been completely served to everyone, Bhagavan usually signalled its start by nodding his head. But this time he looked to his left and right, told someone to lay two more leaf plates between him and the entrance to the kitchen and asked Mahalakshmi and her daughter to seat themselves before these leaves. He waited until they had been served and only then nodded, signalling the start of lunch. As their leaves were so near Bhagavan's leaf, with great reverence mingled with awe, they took the greatest care not to scatter any rice out of their leaves. They ate happily, enjoying the meal and the profound grace of Bhagavan. They respectfully waited until Bhagavan finished his food.

Mahalakshmi often recalled this incident with tears, gratefully saying how fortunate their family was to be blessed by Bhagavan again and again.

When they heard of the impending operation on Bhagavan for the cancerous growth, they immediately travelled to the ashram. A throng of people had gathered; however, darshan for that day was over. Early next morning, Mahalakshmi arrived at the ashram and sat at the entrance to the Mother's temple in front of the closed doors behind which Bhagavan was resting. As she was telling her beads, suddenly

the doors opened and Bhagavan emerged. Looking at her, Bhagavan said, "Um um," acknowledging her presence and walked to the now Mahanirvana room. That very afternoon darshan recommenced and they returned home after jointly seeing Bhagavan.

Later, when Bhagavan's health had deteriorated very badly, they were unable to stay away and returned again to the ashram, which was now swarming with people. Mahalakshmi had brought with her a new towel, some raisins and sugar cubes. She stood opposite the Mother's temple and looked towards the Nirvana room. Her one longing was to preserve these items as relics, after wiping the feet of Bhagavan with the towel, and after a simple glance at the raisins and sugar cubes by him. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. Bhagavan, the living embodiment of compassion, sent a Telugu-speaking gentleman to find out what she wanted. When she disclosed her desire, the gentleman taking the articles with him, informed Bhagavan of her desire. Then Bhagavan, the ocean of grace, stretched his feet so that he could wipe both his feet with the towel. Bhagavan, who could now eat practically nothing, ate a few of the raisins. When all the three items were returned to her, Mahalakshmi was overwhelmed by great joy and profound grief at the same time. She preserved these items as most precious relics in her puja room and worshipped them till the end of her life.

Such a tranquil life, poised in joy and serenity, was now buffeted by storms. Misfortunes befell, starting with the mahasamadhi of Bhagavan. Soon afterwards Mallikarjuna passed away. In the absence of a competent person to conduct the family business it soon fell into decline. Their affluence faded. With only two daughters married, the entire responsibility of marrying off the other two daughters had to be borne by her, though she was assisted by her elder son-in-law. Caught as she was in the tribulations of supporting her family, her visits to the ashram became few and far between. But her inner poise and serenity remained untouched. At last, when all her responsibilities had been discharged by the grace of Bhagavan, she resumed her visits to the ashram. Though her husband had bought a huge plot of land on which to build a house, for various reasons this did not materialize, so she

rented a room. Now she further tightened her self-imposed disciplinary rules. She ate only what she had cooked herself — a simple lunch in the afternoon and a light meal at night. It was a spartan life, given wholly to devotional practice and dhyana. With no more responsibilities weighing her down, she was like a bird released from its cage. Unattached, independent, highly dispassionate, and beaming with joy, her life reflected her inner peace.

Once she arrived back at the ashram after a long time. There was a noticeable difference in her appearance. With the loss of her husband, she had adopted the attire of a widow, white saris with a small coloured border at the bottom. But now her long hair was gone and she was dressed in the strict orthodox garb of a widow — we saw a plain white sari and a shaven head. The only ornaments were a *rudraksha mala* and a *spatika mala*. She looked the picture of renunciation. I asked her why she had resorted to such an extreme step of self-abnegation. She explained what had happened.

When things took a turn for the worse, she had needed spiritual reassurance to steady her inner peace which was seriously threatened. The Paramacharya of Kanchipuram and Abhinava Vidya Teertha of the Sringeri Mutt, were both then touring Andhra separately, camping at various places. The high esteem in which she held the revered Acharya of Kanchi made her decide to meet him, but strict orthodoxy stood in her way.

Brahmin widows with unshaven heads could view him only from a distance. To have a private audience with him or to get the prasad of holy water from him, she had to shave her head. The prospect of a distant darshan did not satisfy her. Her tenacity of purpose and her eagerness not to let the opportunity slip away, decided the issue. Her hair, that was still luxuriant, was cut off and her head shaved. Now she sought and got the longed-for private interview with the sage. The outcome was very positive. Her inner poise was restored and she followed him throughout his tour in Andhra. Thus reassured she was at peace as never before, with all the composure of still water.

When she became old, she could not come to the ashram as before and it was through one of her daughters who came occasionally that I got news of her. After some time I heard of her passing away. The

adversities she had faced after the demise of her husband were innumerable. But she had faced them with equanimity. Because her heart was firmly anchored at Bhagavan's feet, she emerged victorious from all struggles, with her inner calm unruffled.

Thus ended the inspiring life of a pure and holy devotee who had to wage a heroic battle with life armed solely with the weapons of pure devotion and the grace of Bhagavan, and the kingdom of peace was her gain. This echoes what the Lord said in *Srimad Bhagavatam*, in Skandam 10, Chapter 88, verses 8-9:

यस्याहमनुगृह्णामि हरिष्ये तद्धनं शनैः ।  
ततोऽधनं त्यजन्त्यस्य स्वजना दुःखदुःखितम् ॥  
स यदा वितयोद्योगो निर्विण्णः स्याद्धनेहया ।  
मत्परैः कृतमैत्रस्य करिष्ये मदनुग्रहम् ॥

The meaning of which is: “He on whom I am going to bestow my grace, I solemnly deprive him of all his wealth. When his wealth has gone all his friends, his kith and kin will desert him, making him sink into the utmost sorrow and despair. When his further efforts to gain wealth also fail, thanks to My will, he becomes filled with dispassion and becomes associated with My devotees. On such a one I bestow My grace.”

The story of Mahalakshmi illustrates that a householder, amidst the constant demands of family duty and the call of multifarious responsibilities, through steadfast devotion to her guru, can rise higher in esteem and greatness than ordinary ascetics and renunciates. ▲





## KEYWORD

# Sakshin

**Sanskrit:** The Witness-Self or *saksin*. It comes from *sa* = ‘together with’ + *aksha* = ‘eye’: “that which is before the eyes; observer; witness.”

Sakshin is a concept used in Advaita Vedanta philosophy to explain not only how the seeming process of knowing/knowledge occurs but also why it is that the immutable pure Self seems to be endowed with tendencies, desires, merits, demerits, change and multiplicity. This concept is a very useful tool in assisting a spiritual seeker in cultivating detachment and the ability to dive deep within. In other words, it has a methodological use. However, one should not be misled into thinking that Ramana/Advaita posit that there is an independent, real ‘witness’.

Bhagavan: Talking of the ‘witness’ should not lead to the idea that there is a witness and something else apart from him that he is witnessing. The ‘witness’ really means the light that illumines the seer, the seen and the process of seeing. Before, during and after the triads of seer, seen and seeing, the illumination exists. It alone exists always.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar, 18-07-1946. Sri Ramanasramam.



The individual human being is called *jiva* because it is characterized by life (from *jiv*, 'to live, breathe'). Ramana said, "*Jiva* is so called because the individual sees the world."<sup>2</sup> This tells us something about the *jiva* and how it differs from the Self because the Self is not one who sees. The *jiva* is the Self appearing through the limiting adjuncts of the human psycho-physical complex. It is comprised of a physical body with its five cognitive sense organs, as well as an inner organ (*antahkarana*) comprising the mind, intellect, ego, and sense-consciousness. In the *jiva*, the inner organ (*antahkarana*), which is not conscious by nature, appears conscious and the Self, although infinite in nature, appears limited by the inner organ. Though veiled by ignorance, a person's innermost Self shines as a witness (*saksin*) and is unaffected by either ignorance or modifications. In a word, the witness-Self is pure Consciousness *conditioned* by the inner organ (ego).

Every conscious activity of the mind or body of an individual revolves around his or her assumption that there is an 'I', which everyone takes to be a 'person' who is doing things. This 'I' is the common factor involved in every thought and deed and this 'I' assumes that it is responsible for all its activities. Everyone believes he/she is the doer. Ramana described this common delusion as the 'I-thought' (*aham-vritti*) which literally means "a mental modification of the 'I'". When a person's mind flickers, it is their ego that believes that it is responsible for whatever happens. But this is an illusion. The Self or real 'I' never moves, never imagines that it is doing or witnessing anything — whether in the state of waking, dream, or deep sleep. Ramana said the 'I' that is imagining all these states is but a mental fiction, a delusion.

Although the Self seemingly enjoys its experiences in the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, in reality, however, it never leaves its principal seat, the heart. In the heart-lotus that is of the nature of the All, in other words in the mind-ether, the light of that Self shines as the formless 'I'. It shines thus in everybody, so this Self is referred to as the witness (*saksi*) and as the transcendent (*turiya*, literally the fourth

state). The 'I'-less supreme Brahman that shines in all bodies to the light of the formless 'I' is the Self-ether (or knowledge-ether): that alone is the absolute Reality. This is the super-transcendent (*turiyatita*) state.

Individuals take this world to include the body, the senses, and the mind which we view as our ever-changing instruments that act in on and influence the world. As this psycho-physical organism acts in the world, it (the 'person') produces a succession of perceptions and thoughts which come and go. Yet, the question arises, how is this succession known to us? To know that a change has taken place, there must be something that is aware and that continues throughout the various changes. As thoughts come and go and are recognized as such, this logically implies that there is a continued 'knowing' present throughout the myriad changes.

This silent unchanging knower is called the *saksin* or witness. It is an impartial witness, ever remaining the same beyond all changes and differences. It is not affected by any of the differing appearances that come and go before its disinterested witnessing. It is not a doer. Yajnavalkya describes the witness thus: "This, Gargi, is just that which is not changed. It is not seen, but is the seer. It is not heard, but is the hearer. It is not thought, but is the thinker. It is not known, but is the knower."<sup>3</sup>

Ramana held that the notion of the 'witness' is not truth itself, but a helpful concept that is used to point towards the truth. If a spiritual aspirant travels in the direction that this concept points to, the concept is eventually left behind and finally disappears. When investigated, by observing the seer instead of the seen, the witness is conceived as a changeless knower, which knows a succession of changing states that come and go. But when the mind delves more deeply into this changeless knower, it turns out that the knower is itself the true reality underlying each passing state. So, in knowing these states, the knower knows only itself. What was first approached as the 'witness' is now realized to be a self-illuminating Reality whose very Being shines

<sup>2</sup> §571. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam 1997.

<sup>3</sup> *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad*, 3.8.11.

with the light of knowing. In this realization, the 'witness' concept is completely dissolved leaving behind a non-dual self.

What the witness concept does is to provoke the mind into asking questions that turn it back into its truly knowing self. But when the mind gets introverted deeply all the way back to its source, it disappears completely along with all the objects it has conceived. Accordingly, the witness is a concept that the mind uses. As more and more of the changing mind is removed from its idea of itself, the mind approaches closer and closer to its true self. So long as anything that changes remains, the mind must look questioningly back to a changeless witness at the final limit of the changing mind. On getting closer and closer to that witness, the mind gets closer to changelessness and to the absence of all changing things.

Ramana sometimes elucidated the nature of Consciousness by narrating a passage from the tenth chapter of Vidyaranya's *Pancadasi*. "Vidyaranya gives an example of the light that is kept on the stage of a theatre. When a drama is being played, the light is there, which illuminates, without any distinction, all the actors, whether they be kings, servants or dancers, and also the audience. That light will be there before the drama begins, during the performance and also after the performance is over. Similarly, the light within, that is, the Self, gives light to the ego, the intellect, memory and the mind without itself being subject to the processes of growth and decay. Although during deep sleep and other states there is no feeling of the ego, that Self remains attributeless, and continues to shine of itself."<sup>4</sup>

While the Self reveals everything, it itself is not *revealed by anything*. The Self is never an *object* to anything. The Self is called 'the knowing subject' in ordinary, everyday external perceptions when it is associated with, and functions through, the mind. This is because the indivisible non-dual pure Consciousness appears divided, dualistic, in relational knowledge. This process necessarily and invariably involves three distinct factors: the knower, the object known, and the resultant knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma. pp.412- 413, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1948. Sri Ramanasramam. Fifth revised edition 2006.

Such knowledge is referred to as *vr̥tti-jnana* (knowledge derived from a modification of the mind). *Vr̥tti jnana* or empirical knowledge is a blend of the modification of the mind and the reflection of Consciousness therein. It is an expression of pure Consciousness through a mental mode corresponding to an object. Fundamentally and primarily, knowledge is Pure Consciousness. When it is expressed through a mental mode it is called by courtesy, knowledge

The Self is called the witness (*saksin*) when it directly reveals the various internal mental modes. In the case of knowing the mind, there is nothing else to mediate between the Self and the mind. Thus, it is said that the mind is directly revealed by the Witness-Self. However, in whatever way Consciousness is said to function, it is never an object to anything. Nothing exists which can know Consciousness. Material objects are inert and can know nothing. The sense organs and the mind are also inert and cannot function without the light of Consciousness. Even Consciousness cannot know itself for It is one and non-dual and cannot split into a knowing subject and a known object. Thus, Consciousness is declared to be Self-luminous in the sense that, while Consciousness reveals everything, it itself is not revealed by anything.

If one were to speak about knowing the Self, there would have to be two selves — one, a knowing self and the other, the self which is known, as well as the process of knowing. As the Self, as Consciousness, is non-dual, who is to know what? A person can only *be* the Self. One *does not attain* Consciousness, attain something new or reach some far away goal. Consciousness has been there all along, persisting throughout the three states of experience. All that is required of us is to give up our false notions of what Reality is.

As Bhagavan said in *Talks*:

"Maharshi: Who is this witness? You speak of 'witness'. There must be an object and a subject to witness. These are creations of the mind. The idea of witness is in the mind. If there was the witness of oblivion did he say, 'I witness oblivion'? You, with your mind, said just now that there must be a witness. Who was the witness? You must reply 'I'. Who is that 'I' again? You are identifying yourself with the ego and say

‘I’. Is this ego ‘I’, the witness? It is the mind that speaks. It cannot be witness of itself. With self-imposed limitations you think that there is a witness of mind and of oblivion. You also say, ‘I am the witness’. That one who witnesses the oblivion must say, ‘I witness oblivion’. The present mind cannot arrogate to itself that position. The whole position becomes thus untenable. Consciousness is unlimited. On becoming limited it simply arrogates to itself the position. There is really nothing to witness. *It is; simple Being.*”<sup>5</sup> ▲

<sup>5</sup> §180, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1936. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Sri Rammanasramam 1997.

# Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma’s  
Commentary

## Verse Nineteen

S. RAM MOHAN



The Third Prize for Book Cover in the Professional Category at the prestigious Px3 International Photo Competition 2008 was awarded to Dev Gogoi for *Arunachala Mountain of Light* published by Sri Ramanasramam. The Prix de la Photographie Paris is juried by top international decision-makers in the photographic industry who selected the winners from thousands of entries from 85 countries. The winning entries were exhibited in Paris in June and will be published in a book that will be distributed worldwide.

19. Only for those who have no awareness of the basis of both fate and free will, there will be dispute as to which of these two is predominant. Those who have realised the Truth, the ‘Self’ which is the foundation of both fate and freewill, transcend both of them. Can they ever be again [ignorant] in this dyad?

### Commentary

This verse is a powerful repudiation by Bhagavan of the futile and endless discussion about fate and freewill. Fatalism is a negative concept suggesting to us that there is no alternative but to meekly succumb to adversity. Rightly understood, *prarabdha* refers to the unfulfilled effects of our previous karmas manifested in the present life. However, we

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

are not mere puppets of the past karmas. Through awareness (*chit*), we can understand that all *sukhas* and *dukkhas* (joys and sorrows) are mental notions; they can be transcended by *sama bhava* (evenness of mind) and *samadhi*.

One who believes that the body is the Self, imagines an opposition between fate and his will. Because of this ignorance, a person performs actions to obtain a desired result. When that result is not achieved, he thinks that the fate has decided otherwise. However we should remember that only the ego-sense, which is the identification of the body as the Self, deserves the result. When there is no ego-sense, there is no difference between fate and free-will. Thus it is the ego-mind that creates this difference between free-will and fate. If one asks himself the question, “To whom does this difference appear?” he will see that ego-sense is the root of both. When he starts an enquiry into the Truth of the ‘I’ sense, the ego will cease as well as all the differences that arise from it. It is the central teaching of Bhagavan.

Belief in ill-fate is the feeling that one is a puppet in the hands of an unseen power. The uninformed person laments, “I am weak and helpless. Nothing I do ever succeeds”. Such thoughts create fear and sorrow. Belief in a benevolent fate has its corresponding hopes of beneficial happenings. However, these feelings are nothing but ripples of *dukkha* and *sukha*, which are felt only in waking (*jagrat*) and dream (*swapna*) states. They do affect us during deep sleep (*sushupti*). Thoughts of fate do not disturb us then.

The experience of deep-sleep is the same for all. In the other two states the one who experiences feels happy or unhappy, rich or poor. The difference between these two and the deep sleep state is the presence or absence of mind. We feel the differences only as long as the mind is there. During deep sleep, the mind is absent. Fate affects no one in deep sleep but only the one who is in wakeful and dream states. When ego-sense is present, we think and there are ripples in the mind. Fate is then felt and recognized as controlling our fortune.

Then, what is free-will? One who believes in free-will thinks, “I am the master of myself. I am beyond the machinations of fate!” These thoughts are also only notions or ripples on the surface of the mind

— an expression of consciousness. Fate and free-will differ only in degree and content but as ripples in consciousness, both are same. That being so, how can there be, in reality, fate and free-will which appear as two apparently contradictory forces? Do they not have the same root, the ego sense?

Conventional western philosophy delineates these as ‘determinism’ and ‘indeterminism’. ‘Determinism’ denies man the initiative and freedom. He can take no credit for his action; nor can be blamed for any of his failures. He is a puppet in the hands of higher forces. Higher determination of the theologian dictates that God is the sole impeller of all and the undisputed controller of all actions.

The indeterminist posits that man is not responsible for his actions and has no freedom to choose between alternative courses of conduct or actions; he cannot be the subject of moral judgment. Then there can not be any distinction between good and evil.

Bhagavan solves the vexed problem beautifully. What is that which is said to be free or fettered in action? It is the will. It implies the ego sense that exercises the will. It is due to the ego-sense that the problem has arisen in the first place. If the ego is unobstructed in activity, it is believed to be free. If its success is frustrated by an external force in the form of nature or God, and is conditioned thereby absolutely, it cannot be free. As long as we refuse to go beyond the level of ego, the problem remains unsolved.

Bhagavan gives the solution as ‘Self-awareness’. The ground of this ego is the Self. It is the ground of both the fate and free-will. There is nothing beyond it.

For those who have realized this truth, the problem has been dissolved by transcending it. Both fate and free-will work only at the level of the mind, which itself is an emanation of pure consciousness. When you go to the source of mind and ego and abide in the Self, there is seen neither fate nor free-will. Fate cannot touch a person who is beyond the notions and feelings of pain and pleasure. In that state, there is also no question of free-will. The very ego, which thinks ‘I am the doer’, is dead. It has lost its imperative to exist and is dissolved in Pure Consciousness.. ▲



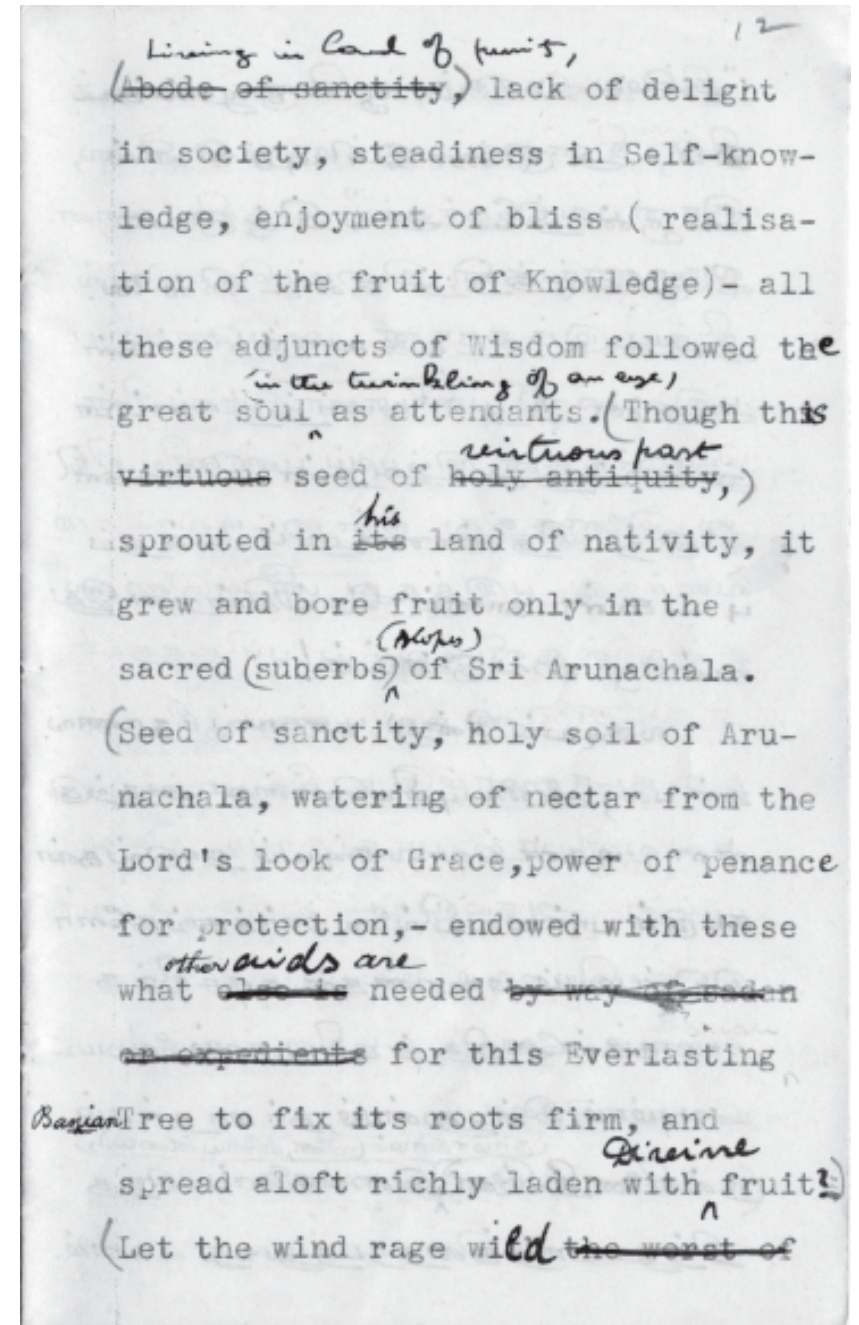
## ASHRAM ARCHIVES

# Bhagavan's Handwriting

In the *Deepam* 2007 issue of the *Mountain Path* we published five pages from a manuscript composed by Rama Varma Appan Tampuran, a member of the royal family of Cochin.

The manuscript, from which the following four pages are taken, is kept in the Ashram Archives which contain a large number of documents in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit in Bhagavan's own handwriting, but at the moment it has very little of any length in English although we do have Bhagavan's corrections of Alan Chadwick's translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*; Lakshmana Sarma's *Vartikam* (commentary) in Sanskrit, Tamil and English on *Arunachala Pancharatnam*; and this one, which was published in *Fragrant Petals* an anthology of devotees' reminiscences. Bhagavan's writing is very legible and the corrections apt. There are a further five pages of the manuscript which we intend to publish at a latter date.

Bhagavan would read through manuscripts presented to him and if necessary make corrections. He had two styles of writing; one casual and the other, precise and meticulous. The prime examples of the latter are the booklets in which he wrote in a painstaking hand, the complete Tamil Parayana for devotees who made a sincere request. These examples in Tamil are astonishing for their precise script which at first glance could be mistaken for print.



14

~~storms~~; let the sea ~~swirl in a whirl-~~  
~~pool~~; let the earth quake; this tree  
of Knowledge rooted firmly on the  
height of the holy hill would not  
budge. Countless travellers on life's  
(sojourn) rest under its shade. (Numerous  
devotees <sup>as</sup> birds sing from its branches.)  
~~Is not this Paradise!~~ This indeed is  
~~the Kingdom of Bliss.~~  
(The ideal) is one; the angles of  
vision are different; the goal is one;  
the steps are many; the eyes that should  
pursue the ideal have no perception.  
The paths are enveloped in darkness.  
(The ~~fact~~ <sup>tracks</sup> of the great are diver-  
gent, and difficult to discern or  
tread.) It would be hard to regulate  
one's life (analysing) <sup>happiness and misery</sup> ~~weal and woe~~,  
virtue and vice, <sup>deeds</sup> (good ~~of~~ evil), action  
<sup>(actlessness)</sup> or inaction. Ordinary folk could not

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proceed one step without being caught  
in the shackles of maya. The body is  
prone to disease; the mind is ever  
fleeting, and ~~understanding~~ <sup>the intellect is</sup> limited.  
" What is poison first, <sup>(in the end)</sup> is nectar,  
~~in the end.~~"  
(This has not been said in vain,  
(There is <sup>nothing strange</sup> to wonder) in the One being  
seen as many and manifold. Those who  
have experienced know this bliss and  
that misery. Only those who are experi-  
encing them could know them. <sup>In alone</sup> ~~this is~~  
~~there~~ is the special feature in Sri Ramana  
Maharishi's life. Sri Arunachala,  
blessing this worthy hero with his  
<sup>loving</sup> ~~loving~~ look of Grace pouring ambrosia,  
lifted him in his holy hands, and  
placed him ~~(by his side)~~ in the bliss-  
ful Kingdom of Heaven giving him



# The Interpretation of Experience

HANS HEIMER

## Defining our Experience

By the term 'experience' in this article, the writer refers to the moment-to-moment sensations, thoughts and emotions which constitute our life. Our minds interpret these experiences according to their interest and value, leading to joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, etc. Minor, instantaneous interpretations lead to longer and more important habitual ones and in due course, as we mature, they become motivations for how we lead our lives, hourly, daily and in the longer term. It is therefore important to subject these experiences to closer scrutiny, so that a deeper understanding might lead us to peacefulness and happiness.

All experiences can be divided into two categories, plus a third which we normally neglect:

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1. Sensory or gross perceptions which involve the physical sense organs of our bodies.

2. Subtle or mental experiences involving our mind, consisting of thoughts, concepts, emotions, volitions, dreams, memories and imaginings.

3. Non-experience, i.e. pure being or awareness; this occurs in the intervals between modes of sensory and subtle experiences and in deep sleep or unconsciousness. Because there is no movement of the mind, memory does not operate and therefore we do not usually think of this state. That it exists is demonstrated by the fact that we cannot recall every second of even our most recent experiences. Also, when we awake from deep sleep, we are happy, a non-mental continuity ending in happiness, must have existed in the deep sleep state.

Two very important aspects of these experiences are their rapidity and sequentiality. When we pay attention to them, we become aware that they succeed each other with incredible rapidity, changing their categories and modes, two never being simultaneous, but oscillating like waves in a pond or in the sea.

These descriptions of what goes on moment-to-moment in our minds will surprise those who have never attempted to observe this. It needs keen attention, with a calm body and mind, to undertake this observation, this introspection.

At this point, let us introduce the term 'self-world view', coined by the renowned physicist and philosopher David Bohm. The term is intended to give a name to our concept of ourselves and the world we experience, both as separate entities and in relationship to each other. Now, we may superficially think that normally we only occasionally refer to this concept, as we are not usually reflecting on the great issues of life. But in fact we are constantly mentally bringing up this concept, because we are ego-driven, habitually thinking about ourselves and our relationship with the world of which we believe we are temporary citizens. When we think about ourselves, we usually have a vague image of our body, and when we think of the world, we think of one or more of the infinite number of situations we come across in daily life.

What do these considerations show? They demonstrate that most of us fail to appreciate *what is going on*, moment-to-moment. They

also show that because of this failure, we do not realise that our self-world view is a *conventional* concept acquired since infancy through language and our environment. It is a concept that cannot stand up to rigorous examination.

### The Conventional 'Common Sense' Point of View

The majority of adults have 'common sense views' of themselves and the worlds in which they live.

These views, developed since childhood, are the starting point for an investigation into the interpretation of experience. Let us try to define this common sense point of view and see whether it has any shortcomings which may make us dissatisfied enough to look deeper into the subject.

We believe we are independent individual persons, one of a very large number of human beings, inhabiting the planet earth, which is part of the solar system, surrounded by almost infinite space, which constitutes the universe. As individuals we change in time from birth to maturity, then to decline and death. As individuals or persons we consist of a living body and a personal mind, especially related to a particular part of that body, the brain. We believe that whilst the body is limited by space and time, the mind is limited especially by time; the mind's physical location is probably in the head. The timescale for a human body is a lifetime and that for the universe is almost infinite, though it started with the Big Bang. The material out of which the human body and all things are made, is called 'matter', whilst the essence of 'mind' is different from matter, being more like a gas which is fluid, formless and evanescent.

Although more thoughtful people ask deeper questions about this point of view, such as: 'Is there a purpose? ; Why all this suffering? ; Can I get out of this treadmill?', the majority, without strong religious, scientific or philosophical conviction, accept this conventional point of view and spend their lifetimes in activities which drown deeper questions.

What is wrong with the 'common sense' point of view? Firstly, by failing to lead us to answers of the deeper questions, we are left spiritually hungry and therefore unhappy. Secondly, by failing to include the need



for morality in our viewpoint, we are led to a policy of selfishness, leading to greed, hatred, strife and destruction, not only of ourselves, but also of the environment. Thirdly, by giving us a self-world view which is in fact erroneous and limited, we are unable to escape from the bondage and limitations which we ourselves have generated.

Our belief that we are independent bodies, independent of our surroundings, which we call 'the world', is logically unsound. How can a body exist independent of the ground which supports it, independent of the air which it breathes, independent of the water and food which keeps it alive, independent of that which the body touches, tastes, smells, sees and hears? This independence is a gross error, because we fail to realise that our sensory faculties are an integral part of our experience, both of our bodies, our so-called 'selves', as well as the surroundings of these bodies, forming an integral whole. The independence and separation is a mental construct or concept, a limited view of what is really unlimited.

The planet earth, the solar system, almost infinite space and the universe are mental constructs and concepts formed from sensory data of the same nature as our body. It is language, memory and our other mental faculties which permit the generation of these images, which we erroneously believe to exist independently of ourselves. If we eliminate one major sense, the sense of sight, then being blind, we will find that the whole of our experience changes utterly and completely. Vice versa, if our sense of sight could penetrate all things, like x-rays, then the universe including ourselves, would be utterly different.

Matter and mind are names we give to different experiences, which memory and language enable us to compare. Matter concerns our sensations of vision, touch, sound, taste and smell. Mind concerns our experiences of replicating some or all of these sensations, without the use of our sensory organs, i.e. dreams, thoughts, imagination, memories.

We have these experiences to different extents and degrees when we are awake and when we are dreaming. But in dreamless sleep and in the intervals between sensations and thoughts, we are simply awareness. This awareness continues unbroken in all three states and forms the underlying continuity that we ignore, instead erroneously ascribing permanence to our little egos and the world.

### Language, Speech and Writing

Language is a key factor in our self-world view. The first point to realise is that we do not only use language to converse, write or read; rather we are constantly engaged in inner talk during our waking hours. The linguist Steven Pinker calls this inner talk 'Mentalese'. It is a form of language, but much abbreviated and not employing all the grammatical rules, much like shorthand.

We must consider what the physical and physiological roots of language mean to the individual. Basically language consists of sounds which we hear with our bodily sound reception apparatus and are able to utter with our bodily apparatus of mouth, tongue, vocal chords, etc. Written language we are able to see with our bodily light reception apparatus and to write we need our arms, hands etc.

We next consider the mental roots of language. Only by attaching *meaning* to sounds and writing, do these become language. What is meant by 'meaning' can only be understood, if we recapitulate the learning process, which commences in the womb and ends at death. It is the marriage of sounds and writing to other sensory data which creates meaning or sound interpretation in us. So for example, an infant being repeatedly affected by the vision of the mother and hearing the word 'mummy', fixes the sound and later the written letters of the word, to the person who brought the infant into the world, thus giving meaning to 'mummy' or 'mother'. This process applies to every word we use, especially the word 'I', which we are taught refers to our person. Mentalese we have already defined, its habitual use fixes our concepts.

Finally we consider the relation of words to each other. When we want to understand the meaning of a new word, we look it up in a dictionary. There it is interpreted for us, using other words. This demonstrates that meaning is a form of relationship. There is no such thing as an unrelated word or an unrelated meaning, in a language. Words therefore are sound or sight symbols, which refer as their basis to learnt or acquired perceptions and concepts. A word is a reference pointing to a referent, i.e. the object being referred to.

When these facts are appreciated and digested, we can see that our beliefs are merely self-world views which we have acquired since infancy. We believe our views to be the truth and fail to realise that their basis

is merely relative to our past. Truth is not a rock-hard matter, but is relative. If we realise this fact deeply and profoundly, we are able to accept that there are other valid self-world views even though they may be different from ours. This makes us prepared to go deeper in our introspection, than the superficial levels of the majority.

We use our imagination and language to create concepts, concepts which go beyond experience and therefore beyond the irrefutable actual present. For example take the triad: 'seer of an object' - 'seeing an object' - 'the seen object'. Whichever of these three concepts our attention is focussed on, that is the actual, the present. The other two are memory or anticipation. By this process, the person is created, although never seen as a whole body and mind. We can never even see our whole body, because we can never directly see our own head, as pointed out by the sage Douglas Harding. The world, never seen or experienced as a whole, is created in this way and we conceptually separate the observer from the observed, thus creating the ego and its environment. The mental stretching or extension of vision creates the concept of space. (Space used to be called 'extension'). As the philosopher George Berkeley observed, it is not only the sense of sight, but other senses, especially touch (or the tangible sense), which contributes to seeing, as the result of a learning process starting in infancy.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, the retrospective (in memory) erroneous compression of the above-mentioned triad of seer, seeing and seen, into an apparently single activity, gives us a distorted view of contiguous succession, which we call 'time'.

### Conclusion

Many of the statements in this article run contrary to the views of the majority. The beliefs which develop from the moment we are conceived are deeply rooted by the time we are adults and therefore not easily challenged. It needs prolonged and continuous deep observation, reflection and meditation, before we can move away from the common sense point of view, to the non-dualist or monist viewpoint discussed in this article. ▲

<sup>1</sup> See G. Berkeley's *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*, Sections 41 to 45.

# Appa in 'Ramana Wonderland'

SARADA NATARAJAN

In the galaxy of those who are bonded slaves of Ramana, my father (*appa*) Sri A.R. Natarajan shines bright. He was simply in love with Bhagavan and he enjoyed Bhagavan to the hilt. Bubbling with boyish enthusiasm and an often impish smile, he would announce the next new plan he had in mind for celebrating Bhagavan even when the previous one had all but begun.

He would gaze at Him. He would talk to Him and he would sing out aloud ever so often in great joy. And Bhagavan opened up a Ramana Wonderland for him. Appa wandered through it opening each of the Halls with joyous amazement. In the Ramana Wonderland, appa entered one door and came out after tasting the elixir of the Name 'Ramana'. He immediately wanted everyone to get drunk with its

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## MOUNTAIN PATH

enchantment. So he exhorted my mother Smt.Sulochana Natarajan, who is an expert in Karnatik Classical Music, to set songs on Bhagavan to music. When she hesitated, saying she did not understand the meter or the words, he rebuked, “Had I only known as much music as you do, I would have set all the songs to music by now and sung them.” Once she stepped into this ocean she got drowned in Ramana Music and was carried away by its flood-tide.

Appa heard every song, every concert, but those songs that praised the Name ‘Ramana’ and its glory held a special place in his heart. Like a child who asks for the same song to be sung again and again, he would have asked hundreds of times, “Will you sing ‘Ramanaya Ramanaya?’”

Ah, yes! Another treasure that was opened to appa in Ramana Wonderland was the glory of Bhagavan’s form. Perhaps that’s why his second-best favorite songs were those that described Bhagavan’s eyes, His smile and His golden form. He entered this door and found boundless joy in worshipping Bhagavan.

The ‘Hall of the Golden Form’ had other attractions as well. Appa was enchanted by Bhagavan’s photographs; he brought out numerous photo-books on Bhagavan. Every room at home has a picture of Bhagavan. Every room in the office too has a beautiful portrait. Appa would go from room to room in the morning and gaze at every picture as if he hadn’t seen Bhagavan’s picture for miles around in the vicinity and had suddenly chanced upon this invaluable treasure.

One invaluable treat that held a perennial attraction for appa in the Ramana Wonderland was the ‘Hall of Bhagavan’s Life’. He had been drawn into Bhagavan’s net of Grace through Arthur Osborne’s book *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*. So he was fully aware of the powerful treasure of Ramana Literature and wrote practically till his last breath. Appa discovered that one could easily spend one’s life exploring the many palaces here. He visited all of them and described them for others to see by writing about them. But he did not tarry too long in any. In the Great Hall of Bhagavan’s Life appa re-discovered the palace of Mother Azhagamma and announced her numerous treasures to the world of Ramana devotees. His very





first book was 'Bhagavan Ramana and Mother' and the last one published was a detailed biography 'Mother Azhagamma – A saga of enlightenment'.

He was a man in a hurry, a great hurry to do more and more and more to celebrate Bhagavan. He wanted to visit every nook and corner of this infinite Wonderland. So he gave up his afternoon nap of precisely fifteen minutes saying that it was a waste of time. He pushed his dinner later and later into the night (finally stopping at 11 p.m.) because he would begin to feel sleepy an hour after dinner and if he slept early how could he cover so much ground? He had no time. So he decided on quick pre-planned tours of clarity and insight in the Ramana Wonderland. He probably edited and brought out numerous little pocket books so that anyone in a hurry should not miss out on the Ramana Wonderland! But he knew full well that someone who had even a glimpse could not help returning for more and more.

How would he himself read? He would read and savour each word slowly, very slowly. Whenever he read Bhagavan's words (and that was frequently, any time of the day, morning, evening or night, whenever the mood came) he would pick up the *Collected Works* or the *Five Hymns* or *The Forty Verses on Reality* which was his favourite and begin reading from it. One caught him gazing at a single line, a single page for ever so long. Then, his gaze would move out into infinity for a while and then back to the same line, the same page. So he wrote and wrote just the way he read, dwelling at length on every one of Bhagavan's words and on His *Upadesa Saram*, *Sat-Darshanam* and *Ramana Gita*.

Appa not only walked through this Ramana Wonderland day in and day out, he also held me by the hand and sometimes carried me on his shoulders and took me around too, sharing each of its treasures with me. Memories of these tours, some on which my mother and sister joined, many on which so many others walked with us, and some on which I was alone with appa, now tumble out of my treasure box. I have indulged in them here with apologies to appa. Apologies because he would ask, 'Why are you dwelling on this or that? Dwell on nothing but Bhagavan.' Yet, I have indulged in these memories

because memories of appa are invariably linked with Bhagavan; they are thoughts of how Bhagavan was brought into our lives and kept there.

Memories surge forth in waves and recede to give room to others. There was the joy of sharing a simple insight with appa; the joy of continuous amazement at how wonderfully Bhagavan takes care of us; the joy of reading letters from devotees together. There are memories of being together in the rough times too when there were problems with the Ramana Centre of some kind or the other. Those were what troubled appa initially. Later, he recognized that the care of the Centre was entirely Bhagavan's. He simply enjoyed serving here. About himself, appa had not a single worry. Even when he was visibly unwell he would declare with great gusto, "I am doing wonderfully well!" and he would mean it too. He would brush aside all suggestions to take care of his body saying one must not pay too much attention to it.

The greatest treasure that he found in the Ramana Wonderland was the bounty of love. He gave of it freely to everyone who came into contact with him and a few of us have had the privilege of looting this bounty. Yet he was ready to leave all behind when the call came. He would refer to the fact that he would not be there to look after me or the affairs of the Centre for ever and that I must learn to lean on Bhagavan's protection totally. At the same time, while he was around, he enjoyed the servitude to the Master and would not hand it over to anyone for anything in the world. He wanted more and more and more of it. A devotee wrote, 'I never expected Sri A.R.Natarajan to go. I simply thought he would go on and on and on in the service of Bhagavan.' Does he not? Is he not still leading someone or the other through the Ramana Wonderland, into the Temples, through His words and through every voice that chants the name 'Ramana', singing with loving vigour, 'Ramanaya Ramanaya Ramanaya Nama Om'? ▲





# What is the Nature of *Adhyasa*?

In the Vision of Acharya Sankara and Bhagavan Ramana

SADHU TANMAYA CHAITANYA

## Preamble and Purpose

*Adhyasa* is the immediate cause of all the afflictions of *samsara* (transmigratory existence). The sorrows of phenomenal life are experienced universally by all. It is natural for any intelligent sadhaka (*mumukshu*) to seek *absolute release* from the tyranny of *samsara* than settle for piecemeal solutions. One must therefore enquire into the cause, namely *adhyasa*. This is the primary malady, and the understanding of its origin and dynamics helps one to pursue the valid means for its remedy. *Adhyasa*, in its fundamental sense, means 'superimposition' and etymologically derives from '*adhi aaste*' where '*adhi*' indicates 'above' or 'upon' and '*aaste*' means 'rests', 'stays' or

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‘exists’. The ‘rope-snake’ analogy is a classical illustration of *adhyasa* where, out of ignorance, a non-existent snake is seen to ‘rest above’ a real rope which then ‘exists’ for the perceiver who has committed the mistake. Projecting silver upon nacre (or a sea shell) and ghost upon a post are other typical examples. The word ‘*adhyasa*’ is pregnant with suggestions of a unique philosophical paradigm in our world-view and encapsulates some core concepts of the Advaitic vision of spiritual life. An attempt is made here to clarify some of these ideas embedded in ‘*adhyasa*’ such as Mutual Superimposition, Subjective Projection, Perceptual Error, Illegitimate Transference of Attributes, Ill-founded Cognition and Erroneous Identification, in order to arrive at a holistic perspective of sadhana.

If we understand deeply the role of *adhyasa* which permeates our everyday life, we will know where and how we are stuck in sadhana. This will facilitate our extrication from the quagmire of *adhyasa*. If we recognise with objectivity our pitfalls without justifying or defending them, then half the battle in our sadhana is won. When we dispassionately acknowledge where we fail to live up to our convictions or meet squarely the challenges thwarting our advance, we move on the right track towards the blossoming of *jnana*. The very recognition fuels an enthusiastic perseverance in sadhana and a flexibility to adapt and evolve course corrections. The rest is accomplished by divine Grace, which is the backdrop sustaining all human endeavour.

### Definitions and Imageries

Acharya Sankara in his celebrated introductory treatise *Adhyasa Bhashya* defines *adhyasa* crisply as ‘*atasmin tat buddhihi*’ which means ‘cognition of one thing in some other thing’. In the context of Advaita, *adhyasa* refers to ‘cognition of the Self in the non-Self’. In our everyday life, the entire world is connected to *me* through the gross body housing the sense organs and the mind, whose operation alone illumines and defines the world for me. Therefore, what precedes all the interactions between *myself* and the world is that *first connection between ‘I’ and the ‘gross body’* (in the form of mutual identification) which arises due to *adhyasa*. Bhagavan Ramana therefore reduces *adhyasa* at its nascent,

rudimentary level to *dehatma buddhi* (‘I am the body *alone*’ experiential awareness), which underpins and sustains all the bondage and misery of *samsara*. Bhagavan never countenanced the morbid idea of sinfulness in *sadhakas*, and proclaimed that the *only* sin of the unenlightened is to wallow in *dehatma buddhi*, the fundamental superimposition. He drew a delightful parallel for this *adhyasa*, blending in perfect harmony with the Biblical concept of *original sin*,<sup>1</sup> embedded in the allegory of Adam’s fall in Eden garden. ‘*Adhyasa*’ is the figurative ‘forbidden apple’, the biting of which begets the limited ‘body consciousness’ and the juggernaut of *samsara* commences its inexorable journey. One may live blissfully in primal ignorance (*mula avidya*), the causal seed, but once the sprout of *adhyasa* has emerged, the wheel of *samsara* is unstoppable and there is no choice but to suffer all its consequent ills.

*Avidya* fathers *samsara*, providing the seminal cause. But it operates through *adhyasa*, which is the actual mechanism that delivers the sorrows of *samsara* in manifold manifestations. *Adhyasa* is, then, truly the mother of *samsara*. Sankara calls it ‘the source of all evil’.<sup>2</sup> Bhagavan Ramana concurs saying ‘the rise and fall of *samsara* is coeval with that of *adhyasa*’.<sup>3</sup> In short, the poison of *avidya* is transmitted *only* through the fangs of *adhyasa*.

### Denouement/ Unfoldment

To elucidate the nature of *adhyasa*, Sankara opens his introduction to *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* with a novel pair of opposites, the ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ conceptals. These are so diametrically opposed to each other like light and darkness that they can never be predicated of each other. For example, none of the characteristics of light can be used to describe the nature of darkness (except in negation) nor can the qualities of darkness be applied to light, because they do not ‘enjoy the same locus’ (*samanadhikaranya*). Similarly the ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ conceptals are polar

<sup>1</sup> §164, p.144. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam 2000.

<sup>2</sup> *Adhyasa Bhashya*: *asya anartha hetoh prahanaya...sarve vedanta aarabhyante*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ulladu Narpadu*, v.26; v.5 & v.7 express similar ideas.



opposites, like chalk and cheese and cannot, in principle, be mixed up at all. As we all know, every word signifies an idea which carries with it an image of the object behind it. For example, the word ‘cat’ has a conceptual image, which brings to mind the idea of a four-legged domestic pet. Similarly when one says ‘I’, the image behind the word ‘I’ that is triggered in our conscious mind is the inner Self (*pratyagatman*). The ‘I’ conceptual, therefore, is a clear pointer towards the Self as ‘the object of the ego-idea’ (*asmat pratyaya gochara*). In contrast, the ‘Thou’ conceptual (*yushmat pratyaya gochara*) stands for *everything else* in the creation which is ‘non-Self’, and whose attributes contradict *in toto* the nature of the former. The Self is ever the subject or seer (*drk vastu*) — a mass of consciousness, limitless, changeless and immortal. The ‘Thou’ conceptual represents all seen objects (*drsya prapancha*) — inert, finite, ephemeral and ever changing; it also includes all the possessions of the ‘I’ like the body, mind and senses.

Incidentally Sankara, with brilliant originality and specific intent, resorts to the use of the pronoun ‘Thou’ (*yushmat*) for the non-Self rather than the usual pronoun ‘this’ (*idam*) which is conventionally used to indicate the ‘seen world of objects’. When asked, ‘Who are you?’, the universal response starts with the premise ‘I am this’ (*aham idam*) body with all its attributes and extensions like the senses and mind. However, it is never possible in any context to use the phrase ‘I am you’. Thus there is a readily available ‘discrimination’ among common people that forbids them from mixing up the terms ‘I’ and ‘you’ in a synonymous sense in worldly parlance. The inherent selfishness of people is responsible for separating the ‘I’ from ‘you’ in all transactions of daily life (*vyavahara*).

Therefore, Sankara cleverly plugs in this ‘native intelligence’ of worldly discrimination into the Vedantic context and lumps all the non-Self under the category of ‘Thou’ conceptual, in order to clearly sieve it off from the Self and eliminate their inadvertent mix-up. Thus right from the outset, Sankara utilises the semantic orientation of the grammatical first and second persons viz. the ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ conceptals which are *not* used in apposition to describe each other, as they never refer to the same locus. This method of analysis can be understood



John Maynard

with an example. Suppose I met one Mr. Hari on a visit to Hong Kong and later come across him in Tiruvannamalai, a *vr̥tti* (thought) of recognition arises in my mind as “*This* is the same Hari *that* I met in Hong Kong”. Here the words ‘*this*’ and ‘*that*’ indicate the *same* person and have a ‘common locus of identity’ (*samana adhikarana*).

Unlike the pair of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ conceptals, the ‘*aham-idam*’ pair of pronouns, are often used in apposition because of *adhyasa*. For example, when we say, “I am hungry or thirsty” we identify the Self with the *pranas* (vital airs sheath) which come under the *idam* category. Hunger and thirst belong to the *pranas* and not to the Self. Extending this to the domain of intellect, we hear people say, “If you kill my belief, you kill my soul!” which shows the intensity of fanatical identification with any belief system. Even when Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that “A man is made up of his faith; he *is* what his faith is”,<sup>4</sup> it is from the *vyavahara* standpoint of this natural *adhyasa* of ‘*idam*’ upon ‘*aham*’, that is deeply ingrained in the human psyche. For this reason, Sankara deliberately avoids the pronoun ‘*idam*’ for referring to the non-Self and instead prefers to use the ‘Thou’ conceptual, in order to snap out of the ‘*aham-idam*’ connection prevalent in common usage.

Having posited thus the two conceptals which represent the mutually antagonistic and exclusive ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ entities, the Self and non-Self, Sankara propounds that while theoretically any admixture of the two disparate entities is inadmissible, human beings run their careers and transactional life entirely based upon the mixing up of this incompatible duo. This is the glory of Maya ‘which makes possible the impossible’ wedlock between matter and spirit.<sup>5</sup> Maya deludes the human mind under the sway of ignorance to commit this illegitimate transfer of attributes of the Self and the non-Self upon each other. Such a mutual superimposition, born of *avidya*, is so natural and effortless to our mindset that we do not even suspect its suzerainty in everyday life.<sup>6</sup> Although none of us ever goes about saying ‘I am the

<sup>4</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch.17.3. *shraddha mayoyam purushah, yo yat shraddhah sa eva sah.*

<sup>5</sup> *Maya Panchakam*, v. 1-5. *aghatita ghatana patiyasi maya.*

<sup>6</sup> *Adhyasa Bhashya: naisargikoyam loka vyavaharah.*

body’ (except when specifically challenged, say in acute pain), this wrong vision percolates through our countless statements describing our self-image.

For instance, statements such as ‘I am brown or white’, ‘I caught a cold’, ‘I am flattered by your compliments’, ‘I had a bad day in the office’, are deemed sensible expressions in our daily life. But in the vision of Vedanta, these are delusion-ridden thoughts that betray our intimate identification with adjuncts like body, mind etc. The crux of *samsara* is traceable to the ego, the primary adjunct of the Self and immediate offspring of *adhyasa*. In fact, all our attachments and aversions (*raga-dveshas*) are but secondary and tertiary manifestations of *shobhana-ashobhana adhyasa* (pleasant and unpleasant subjective projections) and do not have even empirical validity! That is why our opinions, judgments and relationships are fickle like weather; yet such molehills assume huge proportions and ruin the natural happiness of the Self. As the malaise of *adhyasa* governs our life, it infects our *sadhana* insidiously.

What then, is the nature of this ubiquitous *adhyasa*? Sankara describes this superimposition as, “The apparent presentation to our awareness, through memory, of something observed elsewhere previously.”<sup>7</sup> In the rope-snake example, a real rope and memory-born snake image coupled with a concomitant fear psychology, have combined to create the illusion of snake under insufficient light conditions. Suppose ‘you’ have never seen a snake in life, this particular superimposition could have never arisen. Without the operation of memory, therefore, no *adhyasa* is possible. Also it cannot occur in the absence of a locus. For example, in the absence of a rope, no one of sound mind can ever ‘see’ a snake nor superimpose silver where there is no shell.<sup>8</sup> Further, in any subjective illusion — which is a ‘perceptual

<sup>7</sup> *Adhyasa Bhashya: smrtirupah paratra purvadr̥shta avabhasah.*

<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, when something is imagined without a substratum, say a ghost in mid-air, it is a case of hallucination but not illusion. Vedanta is, therefore, meant for the majority of ‘normal’ people projecting illusions upon an ‘empirically real’ locus like a rope and not for abnormal people who indulge in fantasies.



error' (*bhrama pratyaksha*) — mere memory will not do; a psychology of fear (of snake) and desire (or value for silver) deeply embedded in the psyche alone provides a sufficient condition for superimposition of snake or silver in the respective examples.

It is then legitimate to deduce that it is impossible for a *jnani* who is fearless and desireless, to commit *even* a perceptual error! All subjective illusions are ruled out as the fire of *jnana* has already burnt away the twin defects of fear and desire from his mind. It is worthwhile to ponder over this insight in order to truly appreciate the glory of *atma jnana* and see how it permeates his empirical life. His *yathartha jnana* ('seeing things as they are') is complete, down to the last detail. Bhagavan Ramana's life is replete with countless examples of such vision. *His legendary perfection was revealed spontaneously in every trifle of daily life*. In contrast, an *ajnani*'s vision is vitiated by *adhyasa* at every turn. Ironically, it is considered normal *only* because such ignorance is universal.

Self-Knowledge therefore, is regarded as transformative, immediate and experiential (*aparoksha anubhava*). It does not remain merely as cerebral clarity as in the case of academically brilliant exponents of Vedanta. Bhagavan Ramana once told his astonished boyhood playmate Vilachery Rangan that upon enlightenment every cell of his body had become *jnanamayam* (charged with *jnana*) and it is no more the 'old body' of the young Venkataraman who was gone, having been burnt up in *jnanagni*!<sup>9</sup> As per the Tamil proverb, 'only a snake can tell the tracks of another snake',<sup>10</sup> a *jnani* alone recognises the glory of another *jnani*; who else can measure his stature?<sup>11</sup>

### Counterpoints

Here a question can arise: "Does not a *jnani* also perceive illusions like mirage water, rainbow, a blue sky, a rod that appears bent under water or a moon that 'seems to run' when clouds move. Everyone knows

<sup>9</sup> *The Power of The Presence*, Part One, by David Godman, p.26. Avadhuta Press, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> *paambin kaal paambariyum*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ulladu Narpadu* v.31.

these are merely *optical illusions* and do not represent empirically real objects. How can one then say that a *jnani* is free from such perceptual errors?" To answer this query, one has to distinguish between 'private' and 'public'/'universal' illusions. The 'rope-snake' and 'nacre-silver' illusions come under the former category because under the same empirical conditions, *not* everyone commits the same perceptual error. But even a learned person can be duped by them on occasions because these are wholly 'subjective projections' (*praatibhaasika*) that imply defects in the mind like fear or desire. In the wake of 'right cognition' (*prama*), they are sublated and once falsified, they cease to exist. But 'objective'/'public' illusions (*vyaavahaarika*), verifiable by others, like mirage water or the blueness of sky do *not* require any defect in the mind. These are purely sensory perceptions that do not suddenly overwhelm the mind with helpless reactions. Once understood as illusions, they do not delude our minds in all subsequent encounters. They continue to be perceived, unlike 'private' illusions.

Thus while 'public' illusions are registered by his senses for a *jnani*, 'private' illusions like 'snake on the rope' do *not* even colour his sensory perception because of his uncluttered mind and blemish-free knowledge. Therefore, the term 'perceptual error' is used *only* when an illusion leads to 'wrong knowledge' (*bhrama*) as in 'private illusions'. Without this caveat, the subtle distinction between the two categories of 'individual' and 'collective' illusions is likely to be blurred.<sup>12</sup> For a sage like Bhagavan Ramana, anchored in *sahaja samadhi*, the world appearance (*jagat drshti*) itself resolves into a single vast panoramic 'public illusion' which cannot delude him any more than the 'particular public illusions' cited earlier. In his vision of the Self, the world of *nama-rupa* is a trivial superimposition on the screen of consciousness, the all-pervasive substratum of space-time continuum.<sup>13</sup>

Another objection can arise regarding Sankara's definition of *adhyasa* which involves, as a necessary input, memory-based psychology.

<sup>12</sup> For sake of clarity and brevity, theories of erroneous cognition (*khyati vada*) of various dialectic schools have been omitted.

<sup>13</sup> *Ulladu Narpadu*, v.1 & 18.

One can argue that the example of ‘rope-snake’ is fine but dismiss, as a sleight of intellect, its application in the Vedantic domain where the ‘world’ is explained as a superimposition upon Brahman. Since Brahman is neither an object of sense perception nor available for objectification to the mind, how can it serve as a locus for projecting the ‘world-memory’? And for a child, to whom memory is yet to develop, but still sees only the world all around it, how can the *adhyasa* of ‘world upon Brahman’ occur? Sankara anticipates this twin-objection and clarifies it as follows: Even though space is not an object of the senses, children superimpose blueness, dirt and concavity upon the colourless, shapeless sky. Thus there is *no* inviolate rule that superimposition of an object upon a substratum is possible only if the substratum is apprehended by the senses like the rope. Moreover, Brahman is not entirely unknown to us but ‘known erroneously’ to all beings. In pursuing Self-knowledge therefore, we do not so much seek to gain ‘new’ knowledge as only to cauterise the error that veils our vision.<sup>14</sup> Brahman is intuitively known as an immediate experience<sup>15</sup> in the form of the ‘I’ sense pulsating as the living awareness of one’s existence but confounded wrongly as the limited ego-idea. While the limitless Self is the purport and content of this ego-sense, It is never recognised truly as the locus of world appearance because *adhyasa* vitiates all knowledge at its source. Nevertheless *because* of its self-evident effulgence, the Self is always available like a ‘sitting duck’ for being mistaken as a finite, miserable jiva!

Brahman is the seeming cause of this *apparent* creation, upon which the world appearance is merely a superimposition of Maya. That it deludes all living beings right from the moment of birth as attested by Lord Krishna,<sup>16</sup> is testimony to the power of Maya. This can be appreciated only by invoking a ‘universal snake memory’ (world-

<sup>14</sup> Verse two of the famous *Gurustotram* says that the Guru’s Grace removes the cataract of ignorance by the ‘laser beam’ stick of jnana and opens the eye of the disciple! The verse is: *ajnana timirandhasya jnananjana shalakaya, chakshur unmilitam yena tasmai sri gurave namah.*

<sup>15</sup> Adhyasa Bhashya: *asmatpratyaya vishayatvat aparokshatvat ca pratyagatma prasiddheh.*

<sup>16</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch.7, v.13, 14 and 27.

appearance) which is common to all mankind and carried over from birth to birth until emancipation. And this ‘snake memory’ (*jagat drshti*) is itself Maya, foisted upon the ‘rope’ Brahman. Maya as a cosmic principle is the inseparable power of Brahman and has no beginning or end. But *avidya*, which is beginningless, nevertheless vanishes upon one’s spiritual enlightenment by eradication of *adhyasa*. The shadow world play of Maya, however, continues to plague the rest of humanity groaning under *avidya*.

### Conclusion

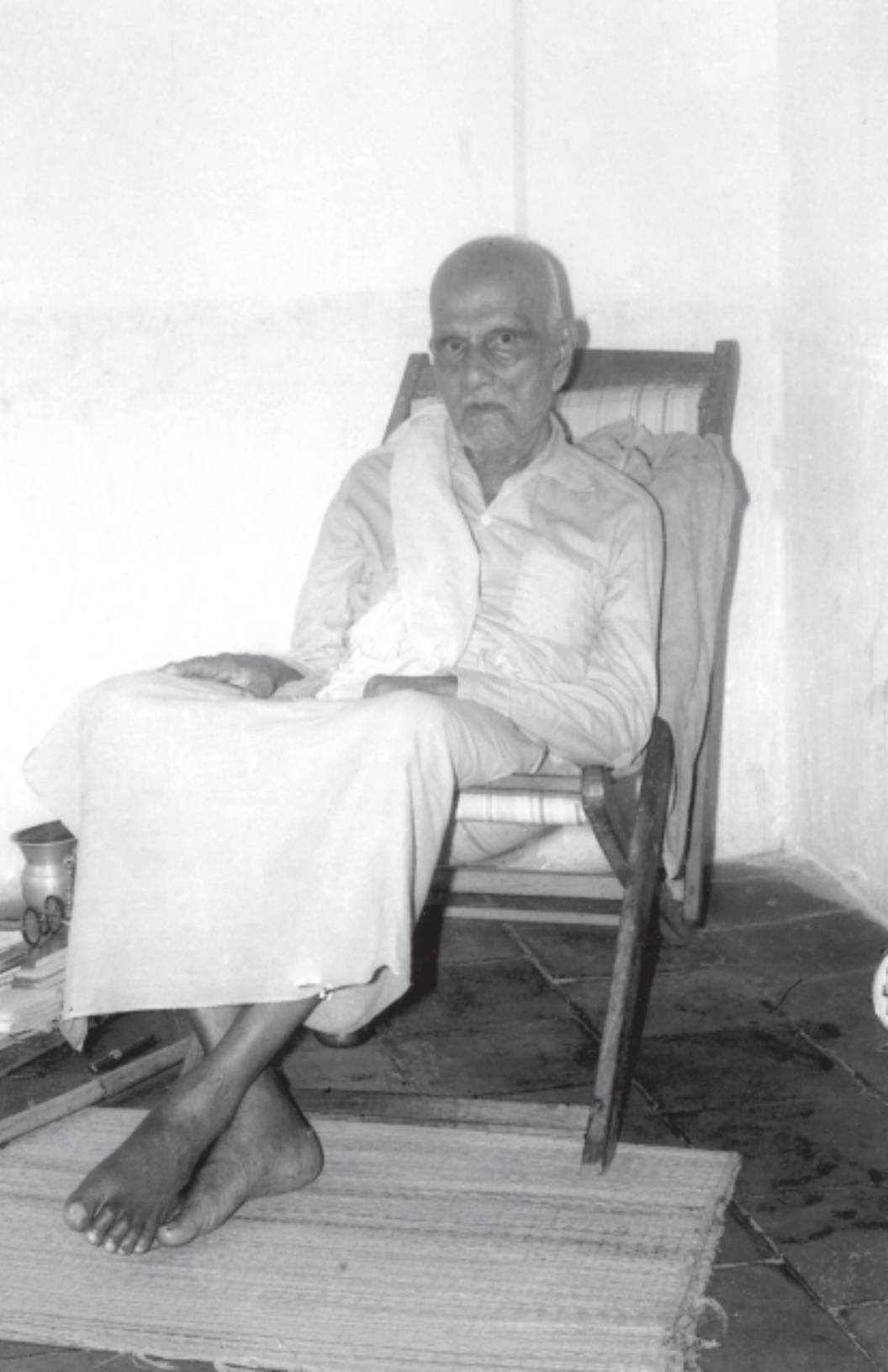
Sankara paints elsewhere<sup>17</sup> a vivid imagery of the *samsara* tree as having sprung up from the seed of *avidya*, whose sprout is *adhyasa* in the form of *dehatma buddhi*, with desire being its tender leaves and the gross body forming its trunk. The waters of *karma* nourish this tree. *Pranas* which perform all physiological functions are its branches and the sense organs its twigs. Sense objects are its flowers and all miseries born of *karma* are the fruits which the *jiva*, as the bird perched on this sorrow-laden tree, choicelessly ‘enjoys’. Sri Krishna galvanises Arjuna by assuring him that this *samsara* tree is intrinsically impermanent and *can* be felled by the *axe of conscious dissociation*<sup>18</sup> from identification with the body, the only direct weapon to overcome *adhyasa*. Bhagavan Ramana lived, from his sixteenth year onwards, as the perfect embodiment of this supreme detachment. He exemplified, in every breath and movement of his life, Sankara’s passionate exhortations<sup>19</sup> to vanquish *adhyasa* once for all!

The ‘Who am I?’ enquiry championed by Bhagavan is truly the proven *brahmastra*, like the spear of Lord Skanda to whom he bears an uncanny resemblance. It was fashioned out of his own *aparokshanubhuti* and bequeathed to all mankind, to win this ‘mother of all battles’ against *adhyasa*, the mother of *samsara*. It is a challenge that will stalk us until we triumph. ▲

<sup>17</sup> *Vivekachudamani*, v.145.

<sup>18</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch.15, v.1-3. *asanga shastrena drdhen chitva.*

<sup>19</sup> *Vivekachudamani*, v.277-287.



# Swami Suresananda

## A True Devotee of Bhagavan

A. SWAMINATHAN

Swami Suresanadaji was a devotee who entirely surrendered to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He worked for the propagation of Bhagavan's teachings through an ashram which he founded — the Vijnana Ramaneeya Ashram, Palakkad, Kerala.

His name was Damodaran Nair in his *purvashram* (worldly life), before he entered the renunciate's life. He was born to a respected Nair family in Ramassery, a village east of Palakkad town. He was a talented youngster and in time he took his law degree from Madras and began to practice at the Palakkad bar.

During this period in the 1930s, he had been attracted to the freedom struggle and held the office of secretary to the local unit of the Indian National Congress. He took an active part in the social and

A. Swaminathan has been associated with Swamiji and the Palakkad ashram for over 45 years, and has written a biography of Swamiji in Malayalam. He is professor of Sanskrit at Santhigiri Ayurveda Medical College, Palakkad.

cultural life of Palakkad. He played a leading role in organizing seminars and literary conventions by inviting luminaries of the Malayalam literary circle. Thus he came to be associated with the great poets of Malayalam – Vallathol Narayana Menon and P. Kunhiraman Nair. He was himself a poet. This was during the 1930s.

Then, suddenly a change overtook Sri Damodaran Nair's life. Due to a vision of the Mother Goddess, which he had in a dream, he began to lead a life of devotion. Though he was the *karanavar* (senior member) of a large family and enjoyed a reputation as a lawyer, his interest in worldly life began to diminish. He concentrated his attention on spiritual matters and read spiritual books, especially on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He set out on a pilgrimage, visiting different ashrams and sanyasis.

It was at Anandashramam, Kanhangad, in northern Kerala that he received the advice to visit Sri Ramana Maharshi. Once with Bhagavan he surrendered himself totally at the Maharshi's feet. His spiritual thirst was at last quenched in the holy presence of Bhagavan. He became convinced that Bhagavan was the guru he had been searching for.

He met Bhagavan in July 1947. "It was indescribable," were the words he used of the awakening experience he had on this first visit. He recalled that he had prostrated before Bhagavan in the old hall and then sat in a corner. For two hours he became absorbed in samadhi and enjoyed supreme bliss. He lost all outward consciousness. When he woke up from that trance he heard Bhagavan speaking in reply to a query of another devotee. The words, "Intense dispassion" (*tivra vairagyam*), which emanated from the lips of Bhagavan, stuck in his mind. He took it as Bhagavan's instruction (*upadesa*) to him, came out of the hall and composed some lines of poetry about the wonderful experience he had just had in Bhagavan's holy presence. He described how for more than a year he had been wandering in search of a guru, without finding one who could quench his spiritual thirst. But on that day, when he sat before Bhagavan, he found his guru. All his doubts were dispelled and he received perfect solace. His human birth had achieved its purpose by this darshan of Bhagavan. He longed to spend the rest of his life at the holy feet of Bhagavan!

Certain worldly constraints compelled Sri Nair to return to Palakkad. Yet his mind stayed with Bhagavan and he continued off and on to charge his spiritual battery in Bhagavan's presence. After his return from Ramanasramam, he spent his days in spiritual sadhana in his own home. Here he had a vision of two divine personages plus a row of books. This haunted his mind for some days and he finally gave shape to it by establishing a spiritual centre in Bhagavan's name. He gave it the name 'Vijnana Ramaneyam Library'. 'Ramaneyam' here means 'Memorial to Ramana' and as well as 'beautiful'.<sup>1</sup> It was in September 1947 that he started this spiritual library in Palakkad, with his personal collection of books. Devotees made good use of this library for conducting satsangs and bhajans. The library thus started to develop as a spiritual centre and soon Sri Damodaran Nair came to be known as Vakeel Swami (lawyer swami). Later, for the library, he obtained a dilapidated Theosophical Society building near the Government Victoria College in Palakkad.

During the initial stages this spiritual centre functioned in a rented building where *Bhagavad Geeta* classes were held. Subsequently, as a result of his intense upasana of Devi, as prescribed by the sage Amrithanantha Yatindra, a devotee of Bhagavan, Vakeel Swami was able to purchase some land. There he constructed a prayer hall and a puja room in Bhagavan's name, at the heart of Palakkad.

On one occasion when he was in Bhagavan's presence, Vakeel Swami submitted his Malayalam translation of *Ramana Chatvarimsat* to him. Bhagavan, addressing him as 'Vakeel Swami', asked him to read it out. Overwhelmed with emotion Swami did so. Bhagavan listened patiently to the text, which was quite lengthy. Then he asked him why he had not translated the invocatory verse. Swamiji replied that the copy he possessed did not contain that verse. Bhagavan then took a copy from his own shelf and handed it to Vakeel Swami. It contained the *Vandana* sloka, written by Bhagavan himself in Malayalam script. Vakeel Swami translated it into Malayalam verse and submitted it to Bhagavan.

<sup>1</sup> 'Vijnana Ramaneyam' can also mean 'Spiritual Knowledge taught by Ramana'.



It was this incident, Swamiji used to say, which inspired him to translate all the teachings of Bhagavan into Malayalam verse and disseminate them among the Malayalees. Swamiji used to get up at 2 a.m. to compose verses in Malayalam translating the teachings of Bhagavan. He published *Upadesa Saram*, *Gita Saram*, *Satdarsanam* and *Ramana Chatvarimsat* as well as other short Malayalam poems that elucidated the teachings of Bhagavan.

On one occasion when Vakeel Swami was staying at Sri Ramanasramam he suffered an attack of high fever. Though the ashram doctor gave him some medicines, the fever continued unabated. Swami Satyananda, who was nursing Vakeel Swami, told him that if it came to the knowledge of Bhagavan, the fever would subside, and reported the matter to Bhagavan. This indeed happened: Vakeel Swami's temperature came down very quickly and he was well again. This event proved to him that just one 'thought' by Bhagavan could work miracles.

On another occasion Vakeel Swami was climbing up to Skandasramam. Midway up he happened to see Bhagavan coming down. Vakeel Swami, with devotion and humility stopped and remained standing at the side of the pathway, giving way to Bhagavan. Bhagavan remarked, "Why should you climb down now? Go up as you had planned." Swamiji in recalling this incident, used to say, "One word from such a sage contains volumes of meaning." By this he meant that Bhagavan was advising him, 'Why stay back and thus show sluggishness in your spiritual practice? Go ahead.'

On another occasion Vakeel Swami along with Swami Ramanananda Giri, a European sadhu, were living in Thiruvallameekiyoor (Tiruvannamiyur) beach near Madras, leading an austere lifestyle practising penance. They had constructed a thatched hut and were living on fruits and tender coconuts. One hot summer's day they were both feeling really hungry but there was nothing to eat. They would have had to walk two miles to reach the nearest village. Reluctantly both remained hungry, but soon there was a knock at their door. A lady carrying a big tiffin carrier had brought cooked rice meals for both the swamis. She had come as a result of a dream which

had directed her to serve these sadhus. The lady was Eleanor Noye, an American devotee of Bhagavan.

The blessings of Amritanatha Yatindra, Bhagavan's devotee, helped Vakeel Swami to construct a prayer hall and a library as a memorial to Bhagavan at Palakkad. It was inaugurated in January 1954 by the then governor of Madras, Sri Sripakasa. Swamiji attracted and transformed innumerable seekers at this centre. Spiritual discourses by eminent scholars, bhajans and classes continued there under his auspices.

A few days before the mahasamadhi of Bhagavan, Vakeel Swami, along with a friend, P.C. Menon, a Magistrate from Ottapalam near Palakkad visited Bhagavan. There was a huge crowd of devotees. A queue system had been introduced for those seeking darshan. When the turn of Swamiji and his friend came, he stood before Bhagavan and chanted this verse:

*yato mamatma bhavasi tvameva  
tato na vacyam mama kinchidasti  
yatha taveyam kuru mam tathaiva  
tvamatmanatham ramanam bhajam<sup>2</sup>*

He also communicated to Bhagavan the desire of his friend to donate a large sum to the Ramana ashram at Palakkad, but Bhagavan suggested that he give rather to the poor. With these words of Bhagavan ringing in the ears and after a lapse of some years, Swamiji was able to start a Poor Feeding *Yajna* during the month of *Karkidakam*,<sup>3</sup> a lean month for many in Kerala. Today it has become a permanent feature of the ashram, affording solace to hundreds of poverty stricken people.

During the ceremony on the occasion of the *mahasamadhi* (leaving the body) of Sri Bhagavan, Swamiji managed to get some *vibhuti* (sacred ashes) from the mahasamadhi (tomb) of Bhagavan with the help of Kunju Swami. He kept it in an urn underneath the earth above which the sanctum sanctorum of the puja room of the memorial hall

<sup>2</sup> As you are my own soul, I have nothing to say to you. Make me do as you please. I surrender myself to Sri Ramana who is the controller of my soul.

<sup>3</sup> In Tamil, *Adi*. In the Gregorian calendar, mid-July to mid-August.

was built.

Subsequently Vakeel Swami took ordination (*sannyasa*) from Swami Purushothamanandaji Maharaj of Vasishta Guha and continued his spiritual activities. He was given the *sannyasa* name Swami Suresananda. He gave free tuition to poor students to help them continue their studies. He put great effort into popularizing the study of Sanskrit. Despite being an erudite scholar in English, Malayalam and Sanskrit, he was simple and unassuming and was always available to seekers. He tried to help ordinary people in all possible ways.

He contributed many articles to *The Mountain Path* and other periodicals on the teachings of Bhagavan. His translation into English of *Yogavasistha* was published in *The Mountain Path* and subsequently published by Sri Ramanasramam as a book.

During the last years of Swami's life, he suffered a paralytic stroke and was confined to the Palakkad ashram premises. By the grace of Bhagavan, Swamiji got back the capacity of speech. He could walk slowly with the aid of a stick due to Ayurvedic treatment. During all these days of ill health Swamiji's thoughts, words and deeds were still centred on Bhagavan and his teachings. On the last day of his life Swamiji was still talking about the glory of Bhagavan to some local college students. He felt some uneasiness, for death began to lay its icy hands on different parts of his body. He knew that the end of his bodily existence was nearing.

On this day which happened to be *Karthika Deepam* (holy Karthika day), he reclined on a cot in a slanting posture gazing at the photos of Sri Bhagavan and Sri Sankaracharya hanging on the wall. Exactly at the time when the Karthika Deepam was lit on the top of the holy hill Arunachala, and when the mantra "Arunachala Siva.....Arunachala Siva" was chanted in chorus at the Palakkad ashram at the conclusion of the evening satsang, Swamiji breathed his last breath.

Swamiji attained mahasamadhi at the age of 87 on the twentieth of November 1983. Like the Karthika Deepam, he too became a beacon of light. This light still glows in all its effulgence, inspiring and guiding devotees at the ashram he founded through the grace of Bhagavan. ▲

# Practical Sadhana

## Part Two

### Meditation and The Mind

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA

*This is the second in the series on a Question and Answer Satsang of Practical Instruction regarding Spiritual Practice. The purpose of this article is to bring before those who 'seek the Truth' clear and practical examples of how the traditions of sanatana dharma and the teaching of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi stressed practice that produces purification (removal of the obstacles and habits which diminish our pure vision) and how to become aware through grace of the knowledge of the Self.*

Question: You mention meditation. Is meditation important in controlling the mind or purifying the heart?

The answer must be addressed step-by-step. So long as you are struggling to control the mind, it is not *deep* transformative meditation. It is, however, an essential mental exercise, for it is a purifying process and thus an important first step. Initially the very grossest *tamasic* impurities must be held in check and eventually sublimated. This is not simply a curbing of negative traits; rather it is

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

their elimination, which is achieved by observing the negative consequences of our habits and changing them. One simply says: “The reaction to that action was harmful to me spiritually, so I will not do that again.” Initially we must exercise willing introspection and right perception, and then, crucially, honestly acknowledge the consequences of our behaviour without any sort of denial or cover-up. Although in reality our divine nature is immutable, eternally unchanging and free of all taint, our consciousness depends solely upon our perception, and the ensuing thought fabrications that manifest and literally ‘create’ our awareness. The Buddha thus declared:

“Mind precedes all mental states, Mind is their chief; they are all mind wrought.”<sup>1</sup>

This perception can be, and is, daily affected by our skilful or unskilful actions. Actions enlighten or darken our perception and their consequences determine the degree of influence that grace has in our lives. Again, this is why Bhagavan Sri Ramana declared:

“Practice is necessary, there is Grace.”<sup>2</sup>

### Quality of Mind

When our mind is too gross, *tamas* (dullness) and *rajas* (activity), govern it. When one is in this condition, the *sattva* or quietude is not predominant. In the absence of *sattva*, the qualities of *tamas* and *rajas* become the reigning powers. Being thus overpowered, such a mind becomes very dull. So the real work is how to bring such a person into spirituality. In the beginning he should be given an activity, for he cannot be made naturally to sit still.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana would often use the Tamil word *kadavul* in reference to God. It literally means the divine and eternal Self that abides within in stillness and silence. This supreme quietude, which is the manifestation of Wisdom, is unquestionably our own very Self and our greatest friend; but because of the governance through an externalized mind degraded by the distracting and veiling powers of

*rajas* and *tamas*, we are seeing, feeling and ‘living’ life in the death grip of the devouring ego, our worst enemy.<sup>3</sup>

So in the *sanatana dharma*, Hinduism of India, what is done in the beginning is to give such a person some action, which has by its very nature a purifying effect.

You see that even though a person has a sincere longing for spiritual attainment, he is not always able to perceive the dullness of the mind. The scriptures say that the ego has mainly two powers in its arsenal; *vikshepa* or distraction, and *avarana*, which is a veiling of the truth.

If a person remains unskilful throughout his life, and maintains an indifferent regard towards spiritual growth then a third power is available to the ego. This third power is *mala* or gross impurities. Of course this third power must be removed, but in truth the very first step is to become aware of its existence.

### Purification Through Action

Placing a person in an environment where *sattva* (a pure condition) is active and assigning work such as in a Temple or an Ashram affects one through mere association with the qualities inherent in doing work for God, even if it is only something like cleaning the place of worship or the pots and pans or picking flowers.

The first phase of transformation away from the dullness of the *tamasic* mind can begin with these actions, for as one is working for the benefit of a place that promotes higher life, one becomes acutely aware of one’s own disinterest, negligence, laziness, and disregard for the work and by grace a sense of shame emerges. Actually by placing someone in a godly environment and having him do work solely for God, the higher power takes away the ego’s power of *avarana*. The veil is removed and now the dull, distasteful and shameful qualities of *tamas* are seen face to face. Also through this divine association, this powerful form of *satsang*, the mind and heart are invested with a determined desire to rise out of heedlessness.

An awareness and recognition of one’s intoxicating addiction to heedlessness is also brought to light together with a resolve to strive

<sup>1</sup> *Dhammapada*, trans. Ven. Acharya Buddhakaraka, (Buddha Vachana Trust) p.7, v.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Guru Ramana* by S.S. Cohen, p. 76. Sri Ramanasramam, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Ch.6, verse 6.

for true spiritual growth. Thus the all-knowing God begins by infusing into us the will to change and seek a pure life.

“The quality of soul that makes it possible for man to rise to spiritual life is purity...that which one wills to do, he has the power to do. Knowledge of that power is faith; and when faith moves, the soul begins its flight.”<sup>4</sup>

### The Path of Assent

We have begun; we have made a start. In the truest sense we have now set our hands to the plough. In the entire *Srimad Bhagavatam* Sri Krishna reveals the quintessence of His teaching in one statement:

“Shake free of sloth, and merge your mind within Me.”<sup>5</sup>

Though we might believe that only a simple start has been made, the shaking free of slothful heedlessness is declared by God to be half the battle.

We have recognized that there is a fog that clouds our vision, and obstacles (restlessness and slothfulness) that literally obscure the manifestation of the light of the Self in our consciousness.

Regardless of whatever ‘label’ we choose to call this effort, whether it be deemed purification, removal of defilement, awakening, being in oneness or even becoming still; it should be known that Bhagavan called it effort that instils ‘purity’ and stressed that without it the goal of *vichara* (enquiry) will scarce be reached.

In direct reference to this Sri Muruganar heard the following profound statement from Bhagavan and recorded it that our doubts might be cleared:

“Know that the wondrous *jnana vichara* is only for those who have attained purity of mind by softening and melting within. Without this softening and melting away of the mind, brought about by thinking of the feet of the Lord, the attachment to the ‘I’ that adheres to the body will not cease to be.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* by Levi, p. 87. DeVorss & Company 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Uddhava Gita, ‘The Path of Devotion’, Ch. XIV, p.379 in *Srimad Bhagavatam* trans. by S.S. Cohen. Sri Ramanasramam 2004.

### Focusing on the Goal

Having arisen out of a body full of *tamasic* habits, we must now set to work and focus the mind by gaining a depth of concentration needed for merging with and realizing our divine nature. This is essential, for concentration on one object effectively reduces the onslaught of thoughts habitual to our mercurial minds. This cannot be imagined or conjured up by any form of trance-like *laya*, and Bhagavan repeatedly stressed avoidance of what can be rightly referred to as an ‘effortless’ or lazy cover-up.

Now it should be becoming clear why Bhagavan often seemed to stress for most of us that ‘Knowledge of the Self’ is attained by an integrated practice of *jnana* (path of Knowledge), *bhakti* (path of Devotion) and *sankhya* (yoga emphasizing control of the mind and senses). In this regard the master declared:

“The means that make one qualified for enquiry are meditation, *yoga*, etc. One should gain proficiency in these through graded practice, and thus secure a stream of mental modes that is natural and helpful. When the mind that has in this manner become ripe, listens to the present enquiry, it will at once realize its true nature, which is the Self, and remain in perfect peace without deviating from that state. To a mind that has not become ripe, immediate realization and peace are hard to gain through listening to enquiry. Yet, if one practices the means for mind-control for some time, peace of mind can be obtained eventually”.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, when Bhagavan was once asked to define ‘*yoga*’, He replied: “Effort itself is *yoga*”.<sup>8</sup>

So then how can this statement be true when standing alongside the propounded emphasis by some that we need only ‘be as we are’,

<sup>6</sup> *Padamalai*, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Recorded by Muruganar, edited by David Godman, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p.186. (Reference to Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham, vol. 7, verse 340).

<sup>7</sup> Self-Enquiry (*Vichara Sangraham*), translated by Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, p. 16-17. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Sri Ramanasramam, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> *Guru Ramana* by S.S. Cohen, p.74. Sri Ramanasramam, 2006.



for the Self is the only Reality, and ever shining within. Simply speaking, this position is putting the cart before the horse. Bhagavan's own words bring to light the Truth that long practice from past sadhana and then, further effort alone makes permanent the effortless state.

The difficulty in dealing solely with dry theory is put to rest by the experience of That, the *samadhi* (meditative absorption) referred to in the *Kaivalya Upanishad* called *vijnana vedanta*, which the theory only implies. When the question was put before Bhagavan of the need for practice and then further practice being required to attain the final state of the highest and permanent *samadhi*, He declared:

“People have all sorts of notions about *nirvikalpa*... All this is due to their viewing it intellectually. *Nirvikalpa* is Chit — effortless, formless Consciousness... To some whose minds have become ripe from a long practice in the past, *nirvikalpa* comes suddenly as a flood, but to others it comes in the course of their sadhana, which slowly wears down the obstructing thoughts and reveals the screen of Pure Awareness ‘I-‘I’. Further practice renders the screen permanently exposed. This is Self-realization, Mukti, or Sahaja Samadhi, the natural, effortless State.”<sup>9</sup>

We must never become foolish in allowing our prideful ignorant ego to talk us into imagining that we have arrived at the goal without putting forth an ounce of effort along the path. It does not work in practical worldly endeavour and likewise it will not work in the ‘life of the Spirit’. ▲

<sup>9</sup> *Guru Ramana* by S.S. Cohen. p.88-89. Sri Ramanasramam, 2006.

## HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

# What Has to Happen Will Happen

MARLEEN BOERS

I first heard about Bhagavan when I was only a teenager. My mother had bought a copy of *De Weg tot het Zelf* (*The Way to the Self*) by Heinrich Zimmer, which contained a photograph of Bhagavan that fascinated me and gripped my heart. I didn't understand the book, however, as it was a literal Dutch translation from the original German and was full of long and complicated sentences.

At about the same time, one day I experienced a sense of nothingness, wherein a sudden thought appeared: ‘It is said that God is infinite, so nothing can exist besides God, because that would make It finite, which is absurd; only It exists. Thus the whole of creation appears within God, just like a dream within me.’

Only a few years ago, in Arthur Osborne's autobiography I found the same idea expressed when he said to someone, “Infinity minus x is

a contradiction in terms because by the exclusion of the x the first term ceases to be Infinite. Think of Infinity as God and x as yourself.”<sup>1</sup> It is the most basic and simple idea of Advaita, pointing to the Oneness of Truth which, as Bhagavan says, cannot be expressed in words, as words are in duality.

I had already been reading about the Sufis and especially Sri Ramakrishna who especially exhorted us always to ‘meditate, dive deep within’ which frustrated me as I had no idea what was meant by that. It was only in the nineteen sixties that I came across Arthur Osborne’s books on Bhagavan, and then I knew without a doubt that Bhagavan was my guru, and the knowing arose that the truth of non-duality had always been known, but I only didn’t know I knew. Bhagavan’s instruction to ask oneself ‘Who Am I?’ goes straight to the core. Finally I knew how to meditate.

Reading Osborne’s books gave me the strong feeling that the author was enlightened. Having the desire to meet him in person, visit the Ashram and ‘experience Arunachala’, I wrote to Sri Ramanasramam asking whether I could visit and Sri Ganesan answered immediately that I was most welcome.

November 1968 was the first time I came to India, visiting the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math near Calcutta before going to Sri Ramanasramam where I felt at home right away and feeling strongly the attraction of the holy mountain Arunachala. When I was leaving after a few weeks, sitting at the back of the bus, I looked back and saw Arunachala disappearing. This disappearance gave me such a shock that I burst out sobbing, feeling as if I had lost the presence of God. I didn’t think I would ever have another chance to visit Arunachala.

My second visit to the ashram was in December 1970 when I was stationed at Karachi in Pakistan after being transferred there from Washington DC. This new posting meant that it was now possible both in cost and in distance for me to travel easily to Tiruvannamalai and I was now able to visit the ashram yearly.

<sup>1</sup> *My Life and Quest*, p.83. Sri Ramanasramam, 2000.

I had hoped to meet Arthur Osborne in 1968, but he and his wife were then in Madrid and in May 1970 he died. However I did meet his widow Lucia Osborne and we became friends.

In early 1972 Sri Ganesan suggested that I should construct my own small cottage in the Morvi Guesthouse Compound, but I told him that I had no money for that and anyhow, I would prefer a place with a garden around the house. I told Mrs Osborne about Ganesan’s idea of having my own place. She said it was not expensive at all — at that time! — to acquire a plot of land and construct a cottage, and she suggested that she should look out for a plot for me. This frightened me a bit and I answered, “No, don’t look for a place, but if it comes to you, please let me know.”

As India and Pakistan had been at war in December 1971, there was still no postal service between the two countries and so I gave Mrs Osborne an address in Holland from where my mail would be forwarded to Karachi.

In September 1972 I received a letter from her telling me that someone had come to her offering a piece of land for sale. This letter came directly from Tiruvannamalai to Karachi, addressed to me at the Netherlands Consulate, Karachi. This astonished me, as I didn’t realise that the mail connection between India and Pakistan had opened up again. There was even a stamp with a picture of Bhagavan on the letter. Mrs Osborne asked me to let her know as soon as possible whether I was interested, and if so, to send some money. She would give the seller an advance so as to buy time while she waited for my reply. I wrote back to say I’d gladly buy the plot and that I’d give her the money in December when coming to the ashram again, as sending money would be too complicated, and then I went with the letter to the post office to ask for a stamp. There I was laughed at and told there was no mail to and from India since the war. When I showed Mrs Osborne’s letter which had on the back a round stamp mentioning ‘Karachi 25.9.1972’ (I still have the letter), they could not believe it, turning it over and over, saying this was impossible. They advised me though to send my answer via another country, as they couldn’t accept my letter.

Then I knew for certain, by this miracle that Bhagavan wanted me to come and live at the foot of Arunachala. I sent a letter to Mrs Osborne via Holland, explaining what had happened and that she must have forgotten to write me via Holland.

When in the winter of 1972/1973, I was in Tiruvannamalai, the sale of the plot of land was concluded and registered. I later heard that since 1972 foreigners couldn't anymore buy immovable property in India but at the registry office in town one apparently was not aware yet of this new rule, so there were no difficulties. Another miracle!

In 1974 I was transferred to Bombay which made visits to the ashram even easier, and there I had the good fortune to be introduced by Maurice Frydman to Nisargadatta Maharaj and was able to visit him regularly during my four year stay in Bombay. In the beginning I was confused by Maharaj's way of explaining things and remember labelling it 'mental gymnastics', making advaita complicated. But I liked Maharaj's presence very much as I found it mind-stilling. Maharaj's talks and answers were always translated from Marathi into English, which didn't contribute to clarity. The translators themselves may not always have understood what Maharaj meant.

Maharaj was always very gracious to me and my friend Meheroo, asking in private if we had any questions. Maharaj once asked me, "Who is your guru?", at which I pointed to Bhagavan's picture hanging behind him, and Maharaj nodded approvingly.

In 1975 the foundation of my house at Tiruvannamalai had been finished, but I had to stop further construction because of trouble with the builder and I decided to wait with it till I was there in person to supervise. As I had been able to save a lot of money in Karachi and Bombay, I could resign my job in 1978 if I settled in India and lived from the interest of my savings. And so I moved to Tiruvannamalai in December 1978 to finally put down my roots. Sri Ganesan had helped me to obtain an entry visa and residential permit by standing guarantor for me.

I was able to finish the house and go daily to the ashram. The land around the house which was completely bare when I bought it, has

been transformed since then into a big garden with tall trees among which are two very big banyan trees.

In April 1981, already living in Tiruvannamalai I decided to go to Bombay to see Maharaj a last time as he was suffering from terminal cancer. He looked a bit shrunk but, though having lost his exuberant gestures explaining matters, was nevertheless spirited enough. After talking a bit, he pointed to a man sitting next to me who was not one of the regular translators when I lived in Bombay. This man, handsome, around sixty, looking distinguished in his three-piece black suite, closed his eyes, bent a bit backward and forward and then opened his eyes and mouth to translate. What came out was the most beautiful and precise English, leaving me in no doubt that he understood Maharaj completely. The feeling arose in me suddenly that this man was enlightened. Later I learned he was Ramesh Balsekar. Much later, reading his books and marvelling at his clear language, only confirmed my earlier intuition of his being enlightened. I have never met him in person again. Maharaj died five months later, in September 1981.

What I slowly learned through the years is that I really know nothing — apart from the fact that I am — and that I can't do anything of my own; there is no free will, everything is pre-destined, which leads to surrender. But as the future isn't known, one has to act as if one has free will. Somewhere Bhagavan explained this to Arthur Osborne when he asked about free will and pre-destiny.

I am at peace at the core of my being listening to its silence and enjoying the view of Arunachala, Siva Himself, according to scripture and symbol of non-duality. I am very thankful indeed to be so blessed.

What is told above are of course my own experiences and concepts, nothing more.

In my opinion everybody should follow his or her own convictions until proved erroneous. Real Truth cannot be proved. *It Is*.

Nowadays there are many gurus, real or half-baked, who may have quite some following. Apart from their credibility it should be remembered that everything in this creation has its place. Whatever happens has to happen, just as Bhagavan said. ▲





# Ajaan Maha Boowa and Bhagavan's Path of Self-enquiry

## Part Two

REINHARD JUNG

*In part one of this two part series, published in the Jayanti edition, 2008, we read of Ajaan Boowa's resolute, single-pointed pursuit of mindfulness. His unyielding conviction was such that, "I drove a stake firmly into the ground and held tightly to it no matter what happened." He assiduously cultivated awareness through the practice of various Buddhist meditations and discovered that his essential nature, citta, never dies.*

**T**hough from then on Ajaan Maha Boowa's practice became even steadier, this new- found 'rock-like stability' developed into an addiction:

The problem is that *samadhi* is so peaceful and satisfying that the meditator inadvertently becomes addicted to it. This happened to me: for five years I was addicted to the tranquillity of *samadhi*; so much so that I came to believe that this very tranquillity was the essence of Nibbana.

Only when my teacher Acariya Mun, forced me to confront this misconception, was I able to move on to the practice of wisdom.

Reinhard Jung is a homeopathic doctor and meditation practioner, interested in the practical aspects of the science.

There is an obvious parallel with Bhagavan's instructions: He always insisted that vichara has to be active and conscious and warned against the temporal trance-like states of *mano-laya*. The ultimate aim of jnana yoga is *mano-nasa*, the complete dissolving of the separate ego.

Ajaan Mun asked Maha Boowa to commence a new approach through the practice of intensive body-contemplation:

The practice of wisdom begins with the human body, the grossest and most visible component of our personal identity. The object is to penetrate the reality of its true nature. Is our body what we've always assumed it to be — an integral and desirable part of who we really are? To test this assumption we must thoroughly investigate the body by mentally deconstructing it into its constituent parts, section by section, piece by piece.

Ajaan Maha Boowa graphically describes how one gains expertise in this form of Buddhist *asubha* practice.<sup>1</sup> Armed with a developed mind due to his concentration-practice, he started to contemplate his body and dissect it mentally in a prolonged and intensive process. He soon saw by assiduous practice:

Not a shred of beauty can be found in the body of a human being. It is just a bag of flesh and blood and bones that manages to deceive everyone in the world into lusting after it. It is wisdom's duty to expose that deception.

Examine the skin carefully. Skin is the great deceiver. Because it wraps up the entire human body, it's the part we always see. But what does it wrap up? It wraps up the animal flesh, the muscles, the fluids and the fat. It wraps up the skeleton with the tendons and the sinews...

The truth is that the object of that desire is a fake — a complete fraud. For in reality, when seen clearly with wisdom, the body by its very nature repels desire. When this delusion is exposed in the light of wisdom, the human body appears in all its gory detail as an appalling sight.

<sup>1</sup> *Asubha*: body contemplation

The body is very important to consider. Most of our desires are bound up with it. Looking around us, we can see a world that is in the grips of sexual craving and frantic in its adoration of the human form. As meditators, we must face up to the challenges posed by our own sexuality, which stems from a deep-seated craving for sensual gratification. During meditation, this defilement is the most significant obstacle to our progress.

From our own readings of Bhagavan's writings and talks it is clear to us that he equated the ego with the identification with the body and true liberation with the vanquishing of the 'I am the body' idea:

"What is natural to the state of Self-Realisation forms the disciplinary course in the other state. 'I-am-the-body' idea will become extinct only on Self-Realisation. With its extinction the *vasanas* become extinct and all virtues will remain ever."<sup>2</sup>

One of the main distractions to equanimity of mind is sexual attraction. As a monk Ajaan Boowa realised that:

Body contemplation is the best antidote for sexual attraction. Successful body practice is measured by a reduction in the mind's sexual desires.

Interestingly the process does not conclude with feelings of disgust:

You have evoked a feeling of revulsion for it: Where does that feeling originate? From where does it come? Who or what assumes that flesh, blood and bones are disgusting? They are as they are, existing in their own natural state. Who is it that conjures up feelings of revulsion at their sight? Fix your attention on it. Where will the repulsiveness go? Wherever it moves, be prepared to follow its direction.

With the cultivation of clarity, mind rejects that to which it previously clung:

<sup>2</sup> §491, p.473. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Sri Ramanasramam, 1996.

Only the mind, and nothing else, paints pictures of beauty and ugliness. So the *asubha* images that the meditator has been focusing on as separate and external objects, are absorbed into the mind where they merge with the revulsion created by the mind. Both are, in fact, one and the same thing. When this realisation occurs, the mind lets go of external images, lets go of external forms, and in doing so lets go of sexual attraction.

Wisdom sees the human body as just a conglomeration of common material substances, and consequently relinquishes all personal attachment to it.

The brain, for instance, is a lump of matter. The brain is merely an instrument that human consciousness uses. When the *citta*<sup>3</sup> enters into a deep state of calm and concentration, the conscious awareness that is normally diffused throughout the body simultaneously converges from all areas of the body into one central point of focus at the middle of the chest. The knowing quality manifests itself prominently at that point. It does not emanate from the brain. Although the faculties of memorisation and learning arise in association with the brain, direct knowledge of the truth does not. Step by step, beginning with the initial stages of *samadhi* practice, progress in meditation is experienced and understood in the heart — and only in the heart. This is where the truth lies, and the meditator who practices correctly knows this each step of the way. When it comes to understanding the true nature of all phenomena, the brain is not a factor — it is not useful at all. The *citta*'s serene and radiant qualities are experienced at the heart. They emanate conspicuously from that point.

This is a beautiful statement which could have originated from Bhagavan himself! It is a shining proof that genuine spiritual practice transcends mere doctrine and reveals universal laws.

Ajaan Boowa took another step when he proceeded with the investigation of the mind itself and its different components:

<sup>3</sup> *Citta* : used both for relative consciousness and also for pure awareness.

The work is mentally very exhausting. Wisdom goes relentlessly through every aspect of mental activity. It works non-stop day and night.

As we investigate the *citta* thoroughly, stage by stage, the defiling elements that previously roamed about will converge into a single radiant point, merging with the natural radiance inside the *citta*. This radiance is so majestic and mesmerising that even exceptional mental faculties like supreme-mindfulness and supreme-wisdom will invariably fall under its spell at first. It's a completely novel experience, never before encountered. It amazes and appears so extraordinary, so majestic and awe-inspiring, that it seems nothing could possibly compare with it at that moment.

And why shouldn't it be? It has been an absolute monarch, ruling over the three worlds of existence for countless eons.

Although the meditator is often deceived, especially as the mind becomes more fine and is led to believe that each new state discovered is the final goal, a competent teacher will ask him to be aware of clinging to that beauty and tell the meditator to look more closely and see that this state is still changing in a subtle way. It is at this point that the valuable tool of *vichara* becomes effective:

So the quality of the *citta*'s knowing then becomes the focus of the investigation. Mindfulness and wisdom concentrate on this point, trying to discover what this knowing really consists of.

They have already investigated everything else, stage by stage, to the extent that all other factors have been successfully eliminated. But this knowing presence, which is so bright and so amazing: what exactly is it? As mindfulness and wisdom pin their concentration on it, the *citta* becomes the focal point of a full-scale investigation. It is turned into a battlefield for supreme-mindfulness and supreme-wisdom. Before long, they are able to destroy the *avijja-citta*<sup>4</sup> that, from *avijja*'s perspective, appears

<sup>4</sup> *Avijja*: ignorance about truth. The term in Sanskrit is *avidya*.



so magnificent and majestic. They now totally obliterate it; so that not even the smallest trace remains within the *citta*. When investigated with sharp, incisive wisdom until its nature is clearly understood, this phenomenon will disintegrate and dissolve away in an entirely unexpected manner. That moment of awakening could be called 'Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree' or 'The total destruction of *samsara's* cemeteries.'<sup>5</sup>

What this dramatic story of spiritual unfoldment can offer us devotees of Bhagavan is the systematic and very structured way of teachings of the Theravada tradition, starting from the bottom to the highest levels of enlightenment. It mirrors also the universal relevance of Bhagavan's teachings. We live in a time where we can easily learn about the wealth of all spiritual traditions. While each tradition has its own peculiar structure and way of expression we can see at the same time what is beyond all the different approaches, a common and therefore scientific knowledge of the path to liberation from spiritual ignorance. The structure of the Theravada schools has developed over the centuries, just as the Advaitic tradition has. There has apparently been little exchange between them. If seekers in different traditions come to very similar experiences we can with certainty conclude that the basic laws of the human mind are beyond the conditioning of the cultural context of different teachings.

Many competent spiritual seekers have expressed the conviction that the only way out of the imminent catastrophe facing our world is a change from the completely materialistic lifestyle that is destroying nature and humankind itself to a truly spiritual culture.

And who was more liberal, universal and all-embracing than Bhagavan Ramana? His presence was and is the greatest good and a true sign of our inner potential. May we all devote ourselves to his path with ever increasing enthusiasm and love. ▲

<sup>5</sup> The interested reader who wishes to read more about Ajaan Boowa's journey may do so in the compilation *Arahattamagga*, which can be downloaded freely from : [www.forestdhammabooks.com](http://www.forestdhammabooks.com)

## BOOK EXCERPT

# Master of Self-Realization

## Live According to Self-Knowledge

SIDDHARAMESHWAR MAHARAJ

MASTER OF SELF-REALIZATION An Ultimate Understanding, *was reviewed in the Aradhana issue of the Mountain Path. Sri Sadguru Siddharameshwar Maharaj was the guru of Nisargadatta Maharaj. The extract given below is from the notes Nisargadatta made when he attended the satsanghs of his guru. Copies are available with Satishji Avhad, C-11 Vishwajit Co-Op Hos. Soc., Veer Savarkar Marg, Thane (West) 400602. Tel: +91 22 25448787 or 25360233. The cost is Rs200. For readers in India please add Rs.100 for postage. The book is also available at [www.wayofthebird.com](http://www.wayofthebird.com) and [www.sad-guru.us](http://www.sad-guru.us)*

All the air, and wind, and the vital prana, both inner and outer are one. It is part of the body. Sky is all one. The luminance is one both inner and outer. If you will not take in the outer air, you are not great. You may say 'it is mine', but if you do not accept from others, you can't do without it. All of this is yours. You are all. The five elements and one Self are the same for all. You have to take from it and release in it. When you write on the surface of water, only the first letter is written,

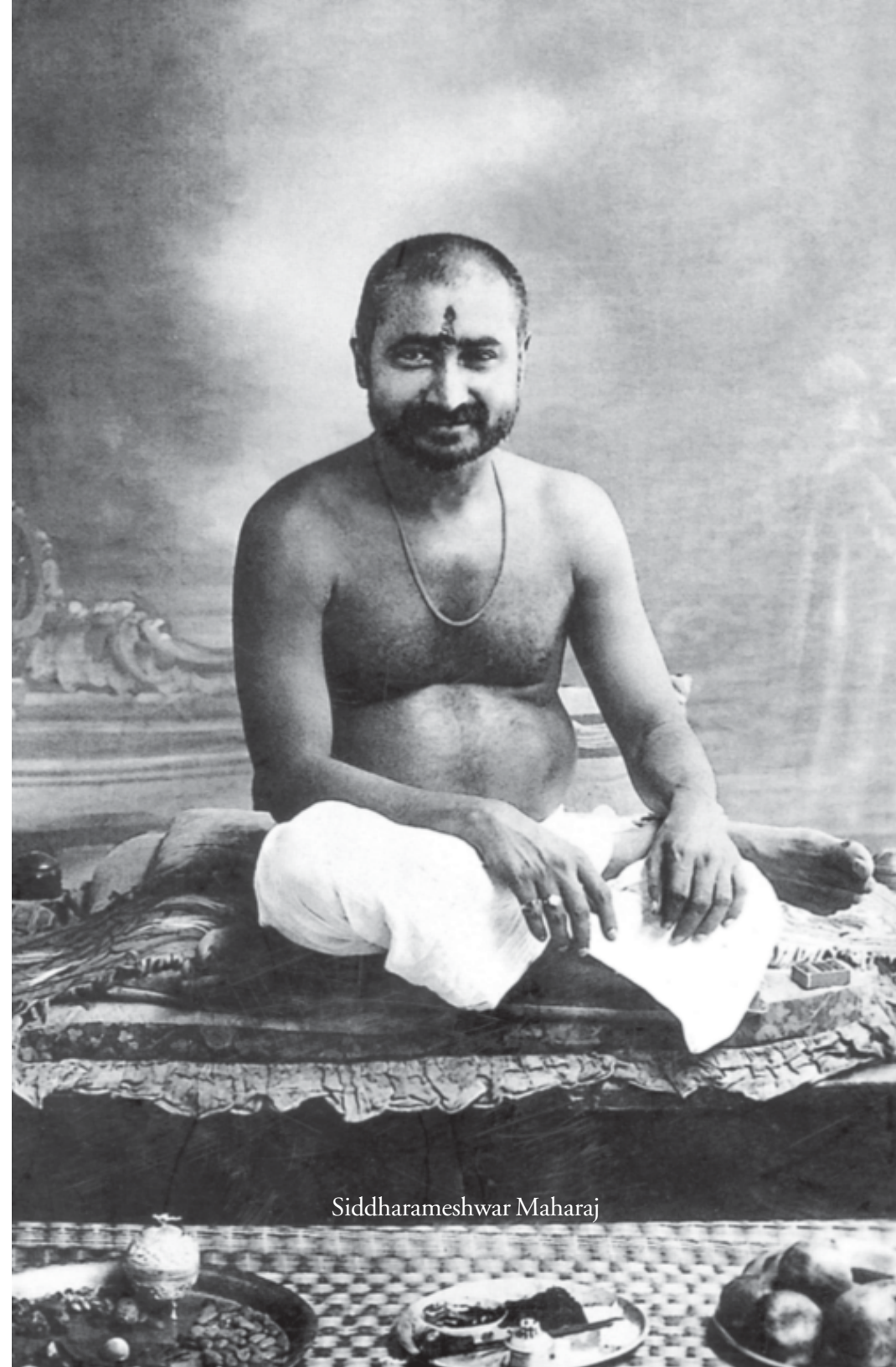
## MOUNTAIN PATH

afterwards, it does not remain while you go on to write the second letter. Such is the sequence in creation, the world appearance. This is all Undivided Brahman, spread out equally everywhere. If you gain some Knowledge, it can be taken with you to any far off places where you go.

Walk simultaneously through air, the sky, and on the earth. You cannot live by touching only one, and leaving the another. They are all together forming one body. The five elements make one Universal Body. The five elements make One Brahman, and the five elements are One with the Self. All things are One with 'This'. If Lord Ganapati (Ganesha) rides upon the mouse, the Lord is greater and if the mouse will ride on Ganapati, then the mouse is greater. The entire world is like this. The business of this world, its very function, is like this. If you are Ganapati himself, you are living in the Innermost Existence, the essential part of your being. If all the advice is absorbed by the body, what will you get? Body is the earth. It gulps all the chariots at one time, which is the right time. You should be Ganapati and put into practice what you have learned.

A small boy was told to pass stools by going to the toilet. He went there and defecated but he did not remove his trousers, or take sufficient water to clean himself. He was asked why he did this. He said, "I did what was told to me. I did not do what was not told." You do like this. How can someone tell you everything? One must understand for oneself. A child who reads everyday, who studies everyday, gives a quick reply. He can reply like this because he is continuously studying. One should study like this. You listen, then you go home, and do many other things but forget the teaching. How can you understand fully in this way? That is why everyday you have to be told again, but what is taught is not retained. The study should be fully imbibed. Life itself, all atoms, all molecules, and the Self, which is subtler than subtle, 'All This, am I'. Fire, water, sky, all the elements, all are One. There is no below, no above, no back, no front. All name and form are all false. Elephant, horse, whatever, all is Illusion, what is, is One Pure Spirit, the Self. Name and form are all deceptive.

The river of knowledge is drowned in name and form. All knowledge is like a river, but the river has become petty, little, and



Siddharameshwar Maharaj

insignificant, because of name and form. The great vastness that is the Self, is beyond name and form. By name and form, it is as if the river is drowned in the boat. Elephant, horse, and mountains are all drowned in that water, but even a sparrow cannot quench its thirst there. Brahman in the form of a sparrow cannot quench its thirst. Do not be deceived by the illusory ego of name and form. Remain as you are. The mouse should not ride upon Ganapati. Ganapati was seated on a wooden seat. The mouse climbed on his back and stole away the sweet Laddoo from His hand. He said, everyday Ganapati rides upon me but today, I am sitting on His body and eating His Laddoo. When Ganapati rides on the mouse, He gets all the powers, but if the mouse sits on the body of Ganapati, the mouse takes away all of the powers. If you conceive of yourself as a petty little creature, you will think of making more and more demands. You are certain to feel like asking for this and that. If you conceive and realize that you are the Ancient, Always Existing, Deathless Spirit, then your urge to demand anything diminishes. You do not like to be a beggar. There is more and more peace, contentment, and health. Automatically you start getting what is sufficient, and ample to meet your needs, and there is peace and contentment.

Therefore, take the vow that you yourself are Brahman that is the Inner Experiencer of all experiences. Who is the owner of the field? Is it the King, or the farmer? You have to pay levy, some percentage, to the King. He is the owner. Everything inner and outer belongs only to the King! You are but a villager. You may live in the village, that is your right, but all the authority vests in the King. Whose authority should be recognized? According to custom, a husband should not utter his wife's name, and the wife should not utter the name of her husband, because there is a belief that if you give definite name to that which has no name or form, then some spiritual merit is lost. The main meaning in this is to recognize that Brahman has no name or form.

Fancy clothes are meant for people who take pride in their appearance. What importance do they have for me? The motive to put on nice clothes is to appear presentable to others, or to indicate that you have many possessions. That is all pride. If the clothes are fine, you have to take care, if they are ordinary, there is no problem of

where to sit. One can sit anywhere. If one takes out their clothes and keeps them outside, one need not be anxious about their loss. What is yours is only what you have eaten and put into your stomach. In short, nothing outside is yours. Outer things are for people. All greed is needless. You suffer only because of ego. Give up the ego. A rich man is happy with the idea that he is rich. Only greed is prevailing in him and nothing else. You should have the attitude that 'everything in the world belongs to me', and give up greed for anything. Will your glory be reduced if you were to say that something is 'not mine'? The body is able to move about, and that is your only need. All else may be there or not, what do you lose?

Rama and Krishna were separate, but the mantra 'Ramakrishna Hari' is formed by unifying both. Both Rama and Krishna are lost, and they became 'Ramakrishna Hari'. Drop the hypocrisy of ownership and greed. The wealth of the Son of the Guru, all belongs to the Guru. Air, water, light, night, day, all are for Him only. Everything is His, so where is there any shortage?

The one who feeds the creatures inside a rock, and the one who gives food to birds living on the highest mountain peak, is only 'He' giving all, with His Own Power. On every grain is inscribed the name of the consumer. He is all. The food and He are not two. He is the tiger, and He is the horse. As He is the form, He is also the name.

When you call all the limbs of your body by different names, you call that all as 'I'. Similarly, be one with all things and all animals. Be your Self. Be your own True Self. Are the sky, water, and other elements taking on any attributes such as sitting or sleeping? They are everywhere at all times. Do not keep Unity only as a mental thing, put it into practice, and behave accordingly. As Arjuna acted upon what he had heard and learned, he acquired the highest skills. Karna did not keep up the study of Archery and therefore he could not remember it in time when he needed it. The Earth, in the form of physical body swallowed his chariot and his knowledge. If you live your Realization in your daily life, only then do you become a man of Self-Realization, a Dnyani.

*Evening, 12-12-1934*







# SRI ARUNACHALA VENBA

## Part Two

SADHU OM SWAMI

TRANSLATION BY SADHU TANMAYA CHAITANYA

21. Seekers, unable to endure any longer the scorching heat of worldliness, come and take shelter in the cool shade of the *sannidhi* (Presence) of Guru Ramana. Without any further worldly straying, they experience forever the abiding peace of the Self, which is manifest here as the Hill of Arunachala.

22. The entire forest of *vasanas* — of both good and bad kinds —, prompting the surging of the ego, is burnt down by the fire of *jnana* lit by the opening of the third eye of the Lord Ramana, who is none other than Siva in human form, for all those seekers who have surrendered to him as the supreme Sadguru. The ineffable peace that such devotees experience in their cool hearts, through the extinction of all *vasanas*, is the peace of Arunachala.

23. When intense seekers (*mumukshus*) discard as pithless straw even the exalted heavenly pleasures attainable by means of Vedic rituals (*karma kanda* or *veda purva*) and hunger only for the knowledge of the Self, the very same Vedas in their final portion (*Vedanta*) serve the liberating feast of the *mahavakya* ‘Thou art That’ to those ripened sweet souls. Arunachala is indeed the eternal silent embodiment of the ‘*Tat Tvam Asi*’ teaching.

24. All human relationships pertain only to the physical status and well being of the seeker and are not always helpful to the spiritual upliftment of one’s soul. Unlike such ephemeral and unreliable relatives, Arunachala remains forever our true and absolute relative ! Arunachala never deserts us even for a moment and finally saves us from the fearsome clutches of *Yama*, the lord of death, by revealing our true immortal essence.

25. If only a person thinks *just once* the glory of Arunachala amongst so many billions of thoughts in his long life, the fruit of that meritorious remembrance of Arunachala manifests in the form of Arunachala before his vision when he is in the throes of imminent death. As a result, he is once for all delivered from the cycle of birth and death.

26. When a sincere seeker attempts to immerse himself in the blissful *sadhana* of Self-attention, the ego [in the form of the ‘I am the body’ thought i.e. *dehatma buddhi*] instinctively fearing its own annihilation, surges forward asserting its finite individuality and shakes him out of inward *sadhana*. For the devotee of Arunachala, at such moments of slipping from Self-abidance [called *pramada* which is inattention — verily called death by *Sanatsujatha*], Arunachala declares His formless Presence in the form of ‘*aham sphurana*’,<sup>1</sup> driving away the *Yama* of *pramada*.

<sup>1</sup> *aham sphurana* is the experiential awareness of one’s ultimate identity, obtainable in *samadhi*, as pure consciousness throbbing in the spiritual heart as ‘I am’, divested of all association with adjuncts (*upadhis*) such as ‘I am so-and so’.

27. In the words of Sadguru Ramana, “You are One without a second. To see yourself as many (*jivas* and worlds) by the power of Maya contradicts the Advaitic vision and this is the only great sin. Without getting swayed by Maya, to abide as the Self is the real virtue and duty (*dharma*).” Understanding his *jnana upadesa*, ripe devotees immerse in the experience of *turiya sthithi* (which transcends all states of experience) by his Grace. Arunachala shines as the Truth of such *jnanis*, reposing in *sahaja samadhi*.

28. When a child is stricken with fear, the loving mother takes it in her own lap and caressing it with soothing words of comfort, she wards off all fear of harm from the child, infusing joy and courage. While the mother’s compassion for the child is supreme among all human relationships, the Grace and compassion of Arunachala for a genuine seeker far exceeds that of even such a loving mother. It shines in unrivalled glory with no example to match Its supreme compassion other than Arunachala Itself.

29. The divine comely form of Sri Ramana has not truly deserted us in grief-stricken tears, even for a moment. In place of a limited human body, now Guru Ramana stands shining eternally in the imperishable macro-cosmic form of Arunachala, thus ever assuaging the sense of personal loss in the bosoms of his loving devotees.

30. Sadguru Ramana by the exemplary personification of the Stillness principle in all the three aspects of body, mind, and speech all through his divine life, and further by his piercing look, has kindled the non-verbal enquiry of ‘Who am I?’ in the depths of the devotee’s heart. He thus demonstrated vividly the science of initiation through look, *chakshu deeksha*, which eventually pulverises the ego of the seeker. The unfailing impact of Sri Ramana’s gracious look is truly the missile of *jnana*. Such indeed is the power of Arunachala.

31. It is possible for a seeker to deviate from the goal of abidance in the Self due to a variety of factors like name and fame, intellectual brilliance, wealth and position, temptations of gross objects and subtle

occult powers (*siddhis*), and lose the blissful peace of immersion in the Heart. As a consequence, one may wander again outward in futile suffering. Arunachala does not tolerate such straying away from Self-attention and brings back the seeker in mysterious ways to the core of one's *antarmukha sadhana*.

32. Whatever austerities one may do, the 'I'-thought (ego) cleverly continues to survive in the form of 'I am doing this exalted mode of *sadhana*'. In order to eliminate this primal thought and thus take one to the blissful, thought-free state of Self-awareness, Sadguru Ramana instructs the seeker to enquire, "Who is this 'I' which makes such a claim?", thus facilitating the inward orientation of the mind. Enquiring 'Who is this Guru Ramana?', the seeker finds him to be none other than Arunachala Himself manifest in human form.

33. The exalted glory, attainable through great scholarship, and amassment of great wealth are truly speaking deadlier than even the cobra's venom. The latter causes only physical death while the former weans away the mind from the Self and thus perpetuates spiritual death, namely self-ignorance. Hence these are surely fit to be eschewed by a seeker of Self-knowledge. Scholarship and wealth are all attained only by the mind and for the enjoyment of the mind alone; however, the greatest good accrues only upon the annihilation of the mind itself (*manonasa*), that is, the falsification of the I-thought (*badhita ahamkara*). This alone results in supreme silence (*maha mounam*), which is verily the truth of Arunachala.

34. The *jnani* is truly no more a 'person', as attaining *jnana* irreversibly devours the individuality or personality (*vyaktivam*). The enlightened one is thus no more a limited human being but a condensed mass of pure awareness. Elucidating thus the ineffable status of a *jnani*, Sri Ramana Sadguru remained as such in his pristine Being of supreme silence of Consciousness, transcending the three states of existence (sleep, dream and waking) untouched by their alternating cycles. His skill of remaining rooted in the pinnacle of spiritual attainment is the ever effulgent Grace of Arunachala.

35. The mechanism governing the law of karma has been designed in such a manner that even after taking millions of bodies and enjoying all the experiences of the world for several cycles of creation, *karma vasanas* and *karmaphala*<sup>2</sup> never get exhausted. The only way to eradicate the endless misery of karma is to drive away the thick mass of darkness of ignorance through the rising of the sun of Self-knowledge. Arunachala is indeed such a sun of *jnana* who puts an end to all *samsaric* afflictions of desire and delusion, which are the products of primal ignorance.

36. By the power of Grace of the feet-dust of the enlightened *jnani*, which cuts through various layers of the darkness of ignorance, the disciples can attain the superhuman state of *sahaja samadhi*. Abiding in it, one ceases to find even the slightest desirable object any longer. Arunachala alone shines self-effulgent as the blissful Awareness-Existence principle in that state of supreme Self-knowledge.

37. To quell the egoistic clash that arose between Brahma and Vishnu, Arunachala alone manifested as an infinite column of fire, to reach whose top and bottom ends, the mighty deities took the form of a swan and a boar respectively. Failing in that mission they stood humbled in their pride, submitting before the Lord Arunachala who cooled down into the form of this divine Hill. He acceded to their prayers and is ever accessible to all His devotees. For them, Arunachala is the divine wealth of unsurpassed value.

38. "Hearken and come hither! The remedy in the form of Arunachala, for the malady of Maya that has overwhelmed you, is waiting here to cure you of all *samsaric* ills. Arunachala is indeed the supreme medicine" — such was the clarion call of Sri Ramana. Heeding his call, all devotees who have repaired to the vicinity of Arunachala in total faith and surrender, very soon find this Hill to be their supreme wealth and verily the priceless crown-jewel of their life. ▲

(To be continued)

<sup>2</sup> Tendencies that impel one to indulge in further actions and fruits of actions respectively. Verses 1-3 of *Upadesa Undiyar* are relevant in this context.



# BOOK REVIEWS



**SAUNDARYALAHARI OF SANKARACARYA.** Translation and Commentary by Nataraja Guru. DK Printworld (P) Ltd., New Delhi. Rs 590

Sankaracarya is alleged to have written numerous devotional works of which the *Saundaryalahari* is considered the crest jewel – not only for its depth and subtlety but also because it was composed in the *sikharini* (crest) metre having 17 syllables per foot. It is remarkable both for its poetic form, its aesthetic beauty, its devotion, and its profundity. It is considered to be the most important of the hymns composed by Sankara as well as his final work. Interestingly, this is also the last work of Nataraja Guru who wrote this translation and commentary thereon. In his 'Preliminaries' Nataraja Guru writes that he took up this task almost immediately after concluding that he had completed his life's work and had set off on a world tour.

Nataraja Guru treats the *Saundaryalahari* as a tantric hymn representing Advaita Vedanta in pictorial language and gives incredible interpretations using both Western and Eastern philosophical and psychological ideas. In the hands of Nataraja Guru, each verse unfolds its purport as he reveals the underlying structural features upon which they are based. Without his profound knowledge this work would have remained a puzzling challenge to most of its readers as indeed it has puzzled pundits and professors throughout the ages.

What will be of special interest to the reader is Nataraja Guru's predilection for dialectics. Thesis, antithesis, and synthesis are his tools. The ideas of complementarity, reciprocity, compensation, and cancellation – when taken together, form a balance and because dialectics is a dynamic enterprise, ever moving upwards towards more sublime and uplifting insights or downwards into more static and constraining states, it is a wonderful tool to reveal the movement of tantric thought.

For anyone with even a passing interest in tantra, in aesthetics, or in Advaita Vedanta, this is a gem of a book. The subject matter is difficult and the concepts the author employs are complex and deep. But the journey is well worth the effort. This is the fruit of an Advaitin's lifetime of dedication to the pursuit of the Absolute. — John Grimes



**A NEW EARTH** by Eckhart Tolle. Penguin Books India. 2006. pp313, Rs300. ISBN 978-0-14-101782-2

Eckhart Tolle states that the purpose of his latest book *A New Earth* is to “bring about a shift in consciousness, that is to say, to awaken.” And that the mere reading of the book can awaken those who are ready. This would place the book in the category of some very rarefied sacred writing, an arguable assertion for sure; nevertheless the author's presentation is most readable, accessible, and practical so would be of interest to anyone seriously concerned with personal and global transformation.

His argument starts like this: all spiritual traditions have two core insights. First, “That the normal state of mind of most human beings contains a strong element of what we might call dysfunction” — ‘maya’ in the Hindu tradition, ‘dukkha’ in the Buddhist, and then secondly, “The good news is the possibility of a radical transformation of human consciousness,” variously known as enlightenment, liberation, or awakening.

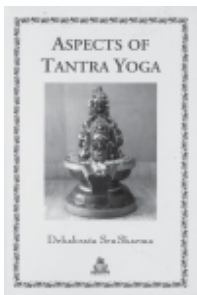
The first half is devoted to describing the ego, the root cause of this dysfunction, from its origin in the original sin of identification with form and all subsequent permutations that this action takes. Tolle shows the reader very vividly all the ‘normal’, everyday strategies that our ego uses to constantly reassure ourselves that we exist and any honest reader will certainly uncomfortably recognize all of them in themselves. But there are some which are more subtle and subversive because they seem so reasonable and defensible and even with concurrence by society at large. These include such familiar attitudes as the constant need for more, complaining and resentment, reactivity and grievance, and being right. All these emotions contribute to what Tolle calls the ‘pain body’ which he defines as a semi-autonomous energy form that lives within most human beings, thrives on negative thinking and is addicted to unhappiness. More importantly, “The pain body, however, is not just individual in nature. It also partakes of the pain suffered by countless humans throughout the history of humanity, which is a history of continuous tribal warfare, of enslavement, pillage, rape, torture, and other forms of violence. This pain still lives in the collective psyche of humanity and is being added to on a daily basis, as you can verify when you watch the news tonight or look at the drama in people's relationships.”



The 'good news'— the way out of this dysfunction comprises the second half of the book, a lot of which is a reiteration of his first book, *The Power of Now*, primarily dis-identifying with form and discovering one's true identity through being present in the now. Most of this is hardly new material as Tolle would be the first to admit, but a worthwhile and interesting reminder from an authentic source; but some of his advice verges on the simplistic and naïve as when he states, "The recognition of illusion is also its ending." If only it were this easy.

Probably due to the phenomenal international success of *The Power of Now* and his own experience as a very popular New Age guru, Tolle feels that humanity is desperately searching for a new consciousness, hence this book and his optimistic ending: "The foundation for a new earth is a new heaven—the awakened consciousness. The earth—external reality—is only its outer reflection. The arising of a new heaven and by implication a new earth are not future events that are going to make us free. Nothing is *going* to make us free because only the present moment can make us free. That realization is the awakening. Awakening as a future event has no meaning because awakening is the realization of Presence. So the new heaven, the awakened consciousness, is not a future state to be achieved. A new heaven and a new earth are arising within you at this moment, and if they are not arising at this moment, they are no more than a thought in your head and therefore not arising at all."

— S. Saman



ASPECTS OF TANTRA YOGA by Debabrata Sen Sharma. Indica Books, D 40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221 001 163pp, Rs 195. ISBN 81-86569-67-7 [indicabooks@satyam.net.in](mailto:indicabooks@satyam.net.in)

Tantra Yoga has been much misunderstood due in part to the esoteric nature of many of its practices which has fostered wild stories and plain falsehoods about its intentions. It has not been helped by the obscure and recondite texts which accidentally reinforce the image of a secret and perhaps dark society of practioners, though it has to be said that many Tantra texts advise that the teachings should remain secret lest their powerful instructions be misused. Many instructions are in code and require initiation. They are composed in a 'twilight language' with both a literal and allegorical meaning and the

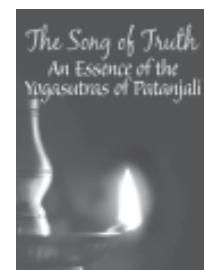
author has offered intelligent and sensible explanations to many of the paradoxical terms which for the first time have satisfied my uncertainties. Though there is a deep philosophy behind it, Tantra above all is a practical discipline (*sadhana kriya*).

It is rare one comes across a book which explains Tantra by a well-versed academic and no doubt practioner conversant with its subtle elements. The author is a scholar of the Kashmir Advaita tradition and was a disciple of the renowned Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj of Varanasi.

Tantra in its strict sense is applied to the science of mantras. There is a fundamental set of metaphysic principles which describe the nature of the world, initiatory rites, worship and other ceremonies and disciplines (*yoga*). There is an immense literature surrounding Tantra which is believed to be eternal like the Vedas but according to the author they were mostly written in the post-Upanisadic era. There is considerable controversy about its ancient links with Buddhism and the cross-fertilisation and influence. Metaphorically the Tantras are said to have emanated from the five faces of Shiva: Isana, Tatpura, Sadyojata, Aghora and Vamadeva. Tantra broadly has three main divisions: Vaisnava, Saiva and Sakta. The author concentrates his discussions on the later two and in particular, the Saiva Tantra Kashmiri tradition which is monistic in philosophy. The supreme goal is the attainment of one's divine nature, *Sivatva*.

The author has admirably succeeded in his task of elucidating the nature of man in the Tantra tradition, the role of the guru and initiation (*sakritpata*), instruction (*diksha*), the nature of mantras and modes of spiritual discipline. For those who are interested in Tantra here is a sensible, coherent and articulate book.

— Amit Ray



THE SONG OF TRUTH An Essence of the Yogasutras of Patanjali by D.V. Sridhar & Alagu Muthu. Rupa & Co. Delhi. 2008 135pp., Rs195. ISBN 978-81-291-1334-4

With the world-wide rise in popularity of yoga, the yogasutras of Patanjali are recognized as the best practical and philosophical base for the study and application of what is generally known as raja yoga. In the traditional sense yoga involves not only hatha yoga but also ethics, devotion, a deep understanding of how the mind works and ways to

bring it under control. Unfortunately the more fashionable presentations of yoga ignore these vital aspects and concentrate exclusively on the exercise of the physical body. The translators and commentators of the book under review have written with the object of rectifying this misunderstanding and abuse.

The problem most often encountered when translating into another language which lacks the exact technical expressions of the original, is how to retain the spirit as well as the exactitude of the Sanskrit. Translations swerve between dry, exact academic texts and free, loose approximations. The present authors have struck a happy balance between the two with a translation of the original text, followed by a short verse translation which is fluent and accessible but not obscure, and is above all true to the spirit of the aphorisms. It is enjoyable to read. The aphorisms are paralleled on the left-hand side of the same page by a short commentary which facilitates an understanding of the catchy, original translation. There is a complete text of the *yogasutras* in Sanskrit with English transliteration at the end of the book.

I would recommend this new translation for its accessibility and close reading of the text. It is excellent as a study guide for regular yoga students as well as a lively introduction for young beginners who will not be intimidated by the reputation of the original.

— Andrew Clement

**THE BECOMING BUDDHA** The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand by Donald Swearer. Motilal Banarsidass Pub. Delhi, 2007. 332pp, Rs494(HB). ISBN 978-81-208-3109-4 www.mlbd.com

This is a fascinating book about the rituals involved in the consecration of a Buddha image — the ceremony by which the Buddha statue comes alive. The study is based on the rituals as practised in northern Thailand. The author also gives us an explanation of the role of images in devotional life and the importance of relics and their veneration. At the core of the book is an account of the process by which through chant, sermon, meditation and the sangh of monks which culminates in the opening of the eyes of the Buddha, the key element in the ritual. The author delves into the history of the early scriptural accounts of the first Buddha image ever made; the debates over the ritual's historical origin and validity; and a comparison between various Buddhist traditions concerning this practice

in the Theravada school which is surprisingly as diverse as Mahayana and Vajrayana. There is an epilogue about the bizarre, modern trend or abuse, depends on how one views it of paying outrageous amounts of money demanded for magical Buddhist amulets in Thailand.

It cannot be emphasised enough the importance of this Buddha ceremony is for the Buddhist lay community. It engages the laity as well as monks in a direct relationship with the teachings of the Buddha. It brings the tradition alive and bridges the gap between the recondite scriptures with explicit images which speak directly to the followers. It gives people a ready focus for their attention and engenders devotion. The lengthy, complex and elaborate ceremony which makes sacred the Buddha is awe-inspiring and rightly so. The consecration of the image rehearses the life story of the Buddha and infuses it with the qualities of Buddhahood. It is no longer a lump of inert matter but a living entity. A relationship is created between the devotees and the Buddha which is alive and consequently, reciprocal. Each Buddha image has its own story and may have a specific affinity to a group or office such as that of the king.

Though the author writes with academic authority this book is pleasantly free of pedantic dryness. It is informative, comprehensible and infused with the author's fascination with this ritual.

— T.V. Ramamurthy



**MANIFESTO AGAINST PROGRESS** by Agustin Lopez Tobajas. Indica Books, D 40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221 001 117 pp, Rs185. ISBN 81-86569-78-2

In this small booklet the author comes out and says what a lot of us secretly believe. That progress as understood today is an illusion. That there is much more to life than the technical and that we have lost an immeasurable wealth of esoteric knowledge in the pursuit of merely superficial understanding. Unfortunately the manifesto has ended up as a diatribe and while ranting convinces the reader of the author's strong feelings, it seldom adds to the validity of his argument. That would need a more reasoned approach and what is even more difficult, a use of simpler language with which to offer a cogent opinion. It is a sad truth that many writers believe that the more complex their vocabulary the more potent their discourse, whereas the exact opposite is true but definitely more difficult to achieve.

— K. Douglas ▲





Swami Ramanananda Samadhi

### Aradhana

The 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bhagavan's Aradhana was observed on Saturday the 3<sup>rd</sup> May. The entire ashram precincts were filled with nadaswaran music from 3am. The early morning ceremonies began with Tamil Parayana, Mahanyasa japa, chanting of *Forty Verses in Praise of Bhagavan* and Rudrabhishekam. The Mangala Arati to the Mahalingam was performed at 10:45am. On the 2nd May there was a music concert by Ambika Kareswaran and Poorna. On the 3rd evening, there was a concert by saxophone maestro, Kadri Gopalnath.

### Installation and consecration (*Pratishta*) of Sivalinga on the Samadhi of Brahmaleena Swami Ramanananda, Past President of Sri Ramanasramam

The Samadhi of Swami Ramanananda who was Absorbed in Arunachala on 26th December 2007, which is situated adjacent to the Samadhi-Shrine of Niranjanananda Swami, received its final touches on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2008. Installation (*Pratishta*) of Sivalinga was done by Sri Madhu Stapati, the architect of the Shrine, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May and consecration was done on Friday, the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2008 with due rituals such as Sri Ganapati Homam, Sri Rudra Homam, Mahanyasa Rudrabhishekam and Maha Mangala Arati, lasting about two hours.

A simple puja which is done twice a day at the adjacent Samadhi Shrine of Niranjanananda Swami will also be done at Swami Ramanananda's Samadhi shrine.

### Mahapuja

Mahapuja which commemorates the liberation (*mukti*) of Alagamma, the mother of Bhagavan was celebrated on Thursday the 29<sup>th</sup> May. The shrine was beautifully decorated and the abhishekam was performed in front of a large crowd of appreciative ashram bhaktas.

The previous evening, Ambika Karmeswaran and Sarada Natarajan from Bangalore presented a musical feature on the life of Mother Alagammal.

### Ramana Kendras

Though we do not often get the chance to express our thanks for the work of the various Ramana Kendras round the country, their efforts



do not go by unnoticed. It is not always possible to report on their various activities due either to the late arrival of their news before the quarterly publication deadline or from lack of space in the bulletin. The Maharshi Ramana Research Centre, Nellore; the Shri Ramana Seva Sangha, Kumta; the Ramana Kendras at Chennai, Hyderabad, Delhi; and the Ramana Mandiram, Madurai, among others, continue to serve Sri Bhagavan in a laudable way by disseminating his teachings.

#### **Sarangathi Website.**

The ashram has created a new website, [www.sriramanamaharshi.org](http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org) whose purpose is to bring together devotees of Bhagavan from all over the world. The website provides the opportunity for devotees to share their experiences as well as the events at their satsangs or kendras. Devotees may check the website for the latest events at the ashram. Emails may be sent to: [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org)

#### **Annamalai Reforestation Society**

Over the years devotees would have noticed the steady increasing greening of Arunachala due to the efforts of the Annamalai Reforestation Society. After an absence of six years, Professor Uliyar Mani of the University of Baroda, and co-ordinator of the WHO collaborating Centre, revisited the work on Arunachala. He saw the changes and wrote to the president of the ARS, Sri D. Rajaram to express his appreciation. Sri Ramanasramam has been a major supporter by providing infrastructure to facilitate the project since its inception in 1989.

#### **Obituary**

Sri T.R.Srinivasan, a disciple of Swami Purushottamanandaji of Vasishtaguha, Rishikesh, passed away suddenly on 23<sup>rd</sup> March in Chennai. He was 81. He had a glorious end by taking the name of the Lord till his last breath. The previous night he was talking about all the great personalities whom he had contacted like Bhagavan Ramana, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Ramdas. He was a frequent visitor to the Ramanasramam and also moved closely with Muruganar and served him during his last days. A retired teacher by profession, he led a very simple life and shared his experiences with all the devotees who came to him. His loss is being felt by all the devotees who knew him. ▲