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Ramana Ashtottaram

5. *Om Mahoujasē namaha*

Prostration to the one who is the great cosmic light.

He is the resplendence of the cosmic light drawing all beings to Itself through the operation of grace. Why divide his being into teacher, pupil and teaching; or knower, knowledge and that which is known? He is whole, unbroken Awareness, the sole Reality. He is this living brightness, *mahouja*.

6. *Om Kāraṇodbhavāya namaha*

Prostration to the one who has descended to this world for a specific purpose.

Unlike us, Sri Ramana's birth here is not as a result of past Karmas. The infinite cosmic consciousness has chosen to limit itself to finite time and form to give spiritual instruction to the world.

7. *Om Jagathitāvatārāya namaha.*

Prostration to the one whose advent is for the well being of the world.

The *karana*, the purpose for which he was born, is the welfare and salvation of the world. An avatar helps *moksha-siddhi* (the attainment of liberation by persons) and *jagat hitam* (the well-being of the world). Bhagavan fulfils both these purposes, which are indeed mutually complementary.

8. *Om Srī Bhūminātha sthalōttitāya namaha.*

Prostration to the one who assumed human shape in the holy place of Bhoominatha.

The presiding deity Lord Shiva in Tiruchuzhi, where Bhagavan was born, is known as Bhoominatha or Tirumeninatha. The meaning of Shiva in this *kshetra* is the 'navel of the universe'.

EDITORIAL

CONFLICT

INVARIABLY in our lives we are confronted with contradictions which drive us in directions we did not foresee and, even if we did, are helpless to alter. We possibly find ourselves admired or reviled for reasons that are, at times, out of our control. In those rare moments when the world stops its demands and we are at peace with ourselves, we experience a still, quiet centre. It may seldom last more than a few moments but our memories can play it back indefinitely so as to replenish our lives.

The world we live in requires responses and often we do not understand the questions let alone know the answers. And even if we do know the question, our resources are usually restricted and our response is often a shot in the dark. It is astonishing to think that chance circumstances can contribute to creating the character that coalesces into the person we recognise as 'I'. We surprise ourselves by how little we know who we are.

On the spiritual path, in our quest for unity and our search for an identity in which our inner and outer worlds are in harmony, there is an urgent demand within ourselves that there should be no irremediable internal opposition. That in the end all will be resolved.

We have climbed a hill or a mountain, looked down on the world below and marvelled at the traffic of people and vehicles in a dance

that has its own rhythm. From our height we see the forces of action weave a ballet which can be beautiful because we are detached. It is a different story when we are part of the juggling mass, each component intent on its own way in the limited space available. Heads clash and bodies suffer. We ask ourselves how can we be removed from the tussle and yet enjoy the benefits accruing from the actions of our external world. We would like to sit on a mountain but for how long can we breathe the rarefied air?

It is no different in our internal realm. We live in a kingdom of one, one who is temperamental and inconsistent, and we ask ourselves 'Who is king?' or 'Who am I?' as Bhagavan constantly enjoined us. The responses can vary from day to day though there are some voices which rule mostly because of our ignorance, our sloth, our desire or fear.

Consistently we like to think of ourselves as good. It is rarely we wish to indulge in evil, at least not knowingly, and if we do we like to think ourselves good at it. Otherwise why would we indulge ourselves? Better to be Ravana than the man caught stealing someone's old clothes.

Krishna talks of a battle we wage if we are true to our *dharma*. It happens everyday in our lives. Sometimes we are Arjuna, but sometimes we are Duryodhana, much to our horror when we realize it. The task is to recognize this when we have the desire for honest introspection. It is understood that we all aspire for unity in whatever shape or form and reject chaos, the loss of equilibrium.

Accordingly like the single point on top of the mountain we seek that place where all opposition is reconciled and resolved.

How then do we climb to the peak above the conflict for which we find ourselves responsible?

Bhagavan is one who has arrived at the central point and abides there untouched. He shares in the immutable nature of that moment or place. He is empty of name or form because there is nowhere for him to go and no entity to go there. What we call emptiness is complete detachment from all manifested, transitory objects and that includes our subtle world of name and form created by the mind which we call 'I'.

Then why is there evil? Why are we confronted by the undesirable, the ugly and the shameful?

From the beginning of our quest to understand who we are these questions have plagued us. The answers are many, the satisfaction infrequent.

We are reminded of the Buddha who, when asked about the world, suffering and the dynamics of karma, related the story of the man who was shot by an arrow. He did not ask what kind of wood the arrow was made of, nor when or how it was made, nor who shot the arrow. He first wanted the arrow to be removed. Our predicament is the same.

We are dreamers and our dreams are not necessarily restricted to sleep. We dream when awake and we dream of triumph. And usually our triumph has nothing to do with reality. It is a

bubble, a respite from the wars in which we are involved. We see ourselves as heroes and it is others who are the cowards.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* the battlefield (*kshetra*) is the domain of action in which the individual develops his possibilities. Whatever one may say, war exists, theoretically at least, to put an end to disorder and restore equilibrium, real or imagined. It is concerned with the reinstatement of unity. This reintegration can appear as a destruction, and it emerges clearly when one considers the function of Shiva in his negative aspect.

There are moments in our lives when we have no option but to fight. Be it others, be it in ourselves when we see all too clearly the pointlessness of our behaviour. If we observe closely, the struggle can become food for thought, a *raison d'être* for living. We have a cause, and a sense of justice whispers in the corridors of our mind. We are on fire.

From a higher viewpoint all our struggles are an illusion in the sense, that the conflicts, the tensions, are all part of a whole. Each aspect cannot exist without the other. In fact, in conflict, our enemy

We are dreamers
and our dreams
are not necessarily
restricted to sleep

is ourselves, both internally and externally. We are the world. What we see is who we are.

It can be frightening, it can be liberating. With the example of Arjuna's courage who overcame despondency when he realized the mammoth effort before him on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, we need to step forth and face our own enemies. Whether we call them evil or not is irrelevant. The facts are clear and impersonal if we but look with dispassion and discrimination. The forces of nature work in us and around us. If we adopt them they become a possibility for transcendence. If we are mired in despair we will be sucked into a miasma of hatred, confusion and hopelessness. We cannot afford self-pity.

There is no question of annihilating the elements of disruption

From a higher viewpoint
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which plague us because, like everything else, they too have their reason for existence and a place in the whole. What is aimed at is to transform them by bringing them back from the illusion of separateness on that particular level of understanding and reabsorbing them into the unity.

This occurs at all levels of a person's being. Unity of

thought, unity of action and the hardest of all, the unity of both thought and action.

Each day is new. We begin again with each new dawn. Though we would like in an instant to rise above the challenges, as if on a magic carpet, we are generally akin to the tortoise, slow, but if we observe aright, steady and patient. The one instrument we have immediately at our disposal is the right intention, no matter how discouraging the circumstances may be. It is a step at a time which guides us forward to the knowledge of who we are. We read the satori legends of Zen

Buddhism, the meeting between Ramakrishna and Narendra, and the numerous encounters between the ripe aspirant and the master where something radical occurs and the student is enlightened. We hear of Bhagavan's instant enlightenment. We ask, why not us? All we do is plod along doing our duty without that fabled reward of *jnana*.

It is here we require *shraddha* or faith in the guru. For most of us the road is long with many tests of our resolve. It is the state of war we all endure. It is slow, it can be boring. Though at times, we are grateful for those moments when nothing seems to happen.

Without being affected by the external actions of the world nor the internal noise — the shrapnel of diverse thought which sends us off balance — we strive for that centre within us which is untouched and unchanged by action or thought.

This centre has its direct reflection in the world and that is why we gravitate towards Arunachala because we know intuitively that it is the Heart, the spiritual centre which directly signifies our Heart, the centre of our being. We yearn for peace, we yearn for stability. We yearn for true identity with that which we hold most precious, our sense of oneness.

Bhagavan had achieved, if one can put it that way, the perfect realization of unity within himself. All opposition has ceased and with it, all enemies have vanished. Nothing can thus harm him, both inwardly and outwardly, since the unity is reflected in both. There is no longer either 'inward' or 'outward' because even these oppositions have disappeared. Who am I and who are you are irrelevant. There is pure Being.

"'Outside' - For whom is inside or outside? They can be only so long as there are the subject and object. For whom are these two again? They both will resolve into the subject only. See who is in the subject. The investigation leads you to pure consciousness beyond the subject. Normal self is the mind. This mind is with limitations. But pure consciousness is beyond limitations". (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 42)

Permanently established in the centre of his being, Bhagavan's *svadharma* is one with the universal Dharma; there is no sense of

separation in his unity of being. He sees all things in unity and resides in the ever present, for where is past or future in the still centre of the heart?

When we identify with Bhagavan it is an affirmation of our true nature. There is no 'I' who is in opposition. He is the remedy for all our troubles. He is the gate for grace to pour into our hearts. There is no opposition, no conflict, no good nor evil. Just the abiding wholeness of grace if our hearts be open. ▲

KEYWORD

CHIT-JADA-GRANTHI

Sanskrit: *Chit*: Consciousness. *Jada*: Inert. *Granthi*: Knot

The term *chit-jada-granthi* was commonly used by Bhagavan to explain the mysterious assumption that we are the body. The body, be it physical or subtle, has no independent 'I' consciousness because it is insentient. This identification of consciousness with the insentient is called *chit-jada-granthi*, or the knot of false identification. This knot is commonly called the ego, or bondage. The ego (*ahankara*) comes into existence by the false identification with *chit* and is mistaken as the true 'I'. The ego can only exist by constant clinging to this false appearance. It lives on the food supplied by the five senses. By self-enquiry we realise that this ego which rises in the form of 'I am the body'-thought is imaginary and has no real existence.

"Though this insentient body cannot say 'I' (i.e., it does not have the feeling 'I') and though existence-consciousness (*sat-chit*, Self) has no rising and setting, between these two rises an 'I' of the measure of the body (the 'I am the body' identification). Know this alone to be the knot between consciousness and the insentient (*chit-jada-granthi*), bondage (*bandham*), and soul (*jiva*), subtle body (*sukshma sarira*), ego (*ahankara*), this mundane state of activities (*samsara*) and, mind (*manas*) and so on!"

— Reality in Forty Verses, no. 24.

“SUNK IN THE OCEAN OF BLISS”:

LEARNING FROM RAMANA

ALISON WILLIAMS

“Those who take refuge at the lotus feet of the supreme Lord of Mercy ... seeking Thy benign grace ... abide happy, sunk in the ocean of bliss.”

— Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Necklet of Nine Gems*, v.3

I am indebted to my Satguru, Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji, whose depth of love and knowledge launched me on a thrilling voyage of discovery of the fullness of Bhagavan. This article draws greatly from his satsangs and unpublished biographical work, Ramana the Maharshi.

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI and the path of Self-enquiry – these two are almost synonymous and Bhagavan's name will be forever associated with that practice. He is generally regarded as a peerless *jnani* and a masterful exponent of Advaita and Self-enquiry, and Arunachala is said to be the centre of that practice. However, to view this as the totality of Bhagavan and Self-enquiry as the only way he

advocated is to do him a disservice, and to deprive ourselves of some of the beauty and riches of his gift to us – for Bhagavan shows us so much more.

Undoubtedly Bhagavan was a *jnani* of the highest order, but he was also a consummate *bhakta* – and far too great to confine himself to one path. He fully recognized that different seekers require different methods according to the individual's need and nature. Thus we find Bhagavan giving advice on diet, lifestyle, posture, worship, attitudes to work and family life, as well as on pranayama and yoga, and answering questions on texts, scriptures, and various spiritual practices. If Bhagavan our master did not limit himself exclusively to Self-enquiry, then need we do so? It is the purpose of this article to question whether, in our zest to follow the practice of Self-enquiry, we have inadvertently overlooked other aspects of his wonderful life and teachings, equally powerful, sublime and beneficial to the seeker.

A Higher Power

Not only were Bhagavan's teachings not limited to one practice, but he valued what could not be practised, and pointed out that grace is the key. When questioned as to whether he himself did any *sadhana* replied, "I know no such period... I had no rules of meditation or contemplation."¹ He often spoke about the significance of surrender and reassured devotees that everything would come to them through the grace of the Satguru and unfold according to the will of Ishvara. In one dialogue Bhagavan said that instructions are necessary only for those who do not believe in the guidance of God,² and that those who seek freedom from misery are told that God guides everything and they need not worry about what happens. "If they are of the best type," he says, "they at once believe it and firmly abide by faith in God."³ When Prajananda

wrote asking to become Bhagavan's disciple, Bhagavan indicated that all that was needed was faith and love towards the guru.⁴ Therefore, according to Bhagavan, the "best type" of *sadhaka* is one who can hand over the reins to Guru (or God or Self which, he said, were all synonymous) and leave him to do the work. It is interesting to note here, that with regard to his own case Bhagavan stated, "The fact is I did nothing. Some higher power took hold of me and I was entirely in its hand."⁵

The Longing for Bhakti

Before probing further into the role of practice and Self-enquiry let us first take a closer look at the part Self-enquiry played in Bhagavan's own realization and how he spoke of it with his visitors and devotees. When we read Bhagavan's description of that famous event in that small room in Madurai over one hundred years ago, it is clear that the enquiry – "Who is it that dies? Is it this body? What is it that remains? Is it me? What is this thing I call 'I' anyway?" – lasted only a few moments. Similarly, the fear of death passed quickly, the same day. Bhagavan said he would lose himself "in the all-absorbing concentration on myself, on the spirit, current or force (*avesam*) which constituted myself,"⁶ and that it remained with him ever after.

This dramatic and transforming experience was expressed in Bhagavan as a kind of indefinable longing. His mood became withdrawn and pensive. He tried to give an explanation for his behaviour that would satisfy his family and told them he had an unbearable headache. "But," he said, "it was not a headache but an inexpressible anguish which I suppressed at the time."⁷ He also commented later that the event of his awakening started two new "habits" in him: introspection, and a tendency to weep whenever he stood before the images of the sixty-three Tamil Saivite saints

¹ *Sri Ramana Reminiscences* by G. V. Subbaramayya, p.153, 1994 edn.

² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* no. 596. p.591, 2000 edn.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Conscious Immortality* by M. Venkatramiah and P. Brunton, p.139, 1996 edn.

⁵ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, by Devaraja Mudaliar, 4-10-46. p.317, 2002 edn.

⁶ *Self-Realization* by B. V. Narasimha Swami, Ch. 5. p.18, 2002 edn.

⁷ *Talks*, no.419., p.404, 2000 edn.

(Nayanmars), and the deities (Shiva, Meenakshi, Nataraja) in the big temple in Madurai. Until then he had occasionally visited the temple with his playmates, but had not felt any emotional response. Now, however, he would go almost every day and stand before the images, which triggered in him a spontaneous upwelling of emotion. “Without feeling pain or pleasure tears would flow.”⁸ He also prayed, not for anything in particular, he said, but he longed for the grace and blessings of Ishvara. There was, however, one specific thing he would pray for, ardently and tearfully: the same *bhakti* as the sixty-three saints. He tells us that he yearned for that kind of *bhakti* and that, “Going to school, books in hand, I would be eagerly desiring and expecting that God would suddenly appear before me in the sky; and so I would be looking up at the sky. What sort of progress could such a one make in his studies at school!”⁹ It is to be remembered that all this came *after* his death experience. The sequence of events and Bhagavan’s description of them clearly show that this was a unique spiritual experience, rather than any kind of intellectual conceptualization or the result of any practice.

If we pause for a moment here, we cannot help but be touched by the beauty and poignancy of the situation. There is wonder at the might of the grace which struck the young Venkataraman like a thunderbolt and claimed him as its own. At the same time there is the image of the teenager, till then seemingly quite normal and enjoying the usual schoolboy activities, suddenly swept off his feet by an overwhelming and life-changing experience, possessed by something that was compellingly fascinating (that “higher power” or *avesam*) yet for which he had no words and apparently nobody he could turn to for an explanation or guidance. In addition, the boy had to endure hostility from his schoolmates and older brother towards his abstracted demeanour, as well as waves of intense longing.

⁸ *Self-Realization*, Ch. 5, p.19, 2002 edn.

⁹ *Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar, entry for 18-3-1945, p.2, 2002 edn.

Arunachala drew me to him¹⁰

After about six weeks of struggle, stung by a comment from his brother, Bhagavan immediately resolved to leave home for Arunachala, which had held a strong attraction for him since he was a young boy. He felt that his brother’s taunts were a call from his divine father. As he wrote in his farewell note, “In obedience to *his* command, *I am going in search of my father*” (italics added). But it was not his own father he was seeking. It was rather that he had undergone a transformation that had changed him forever and had awakened him to the presence of something immense, mysterious, and great; that “something great” he called the father. This was his personalized way of expressing whatever it was that had possessed him for the last six weeks, and his urge to make it more concrete and

To him, Arunachala was
the concrete form
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and an outward symbol
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go deeper into that experience. To him, Arunachala was the concrete form of this inner experience and an outward symbol of what he had realized. He simply had to be united with it. In Madurai he was unable to interest himself any longer in mundane or domestic

matters, and until he arrived at the feet of the object of his love – that for which he had felt *sphurana*¹¹ for as long as he could remember – he remained restless and, as he said, suffering inexplicable anguish.

When Bhagavan finally arrived in Tiruvannamalai it was like a home-coming for him. He hurried straight to Arunachaleswara Temple, where all three compound doors were open, as also the inner sanctum, yet curiously there was not a single other devotee

¹⁰ *Eight Stanzas to Arunachala*, v.1, *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.101, 2002 edn.

¹¹ Sanskrit: throbbing, glittering, springing forth.

present. Arunachaleswara welcomed its son with immediate *darshan*. Later, it blessed him with a natural *abhishekham* in the form of a brief shower of rain.

We might say that Bhagavan's arrival at the feet of his divine father, Arunachala, was in a sense the culmination of his own enquiry into his identity: "Who am I? – Ah, I am the loving son of That, Arunachala." Arunachala had pulled him all his young life and he was now able to fulfil that pull by staying in its proximity. He expressed his identity in various ways: he called Arunachala his Beloved, his bridegroom, his Guru, his father, his mother, Shiva, his lodestone, and the remainder of his life was spent in unending expression of this love. Bhagavan first lived at the foot of the Hill, then on it, then again at its base. He frequently walked around the Hill on *giri pradakshina*, he climbed all over it as if unable to caress it enough – in fact he once claimed that there was not an inch of the Hill he had not explored. Even in his last days when his body was weak and wracked by rheumatism and sickness, he insisted on strolling on his beloved Hill as long as he could walk. He wrote exquisite poems of adoration to Arunachala and he attributed his own attainment solely to its grace. As Bhagavan lay on his sick-bed shedding his grace on devotees to the last, he spent his final moments in the body listening to the chanting of "Arunachala-Shiva", tears of emotion trickling down his cheeks.

Was this not a great love affair? If Bhagavan had realized the Self solely through Self-enquiry, what need would there have been for him to come to Arunachala? He could have stayed more comfortably in his home and avoided distressing his family by his sudden disappearance. If he came only to honour the Hill and pay tribute to Lord Arunachaleswara, why did he stay on? During the more than fifty years he spent there, why would Bhagavan not leave the Hill even for one single day?

Taking Refuge – the Beginning and the End

It is commonly held that Bhagavan's state was complete after his "death experience". Of course, this is true in one way, but in another way, it was a beginning rather than an end – the beginning of finding

love, living in love, of falling into his true identity – and then the ongoing enjoyment of the expression of that identity with his divine father. It seems that Bhagavan lived in an ever-deepening, ever-expanding, experience of that. With every breath he inhaled his Beloved, drew closer and experienced it more and more, enjoying that experience until his very last breath.

If it is true that in poetry a person comes closest to revealing their soul, then even a cursory glance at Bhagavan's poems would identify Arunachala as the core of his being. See the outpouring of love and ardour in the Five Hymns! How full of passion they are and how complete – could anybody express it in a better way or add anything further? They are almost the definitive word in devotional love poetry and emotional expression. And it is significant that these were the only works that Bhagavan wrote spontaneously, without being asked by devotees. The poems clearly indicate Bhagavan's disposition for surrender to one's object of love (Arunachala, in his case) and dependence on the grace of the Guru.

"Those who take refuge at the lotus feet of the supreme Lord of Mercy presiding over Arunachala – their minds free of attachment to riches, land and relatives, and to caste, and made ever purer by seeking Thy benign grace – these rid themselves of darkness, and in the steady light of thy ever-protecting grace, which shines like the golden rays of the rising sun, they abide happy, sunk in the ocean of bliss."¹²

Observe how Bhagavan reassures us: if we take refuge and seek grace, we will be happy and blissful. It is so simple! In *Five Stanzas to Sri Arunachala*, Bhagavan first acknowledges that meditation practices may bring us to fulfilment:

"Abandoning the outer world with mind and breath controlled, to meditate on thee within, the yogi sees your light, oh Arunachala, and finds delight in you."

¹² *Necklet of Nine Gems*, stanza 3, *Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.95, 2002 edn.

But in the last verse Bhagavan leaves no room for doubt over what is the ultimate and what should be our highest goal:

“He who dedicates his mind to you, and seeing you always beholds the universe as your figure, he who at all times glorifies you as none other than the Self, *he is the master without rival*, being one with you, oh Arunachala, and lost in your bliss.”

When we investigate the daily life of this “master without rival”, we see that every moment was indeed an expression of his remarkable joy in and love for Arunachala – a “glorifying” of his god. Thus to me, Bhagavan’s greatest and most powerful teaching is his life itself, not the answers he was prompted to give to questions on philosophy and various practices, inspiring though they are. His love for Arunachala was revealed in his love for all and everything, including plant and animal life. We see him leading a life supremely carefree and happy. There was a majesty in his self-containment and dispassion, needing nothing and sharing everything. Bhagavan himself spoke about the exhilaration of living off alms, with no possessions. Of his early days on the Hill, he said, “I felt like a king, and more than a king.”¹³ When he tells Devaraja Mudaliar, “You cannot conceive of the majesty and dignity I felt while begging,” we too can sense the thrill of his blissful liberated existence.¹⁴

Love...in everything you do

Bhagavan never gave himself any airs or graces; he participated fully in ashram chores and was conspicuous for his refusal to allow the ashram authorities to give him any special treatment. What was good enough for him was good enough for all the devotees, and vice

Bhagavan’s greatest and
most powerful teaching
is his life itself

¹³ *Ramana Maharshi*, Ch. 3, p.17 by K. Swaminathan, 1979 edn., pub: National Book Trust.

¹⁴ *Day by Day*, 30-5-46. p.240, 2002 edn.

versa. His compassionate love showed itself in his round-the-clock accessibility and he had nothing of what we would call a personal life. All were received equally, and his consideration for animals is well-documented. “You cannot love God without knowing Him nor know Him without loving Him. Love manifests itself in everything you do,” said Bhagavan.¹⁵ In a continuous glorifying of his God and manifestation of love, Bhagavan would undertake the most mundane tasks with utter care and attention. With what focus would he prepare the lunchtime *rasam*, or carve a stick, or polish a cooking pot – diligence and dedication were not confined to discussions of lofty spiritual matters! Indeed, we may discern that Bhagavan’s entire life was one continuous flow of worship. Nor was Bhagavan always serious. On the contrary, he delighted his devotees with his wit and keen sense of humour. He enjoyed a joke and was himself a great story-teller and gifted mimic.

If you could trust your guru...

Thus in Bhagavan we have a fully-rounded human being, living in love, inspired by a divine love, and radiating a divine love that touched the hearts and minds of thousands – and still does – yet leading a simple and natural life.

Bhagavan shows us the way to be fully human, to realize our full “humanhood”; he is an example of fully realized humanity. His life is an intimation of what is possible for each of us. By steady moment-to-moment example, as one who realized his full human potential, he shows us the way. His awakening was truly an awakening of the heart, in the fullest meaning of the word – his heart’s desire and his heart’s subsequent fulfilment.

Bhagavan shows us
the way to
be fully human,
to realize our
full humanhood

¹⁵ *Crumbs from His Table*, p.31, by A. Ramananda Swarnagiri, 1995 edn.

So what is the place of Self-enquiry in all of this? We have already seen that for Bhagavan it lasted just a few seconds. What about Bhagavan's teachings – how do they apply to us? “Submit to me and I'll strike the mind,” Bhagavan has promised.¹⁶ He even told us to be like the 1st class railway passenger who tells the guard his destination, locks the doors, and then goes to sleep. “The rest is done by the guard. If you could trust your Guru as much as you trust the railway guard, it would be quite enough to make you reach your destination. Your business is to shut the doors and windows and sleep. The guard will wake you up at your destination.”¹⁷

Despite this firm assurance from our Master, we find it difficult to really close the doors and sleep. We strive and get frustrated and anxious. The ego turns us into 2nd class passengers, unable to let go and trust the Satguru to take us to our destination. As Bhagavan said, “The ego is a very powerful elephant which cannot be brought under control by anyone less than a lion – who is none other than the Guru.”¹⁸ Just as a mother gives her child some toy to keep it occupied so that she will not be hindered in her work of taking care of the child's needs, the guru prescribes some spiritual exercises so that we will not create new obstacles (*vasanas*) and hinder him in his work of shaping us to spiritual perfection. The practice of Self-enquiry can help to loosen the ego's grip and is useful in bringing the wandering mind back to its source, where Bhagavan, the inner guru, can pounce on it and destroy it. As Bhagavan says in *Eleven Verses*, “What a wonder it is! Such a destroyer of lives is this magnificent Arunachala which shines in the heart.” And how does it work? – we don't know! Even Bhagavan declares, “Its action is mysterious, past human understanding.” We only know that the moment we get to the source, the enquiry ends.

¹⁶ *Ramana Arunachala*, “The Direct Path”, p.39, by A. Osborne, 1961 edn.

¹⁷ *Ramana Smrti*, centenary souvenir 1980, from the article, ‘The Bhagavan I Knew’ by Krishna Bhikshu. Also in the author's Telugu biography *Ramana Leela*.

¹⁸ *Talks*, no. 398. p. 384, 2000 edn.

Meaningful Self-enquiry

Though this enquiry seems to be a simple and direct method, by itself it does not suit everyone. Bhagavan acknowledged this several times and said that Self-enquiry suits only mature souls.¹⁹ The trouble starts when we are all prone to list ourselves in this category, subconsciously or otherwise. One of the reasons for this may be the mistaken notion that Bhagavan taught and favoured only Self-enquiry, and that to follow Bhagavan is to be constantly reiterating, “Who am I?” so we stick to it rigidly, when our personality, or even our mood, is not really suited to it. This may lead to unspoken frustration with our spiritual progress.

Bhagavan told us, “Enquiry is not the only way. If one does *sadhana* with name and form, or *japa*, or any of the methods with determination and perseverance, one becomes THAT. According to the capacity of each individual, one spiritual practice is better than another and several shades and variations of them have been given. Everyone is born with the *samskaras* of their past lives. One method will be easy to one person and difficult to another. *There can be no general rule.*”²⁰ (italics added). There are many instances of Bhagavan encouraging seekers to stick to other forms of *sadhana*. Clearly, he never prescribed an all-purpose rule for his devotees.

In that case, why the common impression that Bhagavan taught only Self-enquiry? It is true that Bhagavan repeatedly said in reply to

First find
out to
whom the
question arises,
or
first know
the Self and
everything
will be known

¹⁹ *Spiritual Instruction*, Chapter 2, p. 53, 1999 edn.

²⁰ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma, letter of 29th Nov 1947, p.275, 1995 edn.

questions, “Know, or find out the questioner first.” However, if we examine the recorded dialogues, it is evident that Bhagavan did not relish being dragged into theoretical or academic discussions. Speculation on metaphysical concepts such as the origin of the universe, the occult, etc., did not appeal to him. Very pragmatically he would bring the questioner to their senses by saying, “First find out to whom the question arises,” or “First know the Self and everything will be known.” It was an effective technique of stopping the questioner in his or her tracks and turning them inwards to the source of Self. His close devotees were well aware of this and used to call it his *Brahmastram* (invincible divine weapon). Whenever they wanted an answer from Bhagavan they would first beg him not to use his *Brahmastram*; Bhagavan would laughingly agree and then give them the detailed explanation they were after.

At this point we may feel that there is an apparent contradiction: on the one hand Bhagavan is saying that Self-enquiry is only for a few, for the mature, and on the other hand, he says that the best *sadhaka* is one who surrenders and depends solely upon the guru’s grace, leaving everything to him. We may wonder whether such childlike dependence can ever be termed “mature”. In fact, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” Actually, it is the spiritually mature soul who realizes the futility of his or her own efforts, recognizes their helplessness, and learns to depend on the grace that will be showered on them more and more. At this stage the practice of enquiry may arise naturally and spontaneously, as it did with the mature soul called Venkataraman, at the extraordinarily tender age of sixteen. If the enquiry takes form in this way, then it will undoubtedly bear fruit and propel us towards our goal.

Finding Our Own Arunachala

Once Duncan Greenlees, a British devotee, was alone with Bhagavan in the hall. He was reading a book and Bhagavan asked him what it was. When Greenlees told him it was about Vedanta, Bhagavan retorted, “Read Milarepa!” (Bhagavan was referring to the biography of the Tibetan yogi, Milarepa, which the editor, Oxford

don W. Y. Evans-Wentz, had recently presented to the ashram).²¹ This apparently small incident tells us much (for one thing, it was very unusual for Bhagavan to speak English). Milarepa is renowned as an extraordinary saint, who as a seeker was so severely tested by his guru, Marpa, that it seemed practically like torture. However, perseverance and the longing to reach his goal triumphed – *but only when backed by the grace of his guru*. It is as if Bhagavan is saying, “Get some juice into you! Understand what it is really like to live and suffer through love and to experience devotion to one’s Beloved and an intense desire for fulfilment; see how the realization comes only at the instant the guru bestows his grace!”

To his close devotees Bhagavan would often recommend reading the lives of saints and he was fond of recounting stories of their lives (at such moments he would sometimes be moved to tears and unable to continue). Bhagavan said that the only sacred text he had read before coming to Tiruvannamalai was the *Periapuranam* – the lives of the sixty-three Saivite saints referred to above – and the Bible. Let us read the lives of saints, learn from their struggle and its resolution and go into it deeply. Let us not limit ourselves to a dry practice that shields us from truly experiencing life’s vicissitudes or feeling the highs and lows of this human existence, nor use *sadhana* as an excuse to cower from life. Don’t let’s worry about becoming divine, let us first try to become fully human.

Ramana himself said he never knew of any philosophy until he came to Arunachala. It was not a philosophy that drove him out of his house in Madurai and he had no longing or prayer to be released from *samsara*. “All that idea and talk of *samsara* and bondage I learned only after coming to this place and reading books”.²² It may have appeared that, for the first few years after arriving at Arunachala, Bhagavan mortified his body (“seeming *tapas*” as Arthur Osborne

²¹ *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, p.342, 1995 edn.

²² Sri Sainathuni Sarath Babuji’s unpublished *Ramana the Maharshi*.

aply termed it), but Bhagavan tells us this was not the case. Rather, he was simply immersed in and enjoying the bliss that engulfed him. We have seen how, later, this was expressed in myriad ways in his daily life.

Let us take our cue from Ramana and try to discover what it is that triggers our own love and desire for union, what it is that inspires us. And when we find it, we should stop at nothing to foster it and allow it to rule our lives. The object may be Arunachala, it may be Bhagavan, our guru, a deity, or any other form. Bhagavan said even an idealized form of beauty would do, but we should stick to it one-pointedly.²³ Once that love, that passionate interest is triggered, there is no need for any other practice. Or rather, it is then that the real practice begins, the real *sadhana*.

Being a I class passenger is not so easy – can we sleep? Can we trust the conductor? Are we sure we are on the right train? Why is it going so slowly? Sometimes it even seems to stop or go backwards... we will occasionally be assailed by such doubts and even despair. But when we have such a magnificent example in the life of Bhagavan, when he has clearly shown us the way, and when we still have the palpable presence of his being, is it not perverse to turn away from this? By all means let us make use of whatever tools we can, including Self-enquiry, but the backdrop of all our activities should be the object of our love, the *sruti* note of our existence.

So let us take up the challenge and aim for the highest; to be, in Bhagavan's words, masters without rival. Let us pray for the grace of Bhagavan that we may glorify him at all times, see the whole universe as him, and truly become one with our own Arunachala. ▲

²³ *Talks*, no.27, p.27, 2000 edn.

ULLADU NARPADU

BASED ON LAKSHMANA SHARMA'S
COMMENTARY

first benedictory verse

S. RAM MOHAN

Sri Lakshmana Sharma was a lawyer by profession and served for a while as a judge in Pudukottai State, but most of his life he was devoted to Vedanta and to naturopathy.

A committed devotee, Lakshmana Sharma made a deep study of Sri Bhagavan's teachings. Once in the late 1920s Sri Bhagavan asked Lakshmana Sharma whether he had read Ulladu Narpadu. Lakshmana Sharma replied that he had not, because he was unable to understand the classical style of Tamil in which it was composed, but added that he would like to study it if Sri Bhagavan would graciously teach him the meaning. Sri Bhagavan then started to explain in detail the meaning of each verse, and Lakshmana Sharma, being a lover of Sanskrit, started to compose Sanskrit verses embodying the meaning of each Tamil verse as it was explained to him. He rendered all the verses of Ulladu Narpadu into Sanskrit within a few months. Sri Bhagavan appreciated his sincere efforts and once remarked, "It is like a

great tapas for him to go on revising his translation so many times.”

Lakshmana Sharma eventually published the final version of his translation of Ulladu Narpadu in Sanskrit verse under the title Sri Ramana Hridayam, and he also wrote Maha Yoga in English and Ulladu Narpadu Urai in Tamil, encapsulating the understanding of Ulladu Narpadu that he gained from the detailed explanations he received from Sri Bhagavan.

The first editions of Maha Yoga and Sharma's Tamil commentary on Ulladu Narpadu were both published privately by him. The Sarvadhikari of the ashram Sri Niranjanananda Swami took over the publication of both books and the second edition of the commentary was published by the ashram in 1938.

Lakshmana Sharma had a passion for nature cure. Apart from writing a book on the subject, he was the founder-director of the Nature Cure Institute at Pudukottai and editor of the monthly journal Life Natural.

He passed away on May 3rd 1965 at the age of 86.

BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARISHI has, by his resplendent spiritual presence, communicated spiritual knowledge (*sat vidya*) essentially in silence. His instruction (*diksha*) was primarily through eye contact (*nayana*). However at the request of the devotees, he often gave instructions in verse form and occasionally at the request of the devotees he also rendered into Tamil, translations of important spiritual texts such as *Vivekachudamani*, *Devikalottaram*, *Atma Sakshatkara Prakaranam*, and selections from *Bhagavad Gita*.

The most important portion of Sri Ramana's teachings in Tamil is contained in what is called as "Ramana Prasthanam Thrayam" viz., *Aksharamanamalai*, *Ulladu Narpadu* and *Upadesa Undiar*. The *Ulladu Narpadu* contains 40 verses on Reality. It is a very important work in the annals of Vedanta which conveys Reality of the Beingness (*ulladu*) of the soul (*jiva*) in forty Tamil *venba* verses. Here Bhagavan instructs the aspirant about the direct path of attaining the state of

Absolute Reality or the non-dual Self, in which he was absorbed throughout his life.

The following commentary of the first benedictory verse is based on a lucid commentary in Tamil by Lakshmana Sharma ("WHO").

The original set of forty verses did not contain any benedictory verse or auspicious *mangala venba*. It is said that Sri Ganapati Muni felt that although the work is on Absolute Reality, it is customary to start any work with a benediction. Hence, Bhagavan wrote two *venbas* to satisfy tradition and this request.¹

There are two *venbas* which mark the auspicious beginning of this commentary. The very first verse indicates the state of identity or abidance in the non-dual Self.

In the second verse, the Truth of the Supreme Being as the personalised aspect *Isvara* of the self is shown as the bestower of liberation to the devotees who surrender themselves to his grace. The two verses encapsulate the substance of the book. It is then appropriate to study in depth these two verses to facilitate the full understanding of this significant work by Bhagavan.

The First Benedictory Verse:

Unless there is an absolute Reality, how can there be a sense of being or isness? Can awareness of the absolute Reality be in the absence of that Reality? Since that Reality abides sans thought, in the Heart (*Hridayam*), how and by whom can it, called the Heart, be thought of? Know that the only way to meditate on that absolute Reality is to abide thought-free and continuously in the Heart.

¹ A *venba* is a metre using four-feet per line of quatrain except the last one which has three. The second syllable of the first and second line must be the same. The starting syllable of each foot as also the third and fourth whether long or short consonant is decided by the pattern of the previous foot. Special rules govern the fifteenth foot, and assonances. The *venba* is one of the toughest metres of Tamil.

Explanation

If an Absolute Reality or Truth is not in existence how can any notion of 'being' arise in an individual? Undeniably there does exist a Reality which gives us such a notion of isness. Thus as stated in the above verse: "Can awareness of the absolute Reality be in the absence of the Reality?" The answer is an emphatic 'No'. The absolute Truth and the awareness of it are the same. There is no process of knowing it. It is simply there in an absolute state and dwells in the Heart.

When it is stated that the Reality is in the Heart, it does not refer to the physical heart. The Reality itself is the Heart. In that Reality devoid of an 'other', there is no place therefore for thought, because thought implies the existence of more than one entity: the thinker and the object of thought. Since nothing else really exists, there is no scope for the Reality to be objectified through thought (by another being). Continuously abiding in the state of being with that Reality where thoughts do not arise, who can think about it? This constant abidance in the real and natural state of the Self could as a process be said to be 'meditating on the Self'. Though it is said to reside in the Heart, it is (more correctly) the Heart itself.

Commentary

In the Tamil verse there are only three sentences. The auspicious beginning is made by stating the nature of the Reality which is the subject of the work. It is said that the meditation on the Real is the same as being identical with the Reality, and as Bhagavan is permanently established in this identity, the customary *mangalam* of abiding in the meditation state on the Self (i.e. thought-free state) is thus fulfilled.

Unless there is an absolute Reality, how can there be a sense of being or isness? Can awareness of the absolute Reality be in the absence of that Reality?

This first sentence of the verse has two meanings.

The first meaning is:

i) *If there is not something Real, how can there be a sense of reality (sat)?*

Here it is conclusively stated that there is an Absolute Reality. The purport of this sentence is that the individual soul (*jiva*), the personal God (*Isvara*) and the world (*jagat*), all of which appear to be real, are not so. There should necessarily be a substratum (*adhibhthanam*) for their appearance. The meaning conveyed here is that the only thing that exists is the Reality, which is called Brahman in the Upanishads. The meaning was explained by Bhagavan himself as follows: "Everyone sees both himself, the seer, and the world, the seen. He also believes that these two are real. If these two were real as he thinks, then they should have a continuous existence; they should not appear and disappear. However, there are continued interruptions in their apparent existence. Actually these two appear only in waking and dreaming states and disappear totally during the state of deep sleep. That means they appear only when the mind is active. When there is no mind they do not appear at all. Therefore, the seer (*drik*), the *jiva*, and his spectacle of the world *drshya* are only thought-forms and hence they are unreal. The only Reality is that which shines uninterrupted. It is the source from which arises the mind and in which it merges".²

The same meaning is conveyed in verse seven. There it is stated that what shines with interruption is unreal and that which shines continuously without a break is real.

Gaudapadacharya says, in the *Mandukya Karika*: "The Reality is never non-existent, the unreal never has real existence; whatever is

**The Reality is
never non-existent,
the unreal never
has real existence**

² We are unable to locate the reference in Ramana literature and presume the quote is taken directly from Lakshmana Sharma's personal notebooks — Editor.

non-existent before and after but which appear to exist only in intervals is really non-existent in that interval also.”

But then, what is that intelligence (*buddhi*) by which the three-fold entity of the soul (*jiva*), God (*Ishvara*) and the world (*jagat*) are seen? Do they appear by an intelligence that exists apart from the Brahman? Is the Brahman an insentient thing? Or is it not so? Or is Consciousness (*chit*) an aspect of Brahman? Or is Brahman itself Consciousness? Is Consciousness a quality of the Brahman or an aspect of its activity? All these questions are answered through the second meaning of the first sentence of the verse under consideration.

The second meaning is:

ii) *Is Consciousness of Reality different from that Reality?*

The Consciousness by which the Reality shines whether in the form of unreal world or as it really is, is not other than the Reality i.e., the Consciousness itself is that Reality. There is no need for any infinite regression regarding this Reality. There is no Consciousness other than Self, it shines by itself (*svaprakasha*).

Due to the darkness of ignorance (*maya*) the Self is seen as the world. When seen by the light of Consciousness, the delusion disappears, and the Self is the same as the Self-effulgent Reality-Consciousness-Bliss (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*).

Another aspect of the Truth is implicit in this first sentence. Since it is declared that apart from Brahman there is no conscious entity, it follows that the so-called ‘soul’, which appears as a conscious entity other than Brahman is an illusionary being. This imaginary state was earlier referred to as ‘a seer of the world’. In fact this seer of the world, the *jiva*, is an inseparable part of world-appearance. All of them appear together — the world, the individual soul and the administrator of the world (*Ishvara*). The entities are created by a seeing mind. This is clearly explained by Bhagavan in the first verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* which follows the two benedictory verses.

This individual self (*jiva*) is referred to by Bhagavan as the ‘false-self’. In Vedantic texts the *jiva* is described as the reflection of Consciousness (*chidabhasa*). It is this *jiva* that the ignorant cherish

as their own Self. They name it *jivatma* to distinguish it from *paramatma*, as if there were two selves.

In reality, apart from Brahman, there is no being which answers to the name of the ‘soul’ (*jiva*). Also in Brahman there is no difference as ‘seer’ and the ‘seen’. The instructions here convey that it is wrong to say that Brahman/Self *possesses* Consciousness. Consciousness has no attribute or activity. Consciousness is not the feature of the mind. What we normally refer to as consciousness refers to the mind’s consciousness, *chitta* which has a transitory existence. In deep sleep the mind’s consciousness is in abeyance. It becomes insentient, whereas the Consciousness nature of the Brahman (*chit*) is not like that. This Consciousness is beyond time. It is eternal and it is changeless. The Supreme Consciousness is unaffected by space or time or any other cause; it remains undiminished even in a solitary state when the world is non-existent.

The second sentence of the benedictory verse states:

Since the Reality (*sat*), dwells thought-free in the Heart, how and by who can Itself, called the Heart, be meditated upon?

The sentence means that Brahman is beyond mind. It is tranquil and it abides in a place called the Heart. The significance of this teaching is that Brahman or Atman is ever-shining (*svaprakasha*). It is seen in a place where there is no mind. That place is called the ‘Heart’. It is not self-evident to the mind when it is active. One becomes aware of it only when there is no mind. One is not aware of its shining because mind is turned outwards away from the light and concentrates on the forms of perception, and not on the substratum of perception. In this extroverted state of mind, Brahman Itself appears as the world and the soul in it. But Brahman cannot be an object of meditation for the mind, as meditation is only a mental process of the illusory soul. Bhagavan gives the reasons in verse 24 why the extroverted self cannot think of Brahman.

So long as the mind is extroverted or turned outwards, Brahman remains concealed, not being seen as the Triad but as separate

entities: the individual soul, the personal God and the world. But when the mind is turned inward and made to abide there, then the mind gets withdrawn into the Heart. There it loses its quality as mind and becomes merged in Reality. Thereby that trinity, which itself is a mental creation, ceases to appear and from its point of view therefore, does not obstruct Brahman which can shine as it really is, as the Absolute Self. There is no mind to see it, as it has ceased to exist.

Here it is mentioned that Heart is a place where the Atman dwells. In reality Heart is not something other than Brahman. Because Brahman is all pervading there is not a separate place where we can envelop

it. It is infinite. The Heart has been stated here as a dwelling place solely for the purpose of inspiring in the aspirant the necessity to turn the mind inwards from the external towards the Brahman, which is itself the Heart. Brahman and the Heart are not two but only one. That is why it is called the Heart, as stated by Bhagavan.

From the foregoing arguments, it can be seen that Atman or Brahman will be “experienced” only in a state when there is no thought; in a state where mind is absorbed in the Heart. It cannot be observed or experienced unless the mind is turned inwards, because when the mind is turned outward the trinity of the individual, God and the world get projected on the substratum known as Brahman. It will thus be clear that Atman can be experienced by only those whose minds are turned inwards.

The other reason is that Atman is one without a second. So there is no person separate from it. That is why Bhagavan calls the individual Self which regards itself as the knower (*jnata*) of external things as the false self (*mithyatma*) or the pretender self (pretender in the sense of false-knowledge). Bhagavan used the word ‘*poli uyir*’ in Tamil which denotes a false entity. The individual soul like the rest of the world is only a mental creation. This means that there is

Atman or Brahman
will be experienced
only in a state
when there is
no thought

no individual soul that survives in the experience that dawns after the mind abides within. The Brahman is not an object for meditation.

How then is the Heart to be reached? If there is neither the surviving mind nor the soul in that state, how does the real Self, which is Brahman become known?

Bhagavan provides the answer in the last sentence. He says:

Meditating on Self means simply to dwell (in a thought-free state), as it is in the Heart, as the Heart.

This is the directive. Meditation means abiding in the Heart that is Brahman which is without any attribute, without any thought. When the mind dives into the Heart, it becomes one with Brahman. The Brahman itself is the Heart, thus mind loses its separate identity as mind and it dissolves in the tranquility which is the nature of Brahman. Then it is in the true state of meditation, which is also the state of ‘experience’ of the real Self.

Though the state described is called meditation (in Tamil Bhagavan says *ullade*, that which is), it is not the mental meditation when there is a triad of the meditator, the object of meditation, and the process of meditation. In this verse true meditation is described as a state of identity with the Self without the arising of any thought. The true state of meditation as described by Bhagavan is a natural state (*sahaja sthiti*), where there is no arising of a thought wave. Generally whatever is really good and desirable is included in this State. It is the fourth state of the existence which is described in the Upanishads as the state of deliverance (*mukti*) which is the goal of all spiritual endeavour. The direct path in which the mind is turned inward to abide in the heart is described later in Verse No. 28. ▲

(To be continued)

BHAGAVAN IN MY LIFE

I. S. MADUGULA

THIS is a brief sketch of how I came under the influence of Bhagavan and what it means to me. Or, rather, it is an account of how Bhagavan's grace has enabled me to come into his fold, even though I never actually saw him during his lifetime. For, without his grace, I believe I would not have had the privilege of being exposed to his life and teachings.

I believe it was around June of 1950 when, as a newly enrolled student in the English Honours program at Andhra University, I was wandering outside the faculty offices before class and heard the senior professor of history, Professor O. Ramachandriah¹ talking about the passing of Bhagavan a few months before. I overheard how the sage passed on utterly peacefully, totally in charge, totally himself. At the time I had no idea that 'the death of a God' made headlines in Western media and that pictures of the sage's last moments appeared in the pages of *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. I am not sure any more if I had heard of the sage prior to that time. I had read about the life and times of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the latter of whom

¹ Professor Ramachandriah, along with his brother Krishna Bhikshu, was an ardent devotee of Bhagavan, who spent his later years at the Ashram.

I had to study in my junior college for additional reading material. I was generally familiar with the Hindu way of life and the moral order set forth in the Vedas, based on my family background and upbringing. But I was not aware that someone had so recently lived the Truth as revealed in the scripture, re-discovering it all by himself afresh.

I was sold instantly, though Professor Ramachandriah was not trying to sell me on it. The essence of existence, the very being, seemed to have been embodied in Bhagavan as narrated by the good professor. I was happy to learn that I, too, could discover my real self by just being myself, and somehow find the 'meaning of life.'

I cannot recall at this distance of time how that initial impact played out in the immediately following period. Life just went on, as it is wont to. I graduated, and taught at the university for a spell. Following the example of some colleagues, I was soon obsessed with the notion of going overseas just to prove to myself that I could do it. There was also the unmistakable desire to live in the U.S., accompanied by perceptions of a certain lifestyle. This was eventually accomplished with two negative outcomes: I briefly incurred the wrath of my teacher who wanted nothing but the best for me, though he soon generously forgave my transgression; and not much later the feeling dawned on me that I walked into my own trap from which there was no returning. A corollary outcome is the ambivalence that I have since experienced about living in my adopted land.

Several years later, I had the occasion to return to India to teach when Bhagavan's presence was re-etched on my consciousness, thanks to my late good friend and colleague, Prof K. Subrahmanian.² He used to regale me with stories of Bhagavan and his times from his vast personal knowledge. There was hardly any time when we were

² Professor K. Subrahmanian was responsible for the founding and nurturing of the thriving Ramana Kendra in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. He led prayers, lectures and discussions at the Kendra every Sunday until his last debilitating illness. He made a perceptible difference in the life of each member of the group that attended these sessions. An American professor of Eastern Religions that I once took to one of these meetings was so impressed with his presentation of Bhagavan's teachings that he spontaneously remarked, "That man is *good*."

together that we did not discuss the topic — between classes, at lunch, during professional and social gatherings, or whenever. My mind, as it were, reopened itself to the ideas of the Self and the world, and I seemed to be drawn closer once again to Bhagavan. That did not mean — nor does it now — that I was able to internalize Bhagavan’s teachings to any significant degree. That remains a lifelong goal.

What it does mean is that there was a reaffirmation of the faith and a revisiting of the trust that I had reposed in Bhagavan years before.

Here was another person — a close and valued friend — who also came to the same conclusions about the sage as I, and for the same reasons. We kept up the discussions via mail, to the extent possible, even after I returned to the U.S. for the third time. He helped me in many other tangible ways, but I am most grateful to him for the incomparable benefit of this spiritual fellowship. What drew both of us to Bhagavan was his utter simplicity, true renunciation, disregard for personal recognition or fame and,

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most of all, his total lack of any kind of showmanship. He did not even want any ‘disciples’ or followers. I am particularly pleased with this last characteristic, having seen swamis of every ilk and their *modi operandi* over the decades. He knew instantly that the President of India, a former maharajah, a wealthy industrialist, and a world-renowned English writer were all manifestations of the same Being, without an iota of difference. Who then was the master and who the student?

How does this all translate into a blueprint for life for me? What has my veneration for the sage and his life in the Self done for me so far? What impact will it have in the future?

In all honesty, these are tough questions. It wouldn’t be quite true if I say that I have totally dedicated myself to the Self and Self alone. Being human, I have on occasion unashamedly asked Bhagavan for help, knowing that such mundane requests only trivialize his grandeur and his mercy. I have read about others’ miraculous experiences resulting from his grace, although he himself did not claim any credit for them. I might even dig up some instances of minor wish fulfillment in my own life, which I have tended to attribute to his kindness, though I am fully aware that such an attribution is tantamount to degrading the plenitude of his compassion. Miracles, trivial or memorable, are the hallmark of lesser Bhagavans.

I probably always had a streak of Vedanta in me. Even though I had many worldly advantages that others didn’t and never suffered from want, yet from time to time I distinctly felt that something was missing from the picture. I kept taking stock of my situation and assessing my existence or, rather, existence as a whole. Certain questions would naturally project themselves on my consciousness. What difference did it make if I had or had not this or that item? All my basic needs were met. When I was happy, I would ask, “How long is this going to last? What next?” When I was troubled, I would echo the wise men’s saying, “This, too, shall pass.” On yet other occasions, I would just drift into voids of awareness, i.e. I would be aware that I was drifting into a sensory void in which nothing seemed to matter. Ironically, these voids provided me with an eerie sense of satisfaction that possessions did not give me. I would ruminate on them until I ‘snapped’ out of them and into the “reality” of quotidian life. I am sure there is nothing unique about these wanderings into the realm of the unknown. It’s only now that some of them seem to make sense. Dissatisfaction with mundane existence is a *natural* thing, because it is not an end in itself. Physical existence is but the tip of a vast spiritual iceberg.

Given this background, I believe the major consequence of my feeble attempts to follow the path laid down by Bhagavan is that they have, over the decades, brought about *a change in my outlook*, a sort of insouciance to events good and ill, a desire to view one and

all as variations on the same divine theme and reduce all to the principle of the Self, which defines the ultimate egalitarianism. The aim is to *know* and *experience* once and for all the clear distinction between the seer and the seen, *drk* and *drsya*. This is indeed a sea change in my case which, once again, I unhesitatingly attribute to Bhagavan's grace, for it could have been my fate that I had never heard of him.

In practice, I derive some compelling benefits from such an outlook. In our daily interactions, we are exposed to so many influences and emotions, and our own responses run the gamut from the instinctive to the acquired. We like some people, and may at best be indifferent to others. Gender distinctions further complicate matters. Greed stifles generosity. Selfishness outweighs humanitarianism. Desire blinds the senses. And the senses cloud the Spirit. Unfortunately, most of us believe that these base motivations are necessary for survival. Survival of what? It's the ego we are trying to perpetuate, the non-Self we are aiming to nurture, the mind we are striving to please, the body we are hoping to put on a pedestal.

At the end of six decades of my life, I believe that I am finally beginning to appreciate the teachings of Bhagavan, and realize that even the healthiest body is in essence a disease; that mind exists only at the will and as a servant of the I; that the senses are there only because they receive illumination from the I; and that happiness in the world is inextricably interwoven with sorrow. Unmixed happiness, which is our birthright, it resides in the I, devoid of mind, body, senses, and the related psycho-trash.

Appropriate, too, perhaps is my feeling of indifference to the death of the body, whenever it may occur. It should be a totally

The aim is
to know
and experience
once and for all
the clear
distinction between
the seer and the seen,
drk and *drsya*

irrelevant and immaterial event, because it is just the collapse of the physical system that is designed to wear out, the living principle that animates it being indestructible. Dust returns to dust, but the Self continues to shine ubiquitously and eternally. There is nowhere that It can go, because It is already everywhere. Besides, the Self knows no fear and, since I am the Self, I shouldn't be afraid, either, even when staring at death. After all, I am the one doing the staring, therefore I have the last laugh.

I doubt that I would have believed in any of this but for Bhagavan's personal example. In the manner of the ancient sages, he proved the validity and absoluteness of the Self in our midst, in our time.

So did *I* come to Bhagavan, or did *he* come to me? I believe it's the latter, and it's miracle enough for me. ▲

FROM OUR ARCHIVES

This is a faithful reproduction of the notebook of B. V. Narasimha Swamy. We have retained, wherever possible, the original grammar and punctuation.

SWAMI Sudarsan Sagar, a young man of some twenty-five summers perhaps, rotund, fair and well fed comes and sits before Maharshi and opens fire with the question, "You have realized God, I suppose?"

Maharshi maintains silence. Swami Sudarsan Sagar (SSS) waits awhile. Nothing abashed or daunted, he returns to the attack and after looking at the tiger skin on which Maharshi is seated — a loving present by some ardent *bhakta* acting according to conventional ideas embodied even in the *Bhagavad Gita* as to what is suitable for a *yoga asana* — questions Maharshi.

“Is it sin to kill a tiger?”

Maharshi is silent and retains equanimity and his usual steady gaze into vacancy.

Swami Sudarsan Sagar waits awhile and gets no reply.

B. V. Narasimha Swami, then present interposes and begins to tell the Swami that the answer depends on various circumstances. SSS cuts the speech short with the brusque remark, “I want Swamiji to answer. I do not want others’ answers.”

BVN is hushed. No one speaks. For some ten minutes or more there is solemn silence. SSS getting no reply from Maharshi and finding no chance of getting any, walks out of the hall and goes elsewhere into the premises.

Maharshi then explains to those remaining that answering of such questions would lead to endless (and useless) talk.

It is also clear that Swami Sudarsan Sagar’s object was not to learn something for his spiritual benefit. His were ‘catch questions’. For instance, if Maharshi should say that it is a sin to kill a tiger, SSS would retort, “Why abet the sin by using a tiger skin?” If he declared it no sin, then, “What was the doctrine of Ahimsa” and so on.

This same SSS had asked some inmates of the ashram whether “the Swamiji here is *rich*?” and explained that he (SSS) got his finances from rich mutts and swamijis.

SSS must have been mortified perhaps to note that he could not disturb Maharshi’s equanimity with his questions or impress him with his own (SSS’s) superior cleverness and was perhaps disappointed in finding that he had by mistake strayed into a poor swami’s cottage, misled by the extent of the garden and imposing dimensions of the ashram hall.

The Maharshi is rich — richer than all. He has everything because he owns nothing and cares for nothing. He gives away all that is placed before him and shares it with all present. He is supremely content and happy — in his Self. What has he to do with riches? ▲

FACE TO FACE WITH BHAGAVAN

A.V. SUBRAMANIAM

IT was 1942 and I was totally free, having written my Intermediate examination. My father, a very pious person had decided to go on a pilgrimage and took me along. We visited some of the shrines in Thanjavur district and then went to Tiruvannamalai where, after worshipping at the Siva temple, we went to Ramanasramam to have the *darshan* of Bhagavan.

My father, as we travelled towards the Ashram, told me that Bhagavan was a realized soul from whom many people could glean spiritual wisdom. I did not have any great inner urge to acquire such wisdom but I had read the *Bhagavad Gita*, perhaps too casually as I feel now, and I had several doubts clamouring to be cleared. So I decided to make the best use of this opportunity and made a mental list of doubts as far as I could remember them. I feel now that all this preparation was more due to the regard I had for my father and less due to any great passion for philosophical discussion. It may have been partly due to an adolescent desire to show off my knowledge of Sanskrit and the *Gita* in a gathering of grown men.

When we reached the *asramam* we were directed to sit in the hall where a number of people had gathered. I found there was no religious discourse going on; the devotees were all intensely looking at Bhagavan whose personality did not particularly impress me.

THE MOUNTAIN PATH

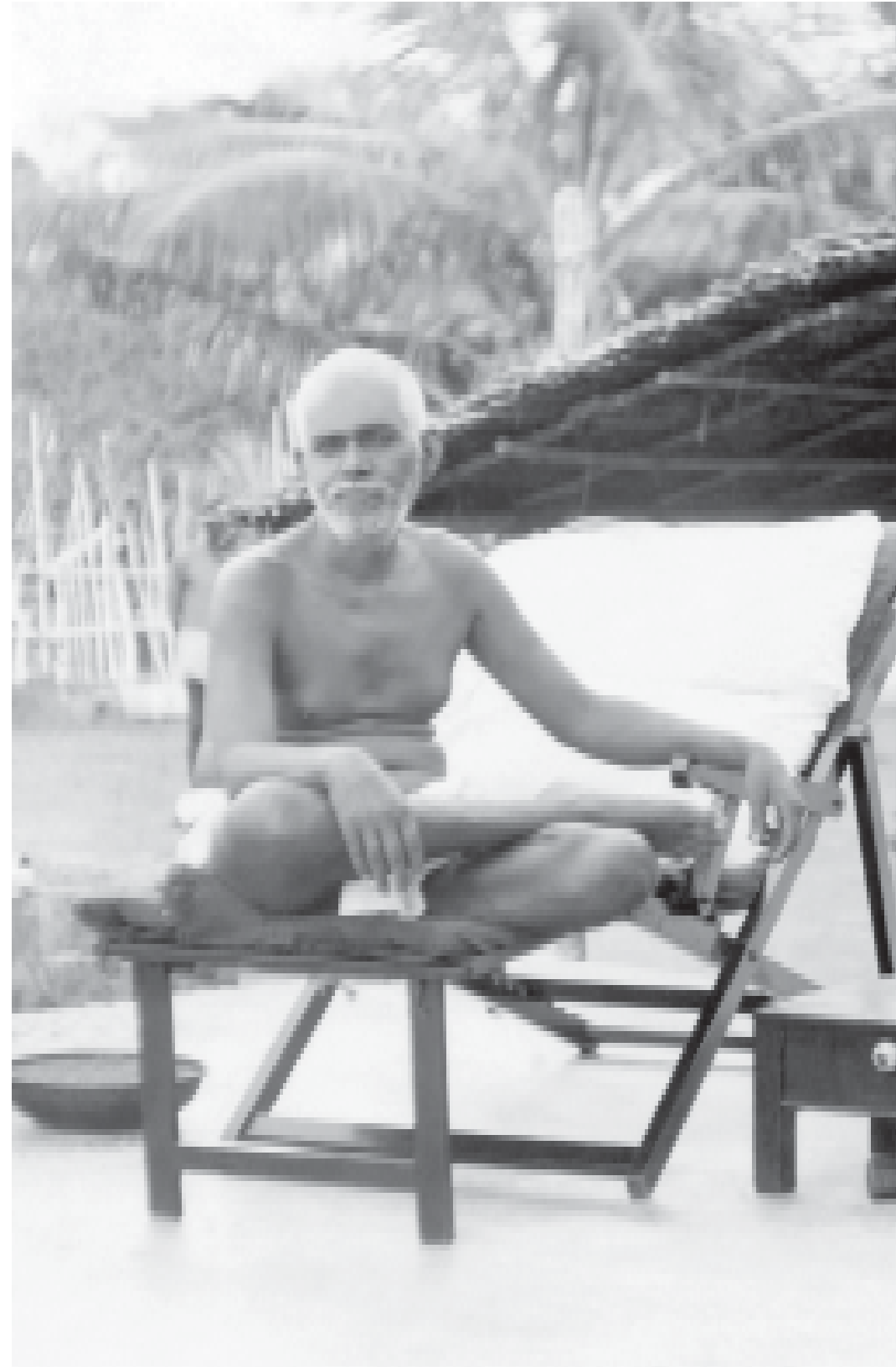
Bhagavan was looking at those gathered there, one member at a time. In due course his eyes turned to me. He looked keenly at me for a while and then shifted his attention to my neighbour. I felt a curious sensation all over, very unfamiliar to me. I felt a strange calmness settling down in my mind, staring at all desire to raise spiritual doubts or any kind of doubt for his clarification. I cannot say I got specific replies to all my questions at that stage; only, I did not feel it necessary any longer to seek clarification. The calm, unperturbed state lasted a certain time, I recollect, and the memory of it is still fresh in my mind.

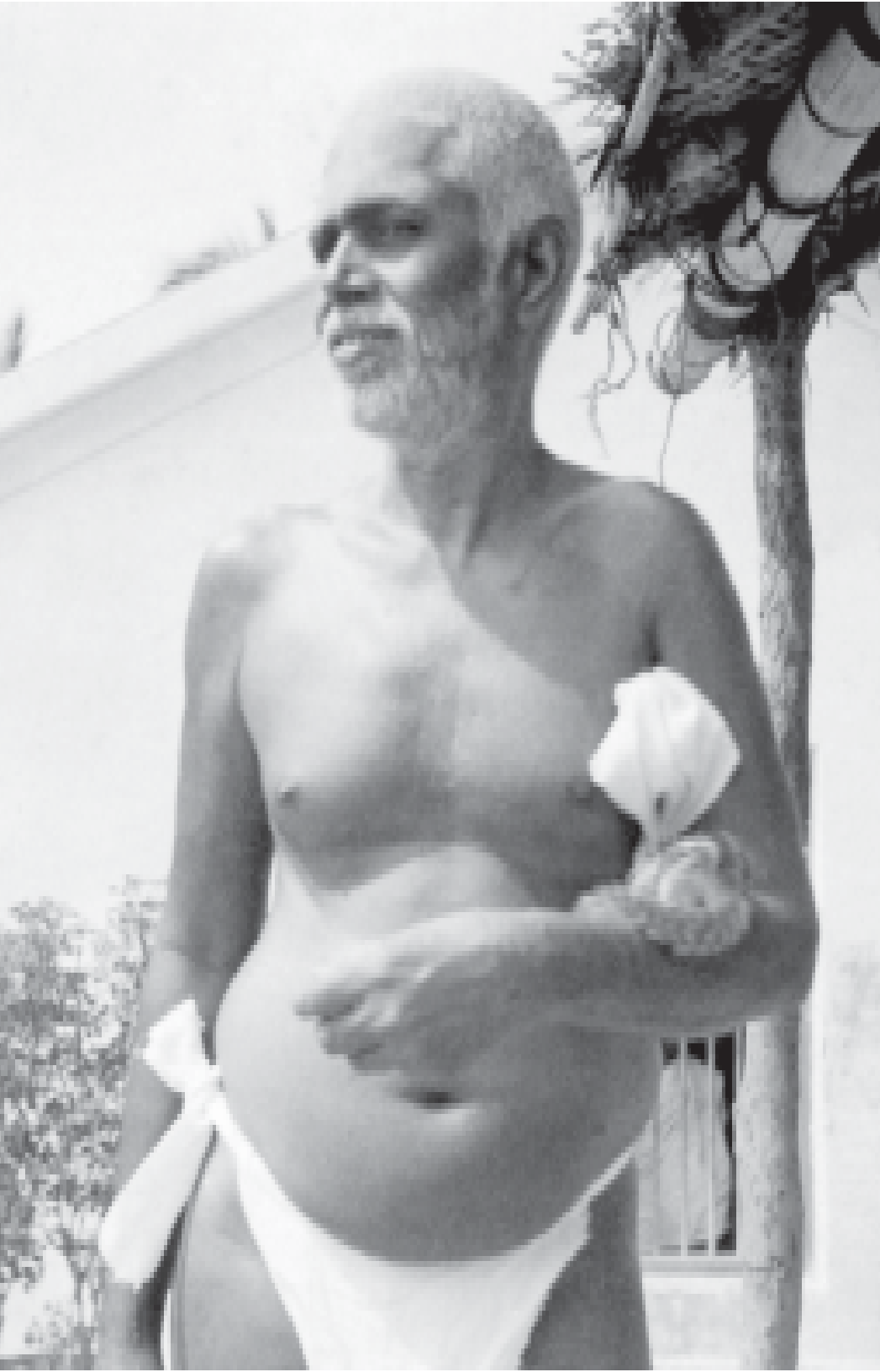
I do not pretend I could understand the sage; I have not imbibed any deep knowledge of the spiritual realities as a result of the visit. But those wonderful eyes rested on me for a certain time and I felt myself lifted, transported to a happier plane. And though subsequently I have had occasion to meet the great of the land in the course of my life, no one else has had that kind of effect on me. ▲



ABHAYA HASTA

This gesture conveys the meaning of protection and reassurance to the devotee that there is nothing to be afraid of. In the dance tradition, this *hasta* is called *pathaka* or flag (denoting either a beginning or supreme lordship). This was a characteristic mudra used by the Paramacharya of Kanchipuram, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami to bless his devotees.







BHAGAVAN'S HANDWRITING

Devotees presented Bhagavan with their own writings or copies of Bhagavan's. Two versions of *Arunachala Pancharatnam* in Telugu are given below, the first in the *kandapadyam* metre and the second in a Tamil metre, *venba*. It is a difficult metre and was composed by G. V. Subbaramayya. Bhagavan, when he received such verses, copied them and wrote the name of the individual at the end of the composition. In this case one can see the lettering GVS and the date.

శ్రీ

2..1

అరుణాచలపంచరత్నము .
(కందపద్యము)

1. కరుణా పూర్ణసు ధాట్లీ
కరనిక రముచే నిఖిలము కబళిం చెడయో .
అరుణా చలపర మాత్మా
అరుణుడ గుమసుచి కసింప నంబుజ మనముక్ ॥ - (౧)
 2. జినన స్థితివిల యములె
జ్జనునగు చిత్రమ రుణాచ లానీ లోన్
కనునా త్తవైష్ణ దినన
క్షునమా కుటసులె లసితిష్టా దయమను పేర్ర్ ॥ - (౨)
 3. నేనని యెంచువె కలునని
లోనమ లమనీ పచేవి లోకం పంగా .
తానగు రూపమె ఊగిన
లోనరు శాస్త్రిన దియల్లి లోవలె నెనయుక్ ॥ - (౩)
 4. పోనా డివెలివి పయముల
ప్రాణని కోధము నమనసు బంధిం చినినుక్ .
వ్యానిం చుయోగి కంచును
లోనన నూనమ గునీవె లుగునరు శాస్త్రీ ॥ - (౪)
 5. మనసును నీక బ్రించయ
రుణాచ్ర సర్వము మనీదు రూపుగ నెపుడుక్ .
గనుచున నస్య స్త్రీతిక్
నినునాలు వజయిం చుమునిగి నీసుఖ మందుక్ ॥ - (౫)
- ॥౬॥ అరుణాగి రిరమణ కృతమగు
అరుణా చలపంచరత్న మార్యా గీతిక్ .
అరుడై నవేద సారము
అరయం గాకం దములివి యనువా దమగుక్ ॥

—

తమిళమలర్ వాక్యములు.

ఇ కౌ ప ప - య

చ - చ

మ - వ . | ఇ - న

[నిర్దిష్టము :- ప - వ]

శ్రీ

అరుణావల పంచరత్నములు.

(పెరి పాట)

కరుణాపూర్ణా క్షామృత కంఠీ కరణా
 త్కరస్య చాగువిష్టా కారా - యుకుణా
 చలపక మాత్మా సరిగా మనఃక
 మలమువిరి యుకరిగ మ్నా ||
 ఇదిచిత్ర మెల్ల వరుణాత్రి నీలన్
 నుదయించి నిల్చిలయ మొందు - ప్రాది "నే"
 ననినాట్య మాడెద వయన్ కనుక
 ననిదకు నిర్వృధయ మంచు ||
 పోనని యెచ్చేట నేతెంచు నగయనియె
 తేనమల వకాటు ద్విధాజ్ఞాన్వి - లగవరయె

దానదు	ణాద్రీ	తమసిటింగి	యెఱుట్ట
లగన	ట్రుణుగన్	లగన్	3
వెరివిష	యము	విదిక్రణం	మాపి
చలపునిల్చి	లగనిసు	దాసు -	వలచే
నలయో	గవకుడుమ	పనబ్యుత్తి	కగణా
చలనీలన్	నంగాం	చేగెల్లు	✓
చిత్రమునీ	కర్పణ	చేసినిసు	గాంచియెల్లు
ద్రుతసు	పంచేభ	దప్రమ -	సెత్తటిని
సేవింబు	వాడు	చెలగువకు	ణాచలా
నీవసుపక	యము	నిగె	3

అరుణా గిరిమణులు దాద్యాగీ త్రిదా
 దరిసెనము చేసె సంస్కృ తమ్మం - వరుణా
 చలపంచకాపని పత్ర త్తమసు
 తెరిపాట దానికిది తెల్లు ||

ఓం చ త్తవ్.

శ్రీకమలాకృణ మస్తు! G-V-S
 29-5-1947

BHAGAVAN'S HERBAL REMEDIES

ASHTA CHURNAM

BHAGAVAN RAMANA'S recipe for this particular medicine is different from the traditional practice; and herein lies Bhagavan's speciality. In most traditional recipes, the physician follows a set pattern. All ingredients are taken in equal measure. Bhagavan also follows this method in some of his recipes. But mostly, he differs from the common physician in this respect; each ingredient is proportionately selected and mixed, depending upon the strength and properties of the ingredient. Bhagavan's formulations are more potent and effective. Another great advantage is that these recipes are the handiwork of the Supreme Jnani and therefore the physical, mental and spiritual results of these recipes are manifold and invaluable.

Ingredients required:

Black pepper — 9 parts

Dry ginger — 7 parts

The bigger cumin seed — 5 parts

Rock salt — 5 parts

Long pippali — 5 parts

Cumin seed — 3 parts

Omum — 2 parts

Clean all the above ingredients well and convert them into fine powder. Rice should be well cooked and mixed with ghee (Or butter/milk if ghee is either unavailable or unappetising). Take a spoon of the above churnam and mix it well with the rice and consume. The above prescription cures indigestion, poor appetite, stomach-ache and is also good for rheumatism. ▲

SRI ARUNACHALA PANCHARATNAM

COMMENTARY

SRI SADHU OM

In the early 1980s some devotees of Sri Bhagavan asked Sri Sadhu Om to explain the import of Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam (The Five Gems to Sri Arunachala) one of the Five Hymns composed by Sri Bhagavan, and they recorded on a cassette tape the spontaneous explanations that he gave them in Tamil. Later, at the request of Michael James, Sri Sadhu Om explained those recorded explanations in English. As he was doing so, Michael questioned him further, and noted down all that he explained. After completing a rough draft of his notes, Michael asked Sri Sadhu Om to check them, and this led to further discussions and more detailed explanations. Finally, after Sri Sadhu Om had approved the rough draft with all his explanations added, Michael wrote a fair copy, which we are publishing here for the first time.

Introduction

SRI BHAGAVAN never studied any Sanskrit either at school or after coming to Tiruvannamalai. But by virtue of his firm abidance in Self, the source of all knowledge, he was endowed with an intuitive understanding of any text he happened to read in Sanskrit.

So clear was this intuitive understanding that in about the year 1903-04 he began translating the *Vivekachudamani* into Tamil prose at the request of Gambhiram Seshayya. He brought out in his translation all the wealth of implied meaning which lay hidden in the terse Sanskrit *slokas* of Sri Adi Sankara. Later, after the great Sanskrit poet and scholar Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri came and took refuge at his feet, by his association with him, Sri Bhagavan picked up sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit grammar and prosody to be able himself to compose *slokas* in Sanskrit.

One day in the year 1917 a devotee asked Sri Bhagavan to compose a verse in the *arya vritta* metre, which is said to be one of the most difficult metres in Sanskrit. In answer to the devotee's request, Sri Bhagavan effortlessly composed the verse "*Karunapurna sudhabdhe...*" in flawless *arya vritta*.

Soon afterwards this *sloka* was brought to the notice of Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri, who on seeing it was wonderstruck, finding that its style possessed all the grandeur and beauty which could be found only in the *slokas* of the ancient *Vedic rishis*. Therefore he at once requested Sri Bhagavan to compose another verse in the same metre. Sri Bhagavan accordingly composed the verse "*Tvayarunachala sarvam...*" On seeing this verse Ganapati Sastri asked Sri Bhagavan to compose three more *slokas* on the subject of the four *yogas* – one on *jnana yoga*, then one on *raja yoga*, and lastly one on *karma* and *bhakti yoga*, in order to form a poem of five verses. Thus in continuation of the ideas expressed in the first two verses, Sri Bhagavan wrote the next three verses as per the request of Ganapati Sastri¹.

The word 'Heart'
is a name for
Arunachala, the real Self
which ever shines
in the heart as 'I'

¹ For various accounts of the genesis of *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam*, refer to *At the Feet of Bhagavan* by T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, p.72, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 19-6-1946, and *The Mountain Path*, July 1982, p. 179.

Unlike the last three verses, which were composed on the subjects specified by Ganapati Sastri, the first two verses were composed without any subject being given to Sri Bhagavan. The first verse is a prayer beseeching Arunachala, the light of Self-consciousness, to make his heart-lotus blossom fully. In the second verse he then reveals that the word 'Heart' is a name for Arunachala, the real Self which ever shines in the heart as 'I'.

If we deeply reflect over the meaning of these two verses, it will be clear that in both verses Sri Bhagavan is drawing our attention only to the effulgent light of Self-consciousness which is ever shining within us as 'I'. From this we can understand that if Sri Bhagavan is asked to say something without being given any specific subject, he will talk only about the shining of the real consciousness 'I'. After understanding the first two verses thus, if we proceed to reflect deeply over the last three verses, it will become clear that even when Sri Bhagavan is asked to write on various specified subjects, he will connect those subjects only with the subject which alone really interests him, namely knowing the real light of Self. This point we can see in more detail in the commentary on each verse.

After Sri Bhagavan composed these five verses, they were named *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam*, and a devotee named Daivarata composed the verse "*Srimad Ramana Maharsher...*" as a concluding verse. Five years later, in 1922, at the request of a devotee named Aiyasami Pillai, Sri Bhagavan translated his five *slokas* into Tamil in *venba* metre, and he adapted the idea of Daivarata's verse in a concluding *venba* "*Arunagiri Ramanan...*"

In the Tamil *parayana* which was recited daily in Sri Bhagavan's Presence, as a conclusion to the programme of songs selected for each day *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam* would be recited. Since Sri Bhagavan had composed this work first in Sanskrit and then in Tamil, it was the custom to recite first the Sanskrit version and then the Tamil version of each verse before proceeding to the next verse. In accordance with this custom, first the meaning of the Sanskrit version and then of the Tamil version of each verse is given below, followed by a detailed commentary on the Tamil version of each verse.

VERSE 1

English translation²

O ocean of *amrita* (the ambrosia of immortality), which is the fullness of Grace! O Arunagiri, the Supreme Self (*paramanma*), who swallows everything [the entire world-appearance] by spreading rays [of the light of Self-knowledge] [Graciously] shine as the sun [of Self-knowledge] that makes [my] mind-lotus, which is swelling [with love and ready to blossom], blossom fully.

Commentary

From the opening words of the verse, it is clear that as soon as Sri Bhagavan sees Arunachala, he sees it as the ‘Ocean of Ambrosia, which is the fullness of Grace’. What does he mean by the fullness of Grace? In this connection he once said,

“What is the fullness of God’s grace? Is it God appearing in name and form, or is it his bestowing *moksha*? No, it cannot be, because he does not bestow either his *darshan* or *moksha* upon all *jivas*. He bestows *moksha* only upon a few souls, because others do not want it. Since *moksha* is bestowed only upon a few souls who sincerely want it and not upon others, even the bestowal of *moksha* cannot be said to be the fullness of Grace. Only that which God is ever giving to all can be called the fullness of Grace. What God is giving at all times to all *jivas* is only the shining of the light of Self-consciousness as ‘I-I’ in the heart of each of one of them. This shining of the consciousness ‘I’ is bestowed upon all by the Grace of God. If this light were not bestowed upon them, no *jiva* could do anything; they could not practise any devotion, nor could they attain Self-knowledge. The shining of this Self-light is the one great boon which is bestowed

² Though Sri Sadhu Om gave Michael word-for-word translations of both the Sanskrit and the Tamil verses, Michael felt that it would be sufficient here to give just an English paraphrase meaning for each verse.

universally upon all *jivas*, not only upon human beings but also upon animals, birds, *devas* and all other sentient creatures. Since this shining of ‘I’ is bestowed only by his Grace, and since it is bestowed equally upon all *jivas* at all times, it alone can be called the fullness of Grace.”³

Therefore, when Sri Bhagavan addresses Arunachala as ‘Ocean of Ambrosia, which is the fullness of Grace’, is it not clear that he sees Arunachala as the light of Self-consciousness which is ever shining in the heart as ‘I’.

Though Arunachala is thus by his grace ever shining in the heart of all beings as the consciousness ‘I’, why do not all *jivas* realise Him to be the fullness of Grace? Because they never turn their attention towards the shining of ‘I’. If a *jiva* withdraws his attention from all second and third person objects and focuses it upon the first person, which shines as mere consciousness ‘I’, then the light of Self-consciousness will shine forth with a fresh clarity in whose spreading effulgence the entire appearance of this seemingly solid world-picture will be swallowed. That is why in the second sentence of this verse Sri Bhagavan addresses Arunachala as “Arunagiri, the Supreme Self, who swallowed everything by spreading rays”.

How is the world-appearance thus swallowed by the effulgent light of Self-knowledge? If a cinema show is going on in a tent in daytime, the pictures can be seen on the screen only because of the limited light of the projector and because of the background of artificial darkness caused by the tent. If a powerful wind were to blow away the tent, the bright sunlight would flood in, the darkness would vanish and thus all the pictures on the screen would be swallowed up. Similarly, the entire picture of the world, soul and God can be seen only because of the limited light of the mind (which

Why do not all *jivas*
realize Him to be the
fullness of Grace?

³ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, v.966 with commentary by Muruganar and Sadhu Om.

is a reflection of the original light of Arunachala, the real Self) and because of the background of the darkness of ignorance caused by forgetfulness of Self. If our attention is focused keenly on Self, the light of Self-knowledge (the bright light of Arunachala) will dawn, the background darkness of ignorance or *maya* will vanish, and thus the whole picture of the world, soul and God will be swallowed up and disappear.

Sri Bhagavan expresses this same idea in verse 114 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*:

If the small light [of a cinema projector] is merged and dissolved in the great light [of the sun], the picture show will vanish. Likewise if the mind-light is merged and dissolved in the true light of consciousness, the false show of the appearance of the three entities [the soul, world and God] will be dissolved...

Such was the experience of Sri Bhagavan. When the fear of the death arose in him, his attention was focused keenly on Self, and thus the light of Self-consciousness shone forth so clearly that in its bright effulgence the entire world-appearance was swallowed, and that Self-consciousness alone remained shining as Arunachala, the Supreme Self. This experience is the true shining forth of Grace described in verse 3 of *Atma Vidya Kirtanam* as "... *minnum tanul anma prakasame; arul vilasame*" (the light of Self will shine within oneself; this is the shining forth of Grace).

Since this experience is possible only when by his light of Grace Arunachala makes the heart-lotus blossom, Sri Bhagavan concludes this verse as a prayer, "Shine as the sun [of Self-knowledge] that makes my mind-lotus, which is swelling [with love], blossom fully".

What is meant here by the blossoming of the 'swelling heart-lotus' (*kilar ulap-pu*)? The mind, which functions as a knot (*granthi*) binding together as one the real Self, which is consciousness (*chit*), and the body, which is insentient (*jada*), is here compared to a lotus. The state in which this knot is tightly closed, being firmly bound by the entanglement of strong worldly desires and attachments

From the beginning
it was only

(*asapasa*), is compared to the state of a tightly closed immature lotus-bud. When by ripening *bhakti* this lotus-bud of the mind gradually becomes mature, the tight binding of worldly desires and attachments gradually becomes loose. This state of maturity in which the force of attachment (*abhimana-vega*) is thus weakened, is compared to the state of a lotus-bud which has swollen and is ready to blossom. The state of Self-knowledge, in which the *chit-jada-granthi* is cut asunder, all its desires and attachments having been destroyed, is compared to the blossoming of the lotus.

Therefore, Sri Bhagavan makes this prayer taking the standpoint of a devotee whose heart-lotus has been well matured and ripened by *bhakti* and is now ready to blossom fully. Just as a closed lotus-bud, however mature and ripe it may be, cannot blossom fully unless the light of the sun falls upon it, so the bud-like mind, however much maturity it may have gained by *bhakti*, cannot blossom with

the light of Grace
which enkindled

Self-knowledge unless the light of the Grace of Arunachala falls upon it. Indeed, just as the lotus-bud has been ripened to maturity only by the sunlight, so the mind has gained maturity only by means of the

bhakti which was implanted and nurtured in it by the light of Grace. From the beginning it was only the light of Grace which enkindled in the mind a clarity of discrimination, and it was only by this clarity that the mind was able to give up its attachment to external objects and to gain ever-increasing love to know Self.

Now, by means of this great love to know Self, the mind has become fully mature and ripe for the dawn of Self-knowledge, so at this point all it can do is to pray to Arunachala to complete the work of Grace by making it blossom with Self-knowledge. When Arunachala is such a powerful sun that he can swallow the entire universe and when he has already ripened the mind-lotus to maturity, will it not be easy for him now to make

in the mind
a clarity of
discrimination

the ripened lotus-bud of that mature mind blossom with Self-knowledge?

Hence Sri Bhagavan concludes this first verse with a prayer, the same prayer which he had earlier made in verse 27 of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*:

“Arunachala, sun of bright rays which swallows everything, make my mind-lotus blossom.”

Until the heart-lotus of the devotee is thus made to blossom by Arunachala’s spreading rays of light (*viri kadir*), his mind remains tightly enclosed within the covering of the five sheaths, and in the darkness created by this enclosure it can only see either darkness, as in sleep, or the shadow-projection of the world of names and forms, as in waking and dream. But when his heart-lotus is made to blossom by the Grace of Arunachala, his mind is freed from the enclosing limitation of the five sheaths and thus it opens up to see the light of the pure ‘I’-consciousness shining brightly as the sun in the all-pervasive space of the Heart, and hence the darkness of *avarana* and the shadow-world projected by *vikshepa* are both swallowed by that bright light of Self-knowledge.

Thus on scrutiny it is clear that in this verse Sri Bhagavan is talking only about his own experience of the shining of the light of Self-consciousness ‘I’. But instead of saying directly, “Swallowing everything I alone exist”, he addresses Arunachala and sings in the form of a *stotra*, “Swallowing everything, O Supreme Self, You alone exist”. From this, is it not clear that other than Arunachala, the light of Self-consciousness which ever shines in the heart as ‘I’, there is no separate entity as ‘Sri Ramana’?

Thus this first verse stands as a proof of the fact that if anyone asks Sri Bhagavan to sing something without specifying any subject, what he will sing about is only the shining of ‘I’, which in his experience alone exists, having swallowed everything else. ▲

(*To be continued*)

RIBHU GITA

T. V. RAMAMURTHY

ONE OF Bhagavan’s favourite traditional spiritual works was the *Ribhu Gita*. It is an important text in the history of his instruction for those close devotees who gravitated to him. Bhagavan’s first attendant, Palaniswami, brought a copy to Bhagavan’s attention while he was residing at the mango grove near Gurumurtham in 1898. Later in life Bhagavan related how surprised he was at the time to hear an exact description of his own state recited in the *Ribhu Gita* and that it had been experienced by others and was the bliss of the Self sought after by all true seekers.

“I had read no books other than *Periapuranam*, my Bible lessons and bits of Tayumanavar or *Tevaram*. My notion of God (Isvara) was similar to that found in the *Puranas*. I had not heard then of Brahman, samsara, etc. I had no idea that there was an Essence or Impersonal Real underlying everything, and that myself and Isvara were both identical with it. At Tiruvannamalai, as I listened to *Ribhu Gita* and other works, I picked up these facts and discovered that these books were analysing and naming what I had previously felt intuitively without analysis and name. In the language of the books, I could describe my mental or spiritual condition after awakening, as *suddha manas* or *vijnana*, i.e., the Intuition of the Illumined”. (*Self-Realization* by B.V. Narasimhaswami, Ch.5)

The text itself is contained in a Sanskrit epic, the *Sivarahasya*, which is primarily devoted to the glory of Lord Siva. It describes renowned *Saivite* centres of pilgrimage, holy rivers, religious observances, spiritual instruction and other topics in the manner of the *Puranas*. In the sixth Amsa or Part VI of this twelve part work of about 10,000 verses, there occurs on the slope of Mount Kedara in the Himalayas a dialogue on the Supreme Brahman between the sage Ribhu and the sage Nidagha. This exposition in the form of a dialogue is typical of the *Upanishads*. The sage Ribhu figures in such ancient texts as the traditional anthology of 108 *Upanishads* such as the 37th, the *Tejobindupanishad* of the *Krishna Yajur Veda*. H.H. Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasavati, the Paramacharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha declared the *Ribhu Gita* is to the *Sivarahasya* what the *Bhagavad Gita* is to the *Mahabharata*.

The book was translated into Tamil by Sri Lokanatha Swamigal in the 1880's and was praised by the Paramacharya who said it excelled the original Sanskrit. The final verse of each of the forty-four chapters differs dramatically from the Sanskrit version. The concluding verse also encapsulates the meaning of the entire chapter. It was this version which was often read before Bhagavan. He would in later life speak about the *Ashtavakra Gita* and *Ribhu Gita* as being the two principle texts which enunciated in great detail the nature of the Self (*Brahma swarupa*). (*Letters and Recollections* by Suri Nagamma, 24th April 1948)

The concept of Brahman is covered in the *Ribhu Gita* by 1,924 verses contained in 44 chapters. The text is uncompromising Advaita. It is adamant and unremitting in the assertion that the Supreme Brahman, "That", is all that exists. That there is nothing else which exists apart from the Self which is Brahman. Brahman is the Self (*atman*), our true indisputable being. This awareness is *moksha* or liberation, which is attained by the way of knowledge (*jnana*) and the conviction that I-am-Brahman. That Brahman is all is stressed again and again in a plethora of positive affirmations.

On the other hand the *Ribhu Gita* also explains the truth about Brahman by the removal of every possible theory about Brahman

and the elimination of all fictitious identification or thought (*sankalpa*) about oneself. The intention of the *Gita* is the removal of all false ideas and thus there is an awakening from all the illusions which bind us to the ignorance of our true nature. Self alone is; it is without beginning and thus never-ending, since it exists outside our concepts of time and space.

In describing the Self or Brahman, the *Ribhu Gita* in verse after verse employs negation as a means of revelation. Since the Self can never be objectified it is not possible to say what is the Self. It cannot be perceived or even conceived of as a thing because that would make it an object of the senses or the mind, both of which are limited. Thus Brahman is beyond the reach of the senses and is the witness (*sakshi*) of all things. It can never be an object of knowledge for "Who can know the knower" (*Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* 2.iv.14).

Ignorance (*ajnana*) consists in the misapprehension of the Self with what is not the Self. Ignorance confuses the Self with what is unreal. In the external world ignorance is the obscuring of the bliss (*ananda*) of the 'Conscious Existence' with the transient objects of perception. The resultant identification causes suffering. It is this misidentification and attachment which creates bondage. Ribhu advocates the use of repeated ne-

Ignorance confuses
the Self with what is
unreal

gation in the enquiry as to what is real (*satya*) and what is the Self (*atman*) and affirms that this destroys our ignorance. It is not a question of seeking what is real but destroying the illusion that the unreal exists. We do not seek to identify truth (*satya*) but rather we seek to negate the superimposition of illusion and by this, the true nature of our being (*sat*) is revealed. When the clouds of ignorance are dispersed the sun which is always present can shine.

The *Gita* is so emphatic because Ribhu is reputed to have obtained this knowledge (*jnana*) from the Supreme Lord Siva Himself. He then was said to have taught it to several disciples, principal among was Nidagha.

There is an amusing and instructive story which relates how Ribhu revealed to his disciple Nidagha the secret that totally transforms him. There are two versions of the story, one in the Agni Purana and the other in the Vishnu Purana. Based on the latter Purana, Bhagavan related the story in *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book Two, Chapter I.

D. Instead of enquiring 'Who am I?', can I put the question to myself 'Who are *You*?', since then, my mind may be fixed on You whom I consider to be God in the form of Guru. Perhaps, I would be nearer the goal of my quest by that enquiry than by asking myself 'Who am I?'

M. Whatever form your enquiry may take, you must finally come to the one I, the Self.

All these distinctions made between the 'I' and 'you', Master and disciple etc. are merely a sign of one's ignorance. The 'I-Supreme' alone is. To think otherwise is to delude oneself.

A *Puranic* story of Sage Ribhu and his disciple Nidagha, is particularly instructive in this context.

Although Ribhu taught his disciple the supreme Truth of the One Brahman without a second, Nidagha, in spite of his erudition and understanding, did not get sufficient conviction to adopt and follow the path of *jnana*, but settled down in his native town to lead a life devoted to the observance of ceremonial religion.

But the Sage loved his disciple as deeply as the latter venerated his Master. In spite of his age, Ribhu would himself go to his disciple in the town, just to see how far the latter had outgrown his ritualism. At times the Sage went in disguise, so that he might observe how Nidagha would act when he did not know that he was being observed by his Master.

On one such occasion Ribhu, who had put on the disguise of a village rustic, found Nidagha intently watching a royal procession. Unrecognised by the town-dweller Nidagha, the village rustic enquired what the bustle was all about, and was told that the king was going in procession.

"Oh! it is the king. He goes in procession! But where is he?" asked the rustic.

"There, on the elephant" said Nidagha.

"You say the king is on the elephant. Yes, I see the two" said the rustic, "But which is the king and which is the elephant?"

"What!" exclaimed Nidagha, "You see the two, but do not know that the man above is the king and the animal below is the elephant? Where is the use of talking to a man like you?"

"Pray, be not impatient with an ignorant man like me", begged the rustic. "But you said 'above' and 'below', what do they mean?"

Nidagha could stand it no more. "You see the king and the elephant, the one *above* and the other *below*. Yet you want to know what is meant by 'above' and 'below'?" burst out Nidagha. "If things seen and words spoken can convey so little to you, action alone can teach you. Bend forward, and you will know it all too well".

The rustic did as he was told. Nidagha got on his shoulders and said "Know it now. I am *above* as the king, you are *below* as the elephant. Is that clear enough?"

"No, not yet", was the rustic's quiet reply. "You say you are above like the king, and I am below like the elephant. The 'king', the 'elephant', 'above' and 'below', so far it is clear. But pray, tell me what you mean by 'I' and 'you'?"

When Nidagha was thus confronted all of a sudden with the mighty problem of defining the 'you' apart from the 'I', light dawned on his mind. At once he jumped down and fell at his Master's feet saying, "Who else but my venerable Master, Ribhu, could have thus drawn my mind from the superficialities of physical existence to the true Being of the Self? Oh! benign Master, I crave thy blessings".

Therefore, while your aim is to transcend here and now these superficialities of physical existence through *atma-vichara*, where is the scope for making the distinctions of 'you' and 'I', which pertain only to the body? When you turn the mind within,

seeking the source of thought, where is the 'you' and where is the 'I'?

You should seek and be the Self that includes all.

The importance of the *Ribhu Gita* can be gauged from the fact Bhagavan right from the days at Virupaksha Cave, often recommended its recitation and sat with his devotees on many occasions when they chanted it. He encouraged devotees to regularly read and study the *Ribhu Gita*. He also affirmed that its repetition was a powerful aid to Self-enquiry, and said, "These readings from the *Ribhu Gita* are as good as *samadhi*" (*Self-Realization* by B.V. Narasimha Swami, Ch. 26. First edition).

By chanting the *Gita* the mind becomes more and more attuned with the Reality. And when the mind becomes purified by this practice, it is easier to take it back to its source and remain there.

There is one recorded instance where Bhagavan presented a devotee, Sampurnamma with a copy of the *Ribhu Gita* and asked her to study it. When she declined to do it on the grounds she did not understand the Gita's import, Bhagavan persisted and asked her to read it all the same. "It doesn't matter that you do not understand it," he said, "still it will be of benefit to you". (*The Mountain Path*, June 1993, p.103) .

Now thanks to the extensive work and co-operation of the Society of Abidance in Truth, Santa Cruz, California, USA, we too have the chance to read and recite the complete *Ribhu Gita* in English translated by Dr H. Ramamurthy. The ashram has now published and has on sale a limited number of copies for those devotees visiting Arunachala and Sri Ramanasramam. ▲

BOOK EXCERPT

The Song of Ribhu

Chapter Twenty-Eight

EXPLANATION OF THE FOUR GREAT APHORISMS

1. For the benefit of all, I shall tell here,
In the manner the perfectly full Siva has explained it,
The meaning of the four great aphorisms
That clearly, directly reveal the nature of the pure Supreme
Brahman,
The essence of the crest of the Vedas,
Which is extremely secret and rare
To come by *in* all the world.
2. "Absolute Knowledge is Brahman" (Prajnanam Brahma),
Which appears at the end of the eminent Rig Veda, is one such
aphorism.
The aphorism "I am Brahman" (Aham Brahmasmi),
Which is at the end of the faultless Yajurveda, is another.
The aphorism "That you are" (Tat tvam asi),
At the end of the delusionless Sama Veda, is one such aphorism.
"This Self is Brahman" (Ayam atma Brahma),
At the end of the rare Atharva Veda, is one such aphorism.
3. Of these four great statements that are in the four Vedas,
I shall first give the meaning of the first —
"Prajnanam Brahma" (Absolute Knowledge is Brahman).
Son! there are two words in this:

Prajnanam (Absolute Knowledge) and Brahman.

Listen to the essential explanation

Of the former word — Prajnanam (Absolute Knowledge).

4. Knowledge, itself, is called Absolute Knowledge (Prajnana).

All is perceived by Knowledge.

As all the world that is seen in Knowledge

Is seen as an illusion in Knowledge,

There is nothing apart from Knowledge.

All the world and everything else is Knowledge only.

Knowledge is our real nature.

Knowledge is the nature of the Supreme Brahman.

5. The meaning of the word “Brahman”

Is the Reality, which is Truth-Knowledge-Bliss,

Of the nature of the substratum of the entire universe.

Nothing that is a superimposition on Brahman

Is apart from Brahman. All that is sentient is only Brahman.

Brahman is our real nature.

Brahman, indeed, is of the nature of Absolute Knowledge.

6. The Reality that is Absolute Knowledge is Brahman.

The Reality that is Brahman is Absolute Knowledge.

By such conditioning as ignorance,

The undivided Absolute appears as dual.

When all the conditionings disappear

By the understanding of the aphorism “Absolute Knowledge is
Brahman,”

The One Reality — the mass of Knowledge —

Remains as the undivided meaning.

7. The direct meaning of the word Prajnanam (Absolute Knowledge)

Is the separated, conditioned individual (jiva).

The direct meaning of the word Brahman

Is the infinite Lord (Isvara) conditioned by illusion (Maya).

The one unconditioned Reality

Is the indicated meaning of both words.

The identity of the indicated meaning of both words

Is the undivided meaning of the great aphorism.

8. Knowing the undivided meaning of the great aphorism as
explained,

With the mind being filled with that Knowledge,

Forgetting all else, all sheaths unveiled,

And existing illusionless,

Can be said to be the mind in complete immersion in

the undivided mode.

It is only those who have realized the undivided mode as told above

Who can easily realize Liberation while alive (jivanmukti).

It is so said in various places.

9. Attaining the Knowledge that I am, indeed,

the Supreme Brahman,

A mass of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss,

Of peaceful, permanent, and changeless nature,

Eternal, attributeless, delusionless,

Limbless, taintless, and nondual,

And remaining in that state

Is said to be the pure, undivided state

By the sages who realize the subtle.

10. The state of mind that becomes identified

With the infinite, undivided Supreme Brahman,

Like salt that dissolves in water,

And becomes one in essence with Brahman,

Thus attaining the Knowledge that I am ever of the nature of

the Supreme Brahman

And not in the least of this world of birth and death,

Has been considered by the blemishless sages,

Son! as the Undivided State.

11. The state declared to be the undivided state

Is the blissful state of Liberation while yet alive.

Later, when the undivided state disappears

And all prarabdha (karma remaining for this life) also disappears,

The state that ensues as the one undivided essence,

Without the least trace of any conditioning,

Is Liberation out of the body.

Hear further about the state of the one, undivided Essence.

12. Leaving aside the word “Prajnanam” (Absolute Knowledge)
 that is chanted,
 And the word “Brahman” that has been explained
 And, also, the devotedly practiced bhava (conviction, attitude,
 feeling) that I am Brahman,
 And being in the Void without thinking of anything,
 And casting aside even the thought
 Of being in this last state of Void,
 And abiding in a state that cannot be felt as anything
 Is ever the state of the one undivided Essence.

13. Being rid of all misapprehensions of the mind
 And without any conditioning such as maya (illusion, delusion),
 And existing as the nature of the one undivided Essence with
 nothing apart,
 Is Liberation out of body.
 Until you attain this state naturally, Cast aside all activities
 And always uninterruptedly practice the pure, undivided state.

14. Hear about the nature of faultlessly practicing
 In this undivided mode.
 Increasingly having the one, faultless, supreme conviction (bhava)
 Without any divisions in the heart
 That all is the undivided Supreme Brahman,
 And That, indeed, is I, and I am That,
 Is the nature of practicing
 In the undivided state, son!

15. Saying that I am the body is the dual state.
 Saying that I am the witness of all, is the witness-state.
 Saying that I am the one Supreme is the undivided state.
 Rejecting two out of these three,
 And assiduously practicing daily the undivided state,
 And thereby being rid of all sorrow-producing mental
 misunderstandings,
 Be of the nature of the said undivided state. ▲

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



* Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter to you to convey my appreciation for the articles appearing in the current issue of ‘The Mountain Path’. I am very much impressed and inspired by all the articles. I convey to you and your associates my love and blessings for the continued appearance of the journal. I have personally met Ramana Maharshi twice, in the 1930s and ’40s.

**Swami Ranganathananda, President,
 Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission,
 Belur Math, W. B.**

* Dear Editor,

I wish to congratulate you on the new get up of the magazine, which is aesthetically very pleasing. The cover is simple, but eloquent and the articles are thought provoking. Bhagavan’s presence is invoked with the sketch of Arunachala. May we live in His wavelength always.

**Parvathy Raman
 Editor, Tapovan Prasad on e-mail.**

* Dear Editor,

The Aradhana issue is superb cover to cover. Prof.K. Swaminathan’s article is his testament of devotion to all of us.

**K. V. Subramanyan
 Ganeshpur, Uttaranchal.**

* Dear Editor,

The present small format of the book is handy to put in a handbag and carry along to read enroute to office. I admit Bhagavan liked simplicity and this booklet represents simplicity. But the material content of the present magazine is very less when compared to what appeared in its earlier half-yearly predecessor.

**A. V. Chandrasekaran,
Anakaputhur, Chennai.**

* Dear Editor,

The new get-up of the journal is simple and dignified. The articles are all uniformly of high quality. Thank you and your team for the rich spiritual fare provided.

**B. Swarajyalakshmi
Visakhapatnam.**

* Dear Editor,

The new format of 'The Mountain Path' is superb. The simple but elegant cover, the depth of the articles, and the overall style are all impressive. Allow me to complement you on a very well written and thought provoking editorial.

Shridhar Bharadwaj on e-mail.

* Dear Editor,

I am always happy to read 'The Mountain Path'. Regarding the article by David Frawley, Agni: The Fire of Self-Inquiry in the Jan-Mar 2003 issue, I do not believe that Bhagavan ever taught that Self-enquiry was "hard to accomplish even after years of dedicated practice". Indeed he said that the thought of difficulty itself was the greatest obstacle which needed to be overcome. . . . As far as I am concerned, anyone who embarks on Vichara and stays with it will . . . achieve Realization sooner than later. All that is required is perserverance. Bhagavan himself, said no special discipline or Yogic practices are necessary to the practitoner of Atma Nishta, only relentless perserverance.

Sol Sandperl on e-mail.

Editor's reply to Mr. Sandperl

As far as 'The Mountain Path' is concerned, the editor does not interfere with opinions of authors who contribute articles. Nevertheless, your question is quite interesting, and we shall endeavour to give a satisfactory answer.

Yes, it is true Self-enquiry is the easiest and the most direct path for the simple reason that the Self is the nearest to us. Bhagavan said that there is nothing to be realized; just give up the idea that you are not realized, that is all. If one can give up the idea that we are not the body, Self-enquiry is the easiest path.

However, though Self-enquiry is easy for those whose mind is absolutely pure, Bhagavan says (in *Spiritual Instruction*, Chapter II., question 2) that Self-enquiry is for ripe souls. For those of us whose minds are immature the task is difficult and requires persevence and one pointed commitment.

As long as we cling to our mind and its attributes Self-enquiry is arduous. If one depends on the ordinary mind to help one to take to Self-Realisation, it is incapable of doing that. The mind constantly seeks outward attractions and veils the Self. Until purity of mind is achieved, it remains difficult to realise the Self. That is why, Bhagavan says in *Upadesa Saram*, v.2: "Disinterested action and surrender to the Lord purifies the mind and points the way to Self-realisation".

He recognizes that though *Atma Vichara* is the ideal and direct path, it may not be possible for everyone to follow it straightaway; it is hard for an impure mind. Hence he talks of *nishkamya karma*, *pranayama*, devotion etc. as a means to achieve a pure mind. The first 15 verses of *Upadesa Saram* are expositions of different methods for those who find Self-enquiry difficult.

The grace of the guru is absolutely essential even for Self-enquiry to progress well, otherwise one is in danger of deluding oneself.

As rightly pointed out perseverance is necessary, for we too are required to make an effort. As Bhagavan said, if we take one step towards him, he will take nine steps towards us. ▲

BOOK REVIEWS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN ABSOLUTIST: Nataraja Guru. 1989. Pub: Gurukulam Publishing House, Narayana Gurukula, Varkala 695145, Kerala. ppvii+694, Price?

This is an engaging, intelligent and unusual book the reviewer encountered with pleasure. It is rare we encounter a biography let alone an autobiography that is refreshingly free of cant and self-serving platitudes. Nataraja Guru is a thinker and a rigorous one at that. Born in Kerala in 1898 to an educated and cultured family he received a thorough education at leading institutions in Bangalore, Ceylon and Madras. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Presidency College, Madras.

After graduation he came in contact with the saintly genius of the great Nārāyana Guru who sought social upliftment and fought social exclusivism. The meeting seemed preordained as if the *sisya*, Nataraja who had first received the Guru's blessings in his early childhood, was ready to be launched into a life of social service through the tool of education.

Elaborate, rich and diverse as his life was, he insisted on being called an absolutist because he was totally absorbed in the task of living and teaching the highest values and wisdom known to man. He applied and lived it to the best of his ability in the modern world. What is so refreshing about his autobiography is his truthfulness even if a story does not particularly show him in a satisfactory light. Here we see a person like everyone else struggling to make sense of his world and his *svadharma*. It is an inspiration to follow the author through all the twists and turns of his journey both in India, Europe and the United States where he taught for some years.

It is impossible to give justice to this long, engaging book of 694 pages. Throughout, there shines the humanity, keen intelligence and determination of a person who followed his *svadharma* come what may. He knew the grace of his Guru was with him whatever the evidence to the

contrary and he adhered faithfully in spirit to the teachings.

A great man and a wise counselor.

— Peter Pichelmann

HINDUISM AND THE CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS: by David Frawley (Vāmadēva Shāstri). 2001. Pub:Voice of India, New Delhi. pp 247, Rs180.

The world at large and India in particular, are going through a deep crisis manifest at the familial, societal, institutional and political levels. Religious discord seems to be the norm.

The book under review focuses on India with particular reference to what Hinduism means and how this religion is related to different aspects of life in general. The clash alluded to in the title is between the Western view of India and the West's vision for the world and the Hindu view which is now beginning to challenge this long-dominant view. Apart from a particular agenda that has informed the colonial view of India, which has continued in post-independence India as well, there is a whole difference in approach to knowledge that constitutes the conflict.

David Frawley begins by pointing out that classical Hindu society was based on a recognition of individual needs and capacities which were defined in spiritual as well as material terms. Hindu religion is not separate from its culture. It is a statement of the social order as well. Similarly, science is not seen as separate from metaphysics in this culture. The book encompasses all aspects of Indian thought—culture, the Vedic sciences and spirituality and presents a case for Hinduism as the new global religion for the new globalised world. The argument in favour of Hinduism (although in this context, Frawley's preferred term is 'Indic') lies in the fact that Hinduism is the only continuous religion since very ancient times. It is a culture that has withstood the onslaught of other religions and various kinds of calamities and still continues to

be a living, throbbing faith close to the people of the country. The reason for this lies in its pluralistic nature, which is in sharp contrast to Western monoculture/monotheism. Hinduism has a holistic perspective on all aspects of life; far from being divisive, it is a way of life that honours every individual, path, creed and belief.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I is on India, *Hinduism and the New Century*, Part II is titled *The Need for a New Indic School of Thought* and Part III is on *Foundations of a New Indic School*.

The first part presents the nature of Hinduism outlining both its strengths and weaknesses. It points out rightly that for a global universe, the pluralistic approach of Hindu culture is the right antidote to so-called Western "multiculturalism" prevailing today which alas is really only monoculturism that seeks to convert all societies and cultures to Western materialistic style of living and thinking (in the form of great malls and blue jeans and MacDonald's).

The second part outlines the deficiencies of both the Leftist view of the world and the Western capitalist view. The book castigates the capitalist and the communist alike for not appreciating, honouring and revelling in the pluralism that constitutes humanity. The chapter entitled "The Myth of the Hindu Right" for instance, clearly points out the difference between what Frawley calls the 'Old Left' and the 'New Left' and analyses the position taken by the Left in India. The Old Left dominates the intellectual circles of India disproportionate to its actual positions of power, and it is this Left being by and large out of touch with the New Left of the West, that uncritically condemns as right-wing all that the Hindu revival movement articulates.

The final part outlines in brief the various branches of Vedic science including *Védānta*, *Yōga*, *Āyurvēda* and *Astrology*. The section begins by demonstrating how Vedic knowledge can contribute to the coming planetary age and ends by describing the significance of solar power and the *Gāyatri Mantra*. The final chapter of this part provides the outlines of a new Vedic school. The author points out that all of this knowledge is available

in Sanskrit and states that it is essential to learn this language if one wants to have a real understanding of the Vedic sciences. The author also exhorts teachers to re-articulate this knowledge in modern terms.

Western methodology that uses purely materialistic tools of analysis pervades the Indian educational system as well. It can be seen in Indian Universities today that all views of what constitute rational, scientific and legitimate areas of study are derived from the West and that scholars in India happen merely to unthinkingly follow theories that the West puts forward—usually ones based on their own limited milieu of research. There is much that India can do to contribute to the intellectual wealth of the world by devising its own tools of analysis which, traditionally at least, have not been content to remain at a physical plane and in fact, have a yogic vision of totality that also includes the spiritual.

The author demonstrates a deep knowledge and understanding of Hindu culture and thought. Yet for those who would like to know facts, this is not an appropriate book. The book is more visionary in nature, passionate in its appeal, and idealistic in approach. The idealism and passion are perhaps not uncalled for, and are even perhaps required in the context of the intellectual terrorism that parades in the guise of secularism and social welfare in academic and political circles and the media in India today. The present crisis in the Hindu psyche is the result of the appeasement of the Minorities led by 'intellectuals' (read Leftists) who denigrate anything that is 'Hindu'. Secularism in India is just anti-Hindu rhetoric.

The book is also appropriate in a context in which Indians lack pride in themselves and in their nation. The book minces no words in lambasting Indians for their lack of knowledge and pride in their own country and who, on the contrary, take pride in their lack of patriotism. Indic culture has an all-encompassing view of life. Yet, as Frawley points out, the self-negativity and weakness in implementation of ideas and thoughts is hardly conducive for growth. Frawley, a Westerner, attempts to restore some pride in Indians in general

and Hindus in particular. He suggests that a new Hindu intellectual class should articulate the Hindu concern and prevent the hegemony of the West in this regard and wealthy Hindu classes should empower right education in India and abroad by funding it.

Much of what Frawley says articulates in clear terms the anguish of the Hindu community which feels beleaguered in its very country of origin and the country in which it constitutes the majority. It is also true however, that there is a section of the Left in India that is 'liberal' in the sense that it does not deride Hindu religion or rituals. Unfortunately, these moderate voices are not heard as much as they should be. (On the other hand, even if they were, they would probably be condemned as right-wing by the more vocal Old Left that dominates the media and Universities.) The case of West Bengal is eminently relevant in our analysis of the role of the Left vis-à-vis Hinduism. The State machinery of this Communist State is paralysed during Durgâ Pūjâ, owing to mass participation in the sacred festivities. It must also be acknowledged that much of the activism (irrespective of the underlying political agenda and extreme postures), in terms of literacy, empowerment of women and the underprivileged is indeed undertaken by the Leftist elements with zeal and passion in the country. At the other end, there are Hindu fundamentalist extremist groups going to the extent of supporting Sati and punishing young boys for celebrating Valentine's Day.

Whether one agrees with (all) the views presented in the book or not, it is a book that every Indian must read and debate the points raised. The debate must be in the true spirit of enquiry that ancient India represented and continues to be a sterling example unmatched anywhere in the world, in any age.

But such a debate within the country and with outside scholars is possible only if knowledge is studied first-hand and in regional language lore. A suppression of either the Vedic subjects or Sanskrit in which much of this knowledge is preserved, would only lead to half-knowledge which,

in its turn, would polarize into an impotent 'fundamentalism-secularism' divide.

Change cannot and should not be either sudden or by force. If it is so, it is bound to be purely temporary. While a Hindu backlash along with an impassioned response to five decades of uneven laws and opportunism is inevitable, it must be tempered by sanity and sobriety to have a lasting impact. [*The destructive power of a fundamentalism born of blinding faith is relative, as it is subservient to the dominant temper of the root culture. The destructive power of a knife is soon controlled if there are many sage elders around a youngster who is learning to use it. Hinduism's dominantly pacific attitude tempers its energetic sustaining power, and thus provides for abundant optimism.—J.J.*]

As Frawley points out, a re-visioning of India is not possible unless history is examined honestly. The book raises several important questions that modern India must face squarely. It is a book that looks back for a futuristic vision.

— Pingali Sailajā

THE HIDDEN MASTER: from 'I' to 'Itness on Vimalaji's teaching': Christine Townend. 2002. Pub: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 110007. pp314, Rs250.

A story about 'the interaction of the force of understanding (the guru) with the force of inquiry (the shishya)'. A journey describing without glamour or sentimentality the qualities of one's guru and the love, guidance and encouragement received, and in the process sharing with the reader rare snippets of Vimalaji's thoughts on Vinoba, Krishnâji and samâdhi states.

— J.Jayarâman

MATRU PANCHAKAM: Hymn of the Five Verses on Mother (Sanskrit slokas): Bhâshya Swâmigal; English commentary by K.K. Sankaran. 1999. Pub: KK Sankaran, 731, 4th E Main, West of Chord—II stage, Mahalaksmipuram, Bangalore 560086. 48+pp116, Rs50.

Srî Mâtru Panchakam is a five verse hymn composed by Sacchidânanda Tîrtha Swâmigal known popularly as Bhâshya Swâmigal, as ordered by his guru in a dream. The latter half of the book has Âdi

Sankara's five verses, also bearing the same name, on his own mother Âryâmbâ, prefaced by KK Sankaran's own *Êka Slôki* on Mother. The greatness of the mother, being the theme, these two pentads bring out the essence of the relationship with a mother as the supreme, right from the day one's *janma* occurs in the womb. Sri KKS gives an exhaustive explanation of the 5 verses of both poems on Mother giving references from various Vêdic scriptures apart from Mahâbhârata, Râmâyana etc, highlighting the unparalleled love a mother alone can give.

[*Interestingly KKS points out that both Bhagavân and Âdi Sankara did liberate souls at the time of death. He quotes Sir CP Râmaswâmy Iyer as saying "Maharshi of Tiruvannâmalai whilst in this world, most unmistakably dwelt with the 'unseen' (p9). On the subject of the passing away of the Maharshi's mother Alagammâl, KKS quotes AS Panchâpakêsa Aiyer (p68) recalling the feelings of the latter's orthodox friend who "was scandalized on hearing that Maharshi would not eat till mother died, ate to the full (without purificatory bath etc — our words) the moment she died". ASP, the author goes on to say, opined that the friend's "conventional mind could not understand the feelings of the sage who could not eat while his mother was suffering in agony, but could eat the moment her soul was released from the body". Really, it is not a mundane matter of feelings here. Kunju Swâmi, an eye-witness, related that upon that soul's Moksha, it was 'back to the routine' for the Jnani, having gone beyond sorrow and contamination.*]

The photographs of the precedent âchâryas and Bhâshya Swâmi and the associated stuti-praises along with translation, point to the author's deep devotion to the guru-parampara.

There is great bonus in the inclusion of poems by, (i) Âdi Sankara: his bhujangas on Siva, Sakti and Vishnu, and his Ganêsha Pancharatnam; (ii) some Srîngêri Math âchâryas and Râjâ Vallabha Sâstri on Âryâmbâ; and (iii) the commentator KKS' own poems on recent Srîngêri âchâryas. —J.J.]

— 'Lathâ'

OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

THE STORY OF DR. BV RAMAN: Father of Modern Astrology: (for children): by Gayatri Devi Vasudev. Pub: Raman Publications, Bangalore 560020 <info@astrologicalmagazine.com>. pp67, Rs 20.

SIVAJNÂNA MUNIVAR: (Makers of Indian Literature Series): Pub: Sâhitya Academy, Mandir Marg, Delhi 110001. ISBN:81-260-0630-7. pp102, Rs25. [*already published: St. Sêkkizhâr*].

SEVEN ETHICO-DIDACTIC WORKS IN TAMIL: Tamil Niti Sastras with Sanskrit and English Translations. [*Âtticchûdi, Kondraivêndan, Mûdurai, Nalvazhi (of sage Auvaivâr), Vetrivêrkai (of king Ativîra Râma Pândiyan), Nanneri (of Sivaprakâsa Dêsikar), and Nîtineri Vilakkam (of sage Kumaraguruparar)*]. pp186, Rs60, US\$

UMÂPATI SIVAM'S WORKS: *Tiruvarul Payan, Vinâ Venpâ, Kodikkavi, Unmaineri Vilakkam* [text, with English translation of these four of the saint's seven works forming part of Saiva Siddhânta's 14 canons]. pp30, Rs15. Both pub: Kalâ Samrakshana Sangkam, 5-D Selvam Nagar, Thanjavur 613007.

[*All three books by 'Sêkkizhâr Adippodi' T.N.Râmachandran. His other excellent translations include Bhâratiâr's Poems, Tirukkôvaiyâr, Periya Purânam, St. Pattinattâr's Poems and the hymns of Kâraikkâl Ammaiâr.*]

RAMANA MADHURÂNUBHAVAM: Reminiscences of Thesûr Akhilândammâl [*Tamil; long awaited reprint*] & Balarâma Reddiâr [tr. from English] [two books in one]. 2003. Pub: Srî Ramanâsramam. pp163, Rs35.

KÂVYAKANTHA GANAPATI MUNIVAR: Dr. Krupânandan. 2003. Pub: Srî Ramanâsramam. pp207, Rs45 [*Tamil tr. of the Telugu original, revised and enlarged to include Ramana Charitam (3 chapters), the 26 Sirsi letters including Bhagavân's reply, the discourse analysing Time, and four verses on Bhagavân found in Umâ Sahasram.*]. — [J.J.]. ▲



ASHRAM BULLETIN

Virupaksha Cave

It was some time in 1899 that Sri Bhagavan began staying at Virupaksha cave on Arunachala. This cave was named after the 16th century saint who lived there. Sri Bhagavan was then known as Brahmana Swami. Many momentous incidents have taken place at Virupaksha cave. It was here that Sri Bhagavan gave his primary teaching 'Who Am I' to an earnest seeker Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai. It was here that the great scholar Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni had his doubts cleared on the true meaning of *tapas*, and overwhelmed with gratitude, gave the young Sage the name Bhagavan

Sri Ramana Maharshi. It was at Virupaksha cave that great devotees such as Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer, Echammal, Mudaliar Patti, Ramanatha Brahmachari, the first Western devotee Frank Humphreys and many others came to see Bhagavan. Virupaksha cave was also witness to a number of compositions by Sri Bhagavan. The immortal *Aksharamanamalai* was composed here. So was the *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*, a compendium of five verses in praise of Sri Bhagavan by Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer. Sri Bhagavan lived here for seventeen years. When his mother Alagamma came

The daily Narayana Seva (poor feeding) under the large Illuppai tree in the ashram

permanently to settle with him she too lived at Virupaksha cave.

The Virupaksha cave is situated on the Eastern slopes of the Arunachala hill and is shaped like the symbol of AUM and the cave resonates with this special subtle sound. Saint Virupaksha had at the time of death converted his body into ashes and it was lying there in a heap at the time of Bhagavan's arrival. Sri Bhagavan arranged the ashes into a mound and placed it on a platform that he himself built. A front porch and a raised platform were also built.

Even during Sri Bhagavan's days, Virupaksha cave served as a place of

meditation for devotees such as Shuddandanda Bharati. It was in 1990 that the Virupaksha cave was brought under the control of Sri Ramanasramam. In 1997, in order to protect the sanctity and environment of the Arunachala hill, the Archeological Survey of India officially took over the monuments and other places of archeological importance situated on the hill. The Virupaksha cave also came under its ambit. This move was undertaken by the ASI to prevent encroachments, vandalism and preserve the original structure of this historical place which is



AN OLD PHOTO OF VIRUPAKSHA CAVE

an important heritage site. The ASI plans to fence the cave and adjacent area.

Devotees of Bhagavan regularly visit Virupaksha cave to spend a quiet day in reflection and solitude — reflecting on Sri Bhagavan's life at the cave, soaking in the sublime atmosphere of that dark cavern and meditating on the higher truths of life. The cave is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. all year round.

It takes about 45 minutes to reach the cave from Sri Ramanasramam. One has to climb to Skandasramam, then take a right turn and climb down for about 10 minutes. During summer months the walk on the mountain can be quite exhausting because of the heat. But during the rains and winter, it is exhilarating. It is important to relax for about 5 minutes in the outer courtyard of the cave until you are cool and your breathing becomes normal before going inside.

Skandasramam

This beautiful small ashram was built by a devotee, Kandasami for Bhagavan in 1916. It was at Skandasramam, in 1922, that Bhagavan's mother attained Samadhi. She was then buried at the foot of the southern slope of the hill. Six months after this, Bhagavan came down to settle permanently near her Samadhi and thus was Sri Ramanasramam born. Skandasramam was not properly maintained for many years. In 1945, Sri Ramanasramam conducted extensive repairs at Skandasramam. The ashram has a perennial spring of drinking water and large trees give a pleasant, cooling effect during the summer months.

Skandasramam consists of an outer verandah, an inner room and the mother's Nirvana room. Behind the hermitage is the perennial spring which Sri Bhagavan caused to flow through the rocks during his stay there.

Skandasramam was also taken over by the ASI in 1997 but the upkeep and maintenance rests with Sri Ramanasramam. The ASI is planning to repair the stone path starting at Ramanasramam.

Overlooking the northern tower of the Arunachala temple, Skandasramam is a favourite place for devotees wishing to spend some time on the hill in contemplation and silence. The ashram is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., throughout the year.

Advent Day

Advent Day, which commemorates Sri Bhagavan's arrival at



SKANDASRAMAM AS IT WAS ORIGINALLY BUILT BY KANDASAMI

Arunachala in 1896 was celebrated at the ashram on September 1st. As usual a large number of devotees from Madurai participated in the celebrations. Special puja was conducted at the shrine.

Ramana Mandiram, Madurai

Ramana Mandiram, Madurai commemorated the death experience of Sri Bhagavan on July 17th and 18th with pujas, poor feeding and talks by devotees on Sri Bhagavan and his teachings.

Rain Rain, Come Again and Again

Yes, it rained heavily in Tiruvannamalai after many years. The uniqueness of this event is that it is not

the rainy season in this state. The south-west monsoon usually skips Tamilnadu, though a few spillover showers occur, that too when the monsoon retreats at the end of August. The last time Tiruvannamalai had such good rains was in 1998 from the normal north-east monsoon. But this year rains started in July itself and peaked in August.

All tanks and ponds around the hill are full. The hill is green and the whole landscape of Tiruvannamalai is verdant. Of course, with the rains, the weather too is pleasant. Waterfalls have also been sighted at a few places on the hill, especially near Skandasramam. A few ashram inmates also regularly went uphill to bathe in the holy waters.



Pali Tirtham

The ashram had taken up desilting, repair and cleaning of the Pali Tirtham tank adjacent to the Matrubhuteswara temple. The timing was appropriate, for soon after, rains filled the tank.

Obituary

SMT. PARVATAM, affectionately called by everyone as Parvatam Patti (Granny) is no more. She passed away at the age of 75 on 29th May 2003.



Parvatam Patti lived in Madurai with her husband whom she lost when she was yet in her twenties. She suffered much in life thereafter but bore it all with fortitude through quiet devotion to God. In the early 1980s

she came to Tiruvannamalai and settled here for good. She served Bhagavan and the ashram by stringing garlands for Bhagavan's and the Mother's shrine. She totally surrendered to Bhagavan and had implicit faith in him.

Parvatam Patti always had a good word for everyone and was capable of making even the most morose of people laugh, such was her humorous nature. Devotees will miss her. Parvatam Patti reposes, in peace, at the Lotus Feet of her chosen master, Bhagavan Ramana.



SRI. AJAY KUMAR, a fine devotee of Sri Bhagavan passed away of a heart attack at the ashram on 26th June. He was 47. Ajay Kumar lived in Pennsylvania, USA and was a doctor by profession. While a baby he received a special blessing from Lakshman Joo, the Kashmiri sage. He was closely associated with Arunachala Ashrama, New York, USA and enthusiastically participated in its activities.

Ajay Kumar, a pure soul, had expressed his desire to shed his body at Arunachala. In a remarkable way his wish was fulfilled. ▲

AFTERWORD

The Sound of Silence

AS WE live and work in the world of noise, we eventually become inured to it to such an extent that we don't even hear it any more. Loudspeakers blare from walls everywhere and various gadgets force artificial sound into our ears and brains. We eventually get to such a state that we feel that every bit of silence must be eliminated in favour of audibility. Shrill or mechanical noise can damage the hearing and probably fill one's head up with clutter. Over the millennia humans seem to have evolved the ability to tune out natural sounds, they resonate on a level that doesn't disturb our brains. Amplified sound has not yet been assimilated in quite the same way. Perhaps we always had this tendency to eliminate space and destroy stillness. Maybe that is why the Vedas are chanted in a steady sort of drone that fills the senses and calms them without stridency.

When not listening to living voices chanting the scriptures, then silence is truly golden. Bhagavan was well known for teaching in silence and he spent many hours a day just sitting in complete quiet. That is when we can absorb the message he has for us, when we allow calmness to rule over clamour and when our inner selves can be receptive to our inner voice.

One of the most precious things the ashram has to offer is silence. We should learn to be grateful for this and realise its true worth and not seek to obliterate it in favour of any type of sound, no matter how appealing. This is not to say that music and singing hymns of praise are not welcome. They are, very much so. However they should punctuate the silence and not overwhelm it. Silence is a treasure we must learn to value before we lose it completely through indifference. ▲

RECENT ASHRAM PUBLICATIONS

Ramana Gita (English): This book which embodies the teachings of Sri Bhagavan compiled by Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni is being reprinted with a new cover.

Pages : pp. 397

Price : Rs. 120



Sri Muruganar (Tamil): This biography of the great devotee Muruganar by Kanakamma which incorporates important elements of two books (*Sri Muruganar* and *Ninaivil Niraindavaï*) on him by the same author is being published with a new cover.

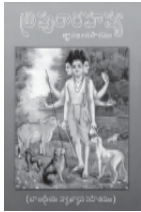
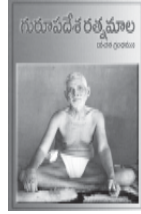
Pages : pp. 109

Price : Rs. 40

Gurupadesa Ratnamala (Telugu): This is a translation in Telugu of the Tamil work of Muruganar, *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (Garland of Guru's Sayings) embodying Bhagavan's teachings.

Pages : pp. 280

Price : Rs. 75



Sri Tripura Rahasya Jnanakhandam Saramu (Telugu): This book is being reprinted with a new cover depicting Sri Dattatreya.

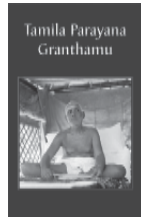
Pages : pp. 290

Price : Rs. 60

Tamila Parayana Granthamu (Telugu): In order to help Telugu devotees follow the Tamil works of Sri Bhagavan, a Telugu transliteration with meaning of the Parayana being chanted daily at Sri Bhagavan's shrine.

Pages : pp. 276

Price : Rs. 55



Available from:

Sri Ramanasramam Book Depot, Sri Ramanasramam, Sri Ramanasramam PO, Tiruvannamalai 606603.

(Postage and packing charges extra.)