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## Ramana Ashtottaram

### 34. Om cūtavāṭyām samāsīnāya namaḥ

ओम् चूतवाट्याम् समासीनाय नमः

Calmly seated in the mango grove.

This name describes the two years' stay in Gurumurtham and the adjacent mango grove. His diet was generally only one cup of milk-mixture for the whole day and as a consequence his body was all skin and bone. His continuous one-pointed absorption into the source of 'I' was not unlike *thailadhara* (unbroken flow of oil). He remained for long hours in a steady *asana*, freed from hunger and thirst, oblivious to the world.

By his very presence in this period of stillness, he bestowed as well as enjoyed profound calmness.

### 35. Om cūrṇitākhilavibhramāya namaḥ

ओम् चूर्णिताखिलविभ्रमाय नमः

One who has destroyed all illusions.

He had completely annihilated every kind of *maya*, not only for himself, but also for those who sought his guidance.

Sri Ramana was a lion who looked upon the world with equanimity, free of desire and fear. His effortless poise demonstrated to all who had the good fortune to receive his *darshan* that here was one who had transcended the compulsion of the *guna*-s. ▲

## EDITORIAL

# Dakshinamurti and Bhagavan

Who is the youthful guru beneath the banyan tree?  
Very old are the pupils who seek him.  
The handsome teacher's speech is silence.  
Cleared are all the pupil's doubts.

— *Dakshinamurti Stotra*

A clue to Bhagavan's role in this world can be discovered in his association with Dakshinamurti, the manifestation of Siva as the supreme teacher. During his early days on Arunachala, Bhagavan said that he discovered a secret place on the north side of the hill where lay a secluded banyan tree. It was here that he was stung by bees for intruding on this sacred site. He immediately understood that he was not to proceed further. In response to his invasion of this space, he allowed the bees to sting him until their anger was spent. Years later when he related this story in the Old Hall, some devotees decided that they would try to locate the site. They told no-one and explored the area of the hill that Bhagavan had generally indicated. They became lost and one of them, Muruganar, was overcome with such fatigue

that it made him briefly mentally unbalanced. They eventually managed to drag themselves away and later they sheepishly reported their activity to Bhagavan. He reprimanded them for their furtive attempt to intrude into a place where they had no business to be.

Who is this Dakshinamurti and what is the significance of this figure in the advaitic tradition? And why do Bhagavan's devotees identify Dakshinamurti with Sri Ramana?

The first substantial historical record about Dakshinamurti is in the *Suta Samhita* of the *Skanda Purana*.<sup>1</sup> It is believed Sankara studied the *Suta Samhita* eighteen times before composing his *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*. Perhaps it was Sankara's familiarity with this text which eventually inspired him to compose the profound *Sri Dakshinamurti Stotra*. There is also a *Dakshinamurti Upanisad* but some scholars regard it as a late interpolation into the canon.<sup>2</sup> In popular worship today there is a statue of this god on the southern side of the main shrine of Saivite temples in the south of India, though it is rare a temple is dedicated exclusively to it.

According to Hindu mythology Dakshinamurti is a manifestation of Siva who taught the four sons of Brahma in silence. It is said he sits under a banyan tree, his left leg crossed over the right knee in *virasana*,

<sup>1</sup> "He removes the ignorance of the devotees with the fingers of the hand held in *jnanamudra*, a specific configuration signifying the essential identity of *jiva* and *Ivara*. His body is half-woman, the woman being his own Supreme power of infinite happiness, not different from himself. *Dharma* in the form of a bull is beside him. The sages who live a life of *dharma* and who are well versed in the Vedic knowledge are all around him. He is sitting under a banyan tree, which stands for *Maya*. He is the repository of all branches of knowledge. He is the Lord of lords, immutable. He relieves the devotees from the clutches of *samsara* by giving them knowledge about their own *atman*. This Lord of creation, sustenance and annihilation is known by the name of Dakshinamurti." Quoted in *Sri Dakshinamurti Stotram* of Sri Sankaracarya by Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati, pp. 8-9, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., Delhi, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Alladi Mahadeva Sastry in a footnote to the *Dakshinamurti Upanisad*, states that it belongs to the *Krishna Yajur-Veda*. See his *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, p. 211, Samata Books, Chennai, 1984. N.S. Subrahmanian gives a resume of this 49th *Upanisad*, in which Markandeya speaks of the *Siva-tattva* as the highest non-differentiated state of perception. See his *Encyclopaedia of the Upanisads*, pp.244-5, Sterling Pub. 1990.

his lower right hand poised in the *chin-mudra* which indicates perfection, and his lower left clasps a bunch of palm-leaves, to indicate that he is the master of the established teachings. On his upper right he holds the drum which indicates he is in harmony with time and creation because it is vibration which manifests as form. His upper left hand holds a flame, the fire of knowledge which destroys ignorance.

The word Dakshinamurti can be divided into two parts: *dakshina* and *murti*. The more familiar meaning is that *dakshina* means south and right and *murti* means form. In other words, that form which faces south. In Hindu mythology Yama, the god of death faces north, so that when Dakshinamurti faces south, there is no death. He is immortal; he triumphs over death — he is Mrutyunjaya.

There is another meaning also based on Sanskrit roots. *Dakshina* means clever, skilful, right-hand.<sup>3</sup> *Daksa* meant at one time discernment, judgement, discriminative thought-power. There is a sense of mental capacity derived from the sense of division, or discrimination, *viveka*. There are several variations on *ds* which means to hurt but in its positive sense it also means competent and able. It is akin to the root *dis*: competent, fit, careful, attentive. Discrimination is a force and it is where advaita or the enquiry into what is true and what is false, begins.

There is a further esoteric meaning, "Dakshinamurti is the effulgent Self as revealed by Ramana. Dakshinamurti is experienced at the centre on the right side (*dakshina*) and yet he is formless (*amurti*), that is, limitless. Dakshinamurti is the very form of awareness (*dakshina*) ... We find this interpretation in the Dakshinamurthi Upanishad (*semushee dakshina proktha*)." <sup>4</sup>

Finally, Alain Danielou relates Dakshinamurti to the five components (*kala*) of Siva and the manifestation of speech. He says that Dakshinamurti who represents the being-in-knowledge or-intellect (*vijnana-maya-murti*), is equated with the root of knowledge which

<sup>3</sup> See *The Secret of the Vedas* by Sri Aurobindo, pp. 67-8, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1996. "We have Dakshina associated with the manifestation of knowledge, [she] represents the separative intuitional discrimination."

<sup>4</sup> *Hindu Iconology: Dakshinamurti*, by Visvanatha Swami, *The Mountain Path*, pp. 39-40, January 1976.

streams forth like the rays of the sun. The sun is the sum total of knowledge and is at the centre of the solar world. In symbolic orientation, the centre, the point of origin, is called the north. The aim of knowledge is the flow toward the south, that is, creation: thus the Southern Image, Dakshinamurti.<sup>5</sup>

The same idea is connected to Avalokiteswara, the Buddhist bodhisattva, whose name connotes the lord who looks down on the world (*ava*: descent; *loka*: world; *isvara*: lord). While Dakshinamurti or Avalokiteswara looks down in silence and compassion, we look north or up to receive their grace.

This is all very well in an academic sense but to those of us who want to understand the close relationship of Bhagavan to Dakshinamurti we need to turn to Bhagavan for clarification. He made a direct reference to Dakshinamurti in the second verse of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*, the Eight Verses to Sri Arunachala:

‘“Who is the seer?” When I sought within, I watched what survived the disappearance of the seer (viz. the Self). No thought arose to say, “I saw”, how then could the thought “I did not see” arise? Who has the power to convey this in words, when even You (appearing as Dakshinamurti) could do so in ancient days by silence only? Only to convey by silence Your (Transcendent) State, You stand as a Hill, shining from heaven to earth.’

In this verse Bhagavan goes straight to the heart of our dilemma as human beings. Who is it really who is conscious? Who knows that they exist? What is this knowledge which streams forth from an impenetrable region of the intellect which reveals us who we are?

What is also interesting here, is Bhagavan’s statement that the reason for Arunachala’s existence is to shine forth conveying by silence the transcendent state of being.

Bhagavan states that Siva appeared in the form of Dakshinamurti in order to teach the sons of Brahma — Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanathkumara and Sanatsujata: “They desired guidance for realisation of the Self. They were the best equipped individuals for Self-Realisation. Guidance should be only from the best of Masters. Who could it be

<sup>5</sup> *Hindu Polytheism*, pp. 207-8, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1964.



but Siva — the *yogiraja*. Siva appeared before them sitting under the sacred banyan tree. Being *yogiraja* should He practise *yoga*? He went into *samadhi* as He sat; He was in Perfect Repose. Silence prevailed. They saw Him. The effect was immediate. They fell into *samadhi* and their doubts were at an end.”<sup>6</sup>

In short, we associate the non-dual realisation — the advaitic tradition — with Dakshinamurti because the ultimate truth cannot be conveyed in words or concepts. It is in silence that we hear the truth. Dakshinamurti epitomises that act of potent silence which awakens *jnana* in us. For the many who have experienced the grace of Bhagavan’s silence this is perfectly understood. Once we have tasted this mysterious, addictive silence we realise it is what we have always been seeking; it resolves the conflicts of the mind; it heals the heart. It is the true north which guides us home.

In respect to the story which opened this editorial, the question that arises is whether there is an entity called Dakshinamurti who resides on sacred Arunachala? And can we approach him?

The name describes not a person who is historical or legendary, but a principle which reflects the pure light of *jnana*. Such an entity does not exist in this physical realm but on a subtle plane such as that which Bhagavan described when he told us that ‘inside’ Arunachala was a celestial city. Unless we too have the eye of *jnana* it would be highly unlikely we could approach such a being.

What we are meant to understand from the legend of Dakshinamurti is that we too are ‘sons of Brahma’ — we too are a blend of desires and like those four mythic sons we seek understanding. We all stand in wonder before this singular hill which stands silent, inspirational and entirely distinct from the other hills on the plain. We wonder how it is possible to come into contact with this divine mystery. Up close it is a paradox: it intimidates us with its stern aloofness and yet its mild slopes invite us to come closer. It appears to be an inert pile of rock and yet it exerts a subtle and energetic influence on all of us. In the end, intellect and the power of articulation are defeated and we are led to crucial insight: we slowly begin to appreciate

<sup>6</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam, Talk No. 569.

that concepts are not important — it does not matter how much knowledge we acquire, Arunachala will strike us dumb each time we attempt to identify it with a thought or feeling. The best approach is a quiet mind because we can then, free of concepts, identify with this universal consciousness, which by some miracle beyond human understanding, has manifested itself as an edifice of rock.

Bhagavan was in awe of Arunachala. In the presence of this allegedly timeless phenomenon we grope to capture the depth of its universal and fundamental character. All the workings of our conditioned mind are futile. The simple pre-requisite is to be absorbed into Arunachala and drop the volcano of our bubbling senses and extinguish our individuality, our sense of separateness. We can enter into the stillness, which is capable of conveying the ‘transcendental state’, not by thought but by identification or absorption. We only need to read in Bhagavan’s devotional outpourings his overwhelming love to realise the importance of this.

Bhagavan told us that Arunachala was his guru. It was Arunachala which inexorably drew him from Madurai. It was Arunachala that opened the eyes of the young Venkataraman and absorbed him into its sacred mystery.

Bhagavan moved down from Skandasramam in 1922 to what is the present day site of the ashram. The coincidence of choosing the southern side of Arunachala for his abode is intriguing in the context of Dakshinamurti traditionally facing south. Near the ashram is the small, rare shrine dedicated to Dakshinamurti. And though we should not read too much into it, in the Old Hall and other places where he lived, Bhagavan sat facing more or less south giving darshan. Bhagavan was so identified with Arunachala and the expression of its *sakti* as Dakshinamurti he was spontaneously in accord with its expression.

Bhagavan quoted quite often from the *Dakshinamurti Stotra* composed by Sankara, which was his very first translation from Sanskrit into Tamil during his Virupaksha days. In the invocatory verse which he composed for his translation he wrote: “That Sankara who came as Dakshinamurti to grant peace to the great ascetics, who revealed his true state of silence, and who has expounded the nature of the Self in this hymn, abides in me.” This is a very clear and definite statement about how Bhagavan saw his role as a guru. The manner of Bhagavan’s teaching ‘method’ is consonant with Dakshinamurti. He taught in silence. Let us listen in silence. ▲



# Sadhana in Advaita

## Part One: The Path of Peace\*

SWAMI MADHURANANDA

*The following article is the first of two dealing with practical approaches to the method of self-enquiry and the path of jnana as taught by Bhagavan Ramana.*

As a sadhana, advaita requires that we already have the deep conviction that the way we generally deal with the world only creates pain and sorrow. This suffering can be traced to our sense of a separate individual self. Such an understanding will reveal the futility of all experiences, including spiritual ones, which are primarily centred on a person's individuality. The knowledge that life is transient inspires urgency and earnestness in the desire to resolve these existential problems; it creates the zeal and fire needed to do so. This, as we will

\*An accurate translation of 'Sadhana in Advaita' would be 'Spiritual Practice in Non-Duality', but I prefer to describe this practice as 'The Path of Peace', because the practice of Advaita aims at supreme peace.

see, develops into a search for unadulterated peace within one's everyday life. I must add here that one is not, at the outset, required to believe that one's individuality is the primary cause of one's suffering. It is enough if one genuinely desires to be free of suffering. Such a one will, in due course, realize that it is individuality — the mistaken belief that a separate 'self' exists — that is the cause of all sorrows. Through sincere investigation, eventually, the spontaneous revelation that 'I am the Reality' will come to such a seeker.

By performing whole-hearted sadhana, one's love for true peace — or the 'Self' — increases. One also starts to take refuge in concepts such as, 'I am Brahman' or 'I am the Supreme Reality' or 'I am not the body-mind complex'. Though thinking thus is merely a mental activity that has to be given up sooner or later, it helps aspirants to weaken their identification with the body and to get rid of the tendency of the mind to dwell on worldly things. Contemplating the truth of one's nature again and again, renders the mind pure, so that any doubt about one's true identity galvanizes our attention via the enquiry 'Who am I?'

If one's discrimination is clear and sharp and if one has the innermost feeling that one's suffering has no end on the individual level and that *there is no way in which we can go beyond the ego if we use the mind*, then the method of enquiry can take an altogether different turn. When we first try the method of self-enquiry, asking ourselves "Who am I?" this is usually because of our trust in Bhagavan or the scriptures. This means that our enquiry does not arise from our own existential doubt about our identity. It merely parrots what is actually Ramana's 'question' or someone else's question. But until the question 'Who am I? What am I?' becomes *our own question*, burning and all-consuming, arising from our own existential experience of our helplessness and desperate seeking, until then we will not be practising self-enquiry. Because it is only when we are totally consumed by this investigation, this search for our true nature, that we will experience the profound power of this method. We will then experience self-enquiry as *a state of deep stillness* that has the capacity *to cut off the very root of our habitual, unconscious, thinking patterns*. Enquiry that does not arise from our own existential insecurity, anxiety and despair is

merely a repetitive exercise that ends up becoming dry and monotonous, or inducing sleep. It is not the path Bhagavan taught, which wakes us up to our ever-existing real nature.

Therefore genuine self-enquiry cannot be intellectually defined or even discussed, because it is a state that is beyond the thinking mind. Self-investigation, as Bhagavan taught it, is not one ego-I searching for another ego-I. Nor does it mean that the mind searches for its 'source' in terms of *thinking* and analysing or in terms of any kind of *destination* to be reached in the realm of time and space. Real enquiry is the search for the source of thought *which is beyond time and space*. Therefore it is a happening, completely outside mental activity, where *questioning itself is experienced as stillness*.

### True Enquiry only happens if and if and if . . .

1. The question 'Who am I?' must arise spontaneously and naturally. Without *genuine doubt as to one's true nature*, self-questioning becomes mechanical and dry. This does not mean that one should artificially create questions in one's mind, because this merely triggers more thinking. Also I do not mean that we should not try to do self-enquiry when we feel no existential doubt. Irrespective of whether our self-questioning arises naturally or not, we should subdue all thoughts, without thinking about anything, and enquire 'Who am I?' Eventually genuine self-questioning will arise, and with it will come an experience of profound peace that is spontaneous. Through practising in this way one automatically enters a mode of being where self-enquiry — the investigation of the ego-mind — arises naturally again and again, repeatedly bringing an experience of deep peace. Through practice one gets addicted to this dynamic peace which is one's own true nature.

2. Further, one must also have the absolute conviction that *there is no answer to the question 'Who am I?'* on the level of thought, and that whatever answer arises as a thought is utterly false. If one thinks one knows the answer, enquiry comes to an end then and there, because the mind, instead of becoming still, is filled with thoughts.

Self-enquiry can only happen when one says, in utter helplessness, 'I do not know anything about myself'. A Vedantin once told me

that the moment he asked ‘Who am I?’ the answer came immediately to him, ‘I am Brahman’. But this merely shows that he had no uncertainty about his identity after all. He was cocksure that he was ‘Brahman’, which is why the answer came immediately. But all he had was a mere concept of reality, which he had got from outside sources, not from his own experience of reality. This won’t work at all on the practical level, to mitigate one’s suffering and bring peace, which is the goal of advaita. How can self-enquiry work for people who are full of *concepts* — false knowledge — about their true nature? In other words, how can the mind — which is merely ‘a bundle of thoughts’, in Bhagavan’s words — subside through *thinking*? This can never happen.

3. Once enquiry starts happening it leads to moments of utter helplessness and fear for the ego. That is why intense enquiry into ‘Who am I? What is this sense of “I”?’ results in a deep and profound *silence* of the mind, which in turn, through practice, will lead one to the understanding that *one IS the ‘stillness’ itself*. This insight can come only in the moments of silence. Silence is the greatest teacher, the true teacher and the only teacher when it comes to Reality. Then, after practising enquiry, this deep stillness of mind may begin to happen even without asking ‘Who am I?’. In any case one should remain ‘dynamically still’ — this is the essence of self-enquiry. This dynamic stillness is the highest state one can wish for in advaitic practice. The understanding ‘I *am* the stillness’ can, of course, also come to spiritual practitioners who have not used the method of self-enquiry. In any case, whatever method is used, all sincere seekers need to experience *this deep stillness that is so alive*, so dynamic, again and again, until they remain utterly at peace, tranquil and unshakeable in the midst of all life’s disturbances.

### **Immense blessings of this stillness**

This wonderful peace ‘which passeth all understanding’, will bring the realization that one is intimately related to every object that is perceived through spontaneous, non-volitional perception. Whether these objects are words, images or sensory perceptions of the external world, one will come to recognize that no object can be the cause of disturbance



to one's ever-existing peace. One will therefore no longer seek to get rid of any object, recognizing that all objects within our field of perception exist as long as the body exists. One comes to see very clearly that it is *our mind*, with its unceasing urge *to become* someone or *to get* something — including enlightenment — that is the main cause of all our suffering. Also, one realizes that though one has the capacity to think, 'thoughts' and the 'mind' cannot be perceived.

Happiness lies in not allowing the mind to breed thoughts. Then sadhana means *just returning* to this extremely lively stillness again and again. Such a practice will weaken the habitual, unconscious thought processes which are very powerful and otherwise almost impossible to subdue. The practitioner *returns to stillness* repeatedly, whether with her eyes closed or open, with her hands at work or free. Physical activity does not affect advaitic sadhana. One can experience the most profound stillness even with eyes open or when running. Such a stillness may come to us then, even if it does not come to us when we are doing formal sitting meditation. Thus the experience of this dynamic stillness has nothing to do with sitting or not sitting, because this stillness is not a state of sedation. Advaitic practise does not estrange us from this beautiful river called life. All that it requires is that we *avoid engaging the mind in thinking when life does not demand it*.

With practice, as the days pass, all our habitual tendencies and negative emotions, even those in suppressed form at unconscious levels, come to the surface of the mind, and slowly lose their hold. One feels a deepening sense of relief and gratitude that such a way out of suffering has at last been discovered. This *abiding in stillness* is the surest method, unlike other techniques, all of which employ the mind and therefore give only temporary peace. In this profound stillness *the unconditioning of the mind* — in other words, the weakening of the *vasanas* [latent mental tendencies] — happens most effortlessly. The practitioner's deadliest enemy, the unconscious patterns of habitual thought, which cause him to repeatedly lose himself in the mind's unceasing chatter and day-dreaming, are steadily weakened.

The breakthrough in sadhana happens when one realizes that one *is* stillness itself. This constitutes a total paradigm shift in one's practice.

It is a radical jump. It entails a moving away from one's habitual self-centredness to an impersonal 'no centre'. When one *is* this stillness, one can accept all objects. Nothing is rejected or feared, nothing is desired. The labelling of objects as good or bad ends. One experiences the external world in an entirely new way. One no longer rejects any external object through aversion, seeking its absence from one's perception. This is because one no longer sees objects as *external*; every object becomes a pointer to one's own existence. It is the *thinking* mind that says, 'This is an object and it is inert, having no connection with my own existence'. Instead, if there is *no thought*, then, from the depths of stillness, you immediately experience a deep affinity with every object that you perceive. Every object of perception becomes an opportunity to *experience* this stillness, which is your own existence. At this point in the practice, the simple fact that *one's true nature is existence itself* becomes self-evident. This realization constitutes our liberation from the doubting mind, which many of us have. Intellectual discussion about attaining reality becomes not just meaningless but even painful compared to the peace of this stillness.

At this juncture a question may arise for Bhagavan's devotees, namely, 'There is another path in advaita, which is surrender, so why should I bother about this stillness?' If by 'surrender' one means reminding oneself again and again that it is God's will that makes everything happen, then this is a mental technique — and a good one — for calming the mind. But the advaitic understanding of 'surrender' is very different. In Bhagavan's teaching it is 'to be still'. Here 'surrender' is the same as self-enquiry. Bhagavan himself said that *surrender and enquiry are one and the same as a state of mind*. The only difference is in the terms used. *Bhakti* [the path of devotion] uses the terms 'surrender'. *Jnana* [the path of knowledge] uses the terms 'enquiry' or 'stillness'.

Bhagavan said that this state of stillness leads directly to the state of unbroken 'I am-I am'. This state is unchanging; it continues through the three states of deep, dreamless sleep, waking and the dream state. Sages describe this state as Absolute Perfection. This is the goal of the advaitin and the fulfilment of all sadhana.

### What this stillness is not

I must make clear what this stillness is not, as there are many misconceptions about it.

1. Nowadays, unfortunately, there are many people who glibly say, 'We are Reality always, we are Stillness, so we don't have to do anything, there is no need for sadhana. Doing anything is an obstacle and conflicts with the ever-existing Stillness.' This is a statement of profound wisdom. But, unfortunately, many people who make this kind of statement, do so very casually, using it as an excuse to avoid practice and to indulge the whims and fancies of their undisciplined minds. This is not 'stillness'. It may be noticed that such people either hold a theory of 'no free will, only predestination', or they are scholars who gratify their egos by such pronouncements. Such people are very shallow; they have no experience of true stillness. The 'lazy' stillness they proclaim has nothing to do with advaitic practice, for they confuse their self-indulgence with advaitic 'effortlessness'.

Further, a true sage does not propound any theory. When we hold on to a theory the mind becomes very active. The theory of predestination may be of help to beginners, as it can tranquillize the mind. But advaitic practice has nothing to do with *any* concept. In this practice we seek to *uncondition* and release the mind from the entire storehouse of *vasanas* [latent mental tendencies]. Thus, no matter how 'true' an idea may be, it cannot liberate us, because, when engaged with an idea, the mind becomes active. *No idea can still the mind.*

2. Today there is much discussion of various practices of 'awareness', especially in some schools of Vipassana meditation. Here one must be extremely careful. Both 'Vipassana' and 'awareness' are terms that are used in very different ways by a wide variety of schools. I want to emphasize that some of these 'awareness' practices are not identical with the practice of enquiry as taught by Bhagavan. That is, they will not bring one to the unconditioned state of stillness. Bhagavan taught that our *existence* is not different from our *awareness* — they are one and the same thing. He emphasized this repeatedly. Therefore, the state of awareness, as described by him, is a state in which the awareness

of emotions happens automatically, without any deliberate effort. On the other hand, if one *thinks* that one has to *try* to be aware of one's emotions and sensations, not only is mental effort present, but a subject-object relation has arisen. This is the crux of the problem. In other words, practices that use the mind may be stepping stones towards peace, but the mind is in full swing in them.

If one is a sincere practitioner this can be easily tested. If one knows that 'I am', one's nature, is nothing but awareness, one can handle even the most painful emotions quite easily. This is simply not possible if one's 'awareness' is merely a mental exercise. If the mind is involved, one can handle only mild to moderate emotions. Further, when one's mind is active in one's sadhana, one is always looking for shortcuts — through books and teachers — to an external goal. As long as one believes that objects have an independent external existence, quite separate from one's perception of them, mental activity continues unabated. Such practice does not still the mind. But it is mental stillness that is the whole point of advaitic practice.

In practices that use the mind, the practitioner may have the feeling that he can give up God — yet he is still unable *to let go of his own mind*. But this is precisely what is required. The day must come when he has to recognize the hard fact that every time he directs his mind to an emotion, a sensation or an object 'outside' himself, he instantly *moves away from stillness*. Only then will he realize that he has to give up all techniques that involve the mind. Yes, finally one has to realize that one *is* awareness or stillness itself. It is solely in this state of profound stillness, where all objects have vanished, that one arrives at the heart of self-enquiry. ▲



# Sri Bhagavan and Our Family

M. V. SABHAPATHY

*This is a slightly abridged version of an account originally written in Tamil by M. V. Sabhapathy. The two additional stories that appear in italics were added by the translators and editors, T. V. Venkatasubramanian and David Godman.*

**M**y father, Sri M. S. Venkatarama Iyer, was a boyhood friend of Bhagavan. At one time my grandfather's family and Sri Bhagavan's family lived as tenants in different parts of the same building in Madurai.

For my father, who was a staunch advaitin, Bhagavan was all and everything. He would not pay his respects to any of the gods since Bhagavan and Bhagavan alone was his deity. In our house there was a picture of Lord Murugan seated on a peacock. My father pasted a photo of Bhagavan on top of the head of Murugan, making it appear as if Bhagavan was sitting on the peacock.

Instead of performing his children's first tonsure ceremony [shaving the head of a young child] in the presence of our family deity Lord Venkateswara, a custom few would dare to deviate from, he would perform it in the presence of Bhagavan.

The author's mother, Parvatam, is indicated in the centre and his father, M. S. Venkatarama Iyer, is on the right with an infant, possibly the author.

Prof. N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer, a long-standing devotee of Bhagavan, once said to me: ‘Your father was an ardent Ramana devotee. For him, Bhagavan alone was his mother, his father, his family, and everything else as well. He had a complete disregard for all the traditional deities. His madness for Bhagavan was so strong, that when he went to the Vinayaka Temple, he would sit with his back to the deity. If anyone mentioned the word “Bhagavan”, streams of tears would start to flow. That is why Bhagavan himself gave him the name “Azhuguni Siddhar” [The Weeping Siddha]. Your father belonged to the Siva *ganas*, [the attendants of Siva]. Whenever Siva manifests on this earth, he will bring these *ganas* with him.’

My father used to spin thread on a spinning wheel, spool it and send it to Bhagavan. This thread was used to weave the cloth that Bhagavan’s *kaupinas* were made from.

When my father came to see Bhagavan for the first time in Tiruvannamalai, Bhagavan remarked, ‘Does that *aathi* [sesbania] tree still exist?’ This was a reference to an incident from their childhood.

Bhagavan and my father used to sleep on a platform in the front portion of the house. One night they put pillows on the bed and covered them with a sheet because they wanted to go out and play *silambam* [a traditional Tamil form of martial arts in which combatants twirl four-foot-long wooden sticks]. My grandfather, Sabhapathy Iyer, walked past the platform and noticed that one of the pillows was protruding from the bed. Thinking that his son had just stretched his legs out, he attempted to put them back on the bed. When he discovered that there was no one sleeping there, he realised he had been tricked. When the two Venkataramans returned home early the next morning, he tied my father to the *aathi* tree that was in the courtyard of the house and caned him severely with a branch that he took from the same tree. This was the incident that Bhagavan was reminding my father of.

My father cast all his burdens on Sri Bhagavan and remained unaffected by all the unfortunate events of his life. Out of the ten children who were born to him, seven of them survived only to the age of three or four before merging with Bhagavan.

Bhagavan used to remark humorously, ‘Whenever a letter comes from Venkataraman, it is usually about his child attaining to the supreme world’.

Can there be any doubt that it was the grace of Sri Arunachala Ramana that gave my father the power to endure the loss of seven children, one after another, in quick succession?

On one of his visits to the ashram Bhagavan began to speak about the special characteristics — such as size and thickness — of Azhagar Koil *dosais*. My father immediately left for Madurai, without telling Bhagavan. Two days later he came back, bearing on his head a large number of these *dosais* and offered them to Bhagavan. So intense was his love for Bhagavan.<sup>1</sup>

When Bhagavan lived in Virupaksha Cave, he and his devotees would occasionally go to the top of Arunachala. Food for the devotees would be carried in a big vessel that was tied to a strong bamboo pole. Two people, one at each end, would carry it to the peak. On one of these trips my father, who was strong and well built, carried the food along with Ramanatha Brahmachari, who was both puny and frail. Ramanatha was at the front and my father was at the rear. They lost their way and found themselves in a place from where they didn’t know the route to the peak. At that point they saw Bhagavan walking ahead of them, so they decided to follow him. Three times they got lost, and three times they saw Bhagavan in the distance, showing them the way. However, when they finally reached the peak, Bhagavan was not there and had not been seen there by the other devotees who were waiting for the food to come.

When they returned my father saw Bhagavan sitting in Virupaksha Cave.

<sup>1</sup> Azhagar Koil is a temple in Madurai district. In this particular shrine the *dosais* that are referred to in this story are offered as *prasad* to devotees. They are not available anywhere else. Bhagavan seemed to be particularly fond of this variety of *dosai*. In *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 30th October 1946, it is recorded that Dr Rao brought some of these *dosais* from Madurai. Devaraja Mudaliar wrote: ‘Bhagavan had several times told us of this *dosai*. That is why Dr Rao was so particular about bringing it. Bhagavan partook of it with relish and spoke of the days when he used to eat it frequently.’

Both puzzled and astonished, my father said, 'You are a great trickster! How did you manage to be present in two places at the same time?'

Bhagavan smiled, but gave no reply.

What to say of Bhagavan's greatness, he who bestowed strength on the weak Ramanatha Brahmachari and manifested to show the way to the summit.

My mother also had the good fortune of climbing Arunachala in the company of Bhagavan. On these trips, the party would usually halt at Seven Springs, which is located near the peak of Arunachala. This was one of Bhagavan's favourite resting places. He would often remain there while the devotees went to the peak and back. Bhagavan once remarked that even though the seven springs are adjacent to each other, the water from each spring has a distinct taste that is different from the others. My mother once washed Bhagavan's feet with water from these springs. She discovered that those feet were soft and red, like red lotuses. My mother was one who held his feet firmly, illustrating the line, 'Let us worship the feet of Lord Ramana, the true meaning of the *Vedas*, and attain *jnana*'.

*It seems that Bhagavan's body became soft and smooth after his realisation. Rangan, another boyhood friend of Bhagavan, has written about this:*

*On another day, when we were at Skandashram together, I [Rangan] felt Bhagavan's leg from heel to toe and commented, 'When our legs touched when we played games together in our childhood, yours used to feel like iron. Your skin used to be so rough, when it touched mine, I felt like I was being scratched by thorns. Now your skin is all changed. It is like velvet.'*

*Bhagavan commented, 'Yes, my body is all changed. This is not the old body.'*

*When Rangan told this story on other occasions, he sometimes said that Bhagavan had said, 'This is not the old body. The old body was burned by jnanagni [the fire of jnana].'*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Both of the two indented paragraphs are from *The Power of the Presence*, part one, pp. 25-26.

In Bhagavan's presence my mother once sang a few verses composed by *Avudai Akka*, a *jnani* from Senkottai.

Bhagavan recognised them and immediately asked, 'Did mother [Bhagavan's own mother] teach you these verses?' to which my mother replied 'Yes'.

My mother Parvatam, following the footsteps of my father, was fortunate enough to have an equal devotion to Bhagavan. Almost every month, as soon as my father received his salary, my parents would visit Arunachala. On one of these visits my mother prostrated to Bhagavan with her baby (my eldest brother Ramanachalam) in her arms. When she stood up, she was stunned by what she saw. Instead of the usual divine form of Sri Bhagavan, she saw a great and formless effulgence. This effulgence manifested before her not once but three times. Bhagavan thus fulfilled the plea that is written in *Aksharamanamalai*, verse 32:

Stop deceiving me, testing me and proving me, O  
Arunachala, and henceforward reveal to me instead your form  
of light!<sup>3</sup>

When my mother informed Bhagavan what had happened, Bhagavan just smiled and said, 'Is that so?'

What can one say about the ironic statement of this conjuror? What can one say about the good fortune of my mother?

Many years later I asked my mother about this incident: 'You have been so devoted to Ramana, and you have even had a vision of him as effulgent light. Why have you not yet become fully mature?'

She replied, 'Since Bhagavan has himself written, "Make me fit, ripen me, then be my Master and govern me,"<sup>4</sup> he will certainly bestow his grace.'

Just as she predicted, in her final breath she uttered the word 'Ramana' and merged in the lotus feet of Bhagavan.

<sup>3</sup> *Five Hymns to Arunachala*, tr. by Prof. K. Swaminathan, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> From *Aksharamanamalai*, verse 63, tr. Prof. K. Swaminathan, *Five Hymns to Arunachala*, p. 60.

There is another incident that attests to the good fortune of my mother. Women were not allowed to stay in the ashram after 6 p.m. One morning, when my mother arrived in the ashram, she found that Bhagavan and all the devotees who lived there had left for *pradakshina*. Since she was very upset that everyone had gone without her, she decided to wait on the road she knew Bhagavan would take on return.

When Bhagavan noticed her in the distance, he turned to the other devotees and said, 'Look! Parvatam is about to get angry with me.'

Looking at Bhagavan my mother burst into tears and cried out, 'Why did you exclude me? Why did you not take me with you on *pradakshina*?'

Bhagavan replied by saying, 'All the merit accruing from this *pradakshina* is for you alone!'

The meritorious person who received in this way the benefits of the *pradakshina* performed by Bhagavan himself, the Lord of All, was none other than my own mother!

We lost our father in 1939 when he was only fifty-four years old. This made us experience some very hard times. Without our father to support us, our mother brought us up by feeding us Ramana's name alone. She used to get up at 4 a.m. to attend to her work, and while she was working she would sing the melodious tunes of *The Five Hymns to Ramana* and *Aksharamanamalai*. Even at the young age of five or six I was able to memorise these songs merely by listening to her recitation. To get our morning coffee we had to recite '*Ponnolir vadivinane...*' and *Aksharamanamalai*. We used to do it quite quickly because we knew there would be coffee for us when we were done.

After my father passed away, several years passed before the family had the opportunity to go to Arunachala.

When my mother finally told me, 'We are going to see Ummachi Tata [grandfather-God], I felt extremely happy. My mind had for some time been feeling the longing, 'When will I see in person that Tata who gave everything I wanted when I prayed standing before his photo?' This news therefore gave me limitless joy.

My elder brother, my cousin and I went with my mother to Arunachala in December 1946. I was eleven years old at the time. It was seven in the morning when we reached Bhagavan's presence and were greeted by a rare and wonderful scene. Bhagavan was sitting on his sofa surrounded by a flood of light. We three children sat before Bhagavan, but my mother remained standing before him. Bhagavan looked at her once and then turned his attention elsewhere. Mother apparently could not stand this indifference of Bhagavan. She had come after a gap of eight or nine years, and for the first time after the demise of our father.

With tears streaming down her face and in a faltering voice she asked, 'O Bhagavan, don't you recognise me?'

Bhagavan replied, 'It is Parvatam, is it not? The attire and role have changed.'<sup>5</sup>

Bhagavan seemed to be saying by this, 'This world is a theatre and we are all acting different roles. Previously you were playing the part of a married woman, but now you have taken on a different role.'

Devaraja Mudaliar, who had been watching this exchange, asked Bhagavan who my mother was.

Bhagavan replied, 'She is the wife of Madurai Venkatarama Iyer'.

Bhagavan then asked the librarian Rajagopal to look for several ashram books so that he could search in them for my father's photo. Eventually he asked for the first edition of B. V. Narasimha Swami's *Self-Realisation*, and in that he located my father in one of the group photos. However, part of the head was missing.

When Bhagavan saw that the face was only partially appearing in this photo, he remarked, 'Look! The photographer has cut off half of Venkataraman's head!'

Bhagavan then asked our mother where our house was, but before she had a chance to reply I replied, with childish innocence, 'In the lane opposite to Central Cinema.'

<sup>5</sup> Bhagavan was referring to her widow's clothes and appearance because he had not seen her since the death of her husband.

Bhagavan smiled and responded, 'Was there a cinema house in existence when I came here [in 1896]?'

My mother then explained to Bhagavan, 'Our house is behind the house of Judge Venkatarama Iyer.'

Immediately Bhagavan replied, 'Oh! In that filthy lane.'

That remark was made almost sixty years ago, but even today that same lane is full of garbage and cow dung.

*Parvatam's visit was recorded in Day by Day with Bhagavan, January 1st 1947:*

*An old lady, a brahmin widow, was talking to Bhagavan in the hall, recollecting various incidents connected with her family and Bhagavan during Bhagavan's stay in Virupaksha Cave and Skandasbaram. Thereupon I [Devaraja Mudaliar] asked T. S. R. who the lady was. He said she was the widow of one Mr Venkataramier of Madurai who stayed with Bhagavan for a long time and was greatly attached to Bhagavan. Thereupon Bhagavan asked me, 'Haven't you met him? His photo must be in our groups in the "Life".' I said 'No'. Then Bhagavan asked T. S. R. to get a copy of the first edition of Self-Realisation by B. V. N., took out a group photo (Second Jayanti) and showed us the above Mr V. Iyer in that group.*

During this visit my elder brother and I stayed in the Veda Patasala. When Bhagavan returned from his trip to the toilet, we used to walk along with him. On many of these occasions he would touch my shoulders with his hands, ask my name and say three times, 'Sabhapathy, Sabhapathy, Sabhapathy'.

Afterwards he would sometimes add, 'They have named you after your grandfather.'

Keeping his lotus-like hands on my shoulder, he would then walk with me from the Patasala as far as the dining room. He would also do this with my elder brother Swaminathan and my cousin Padmavati. Even today, when I think of Bhagavan's *sparsha-diksha* [initiation by touch], my hairs stand on end.

It also brings to mind verse seventy-two of *Aksharamanamalai*:

Let me not like an unsupported creeper droop and fade. Be a strong staff for me; hold me up and guard me, O Arunachala.<sup>6</sup>

Bhagavan showed to me in this clear and obvious way that he will always remain as my support.

Once, while I was in Bhagavan's presence, I was reciting *Ramana Dhyanam*, a work written specifically for children by N. N. Rajan, a devotee of Bhagavan. In the invocatory verse I incorrectly recited, 'Sri Ramanaya loka guruve...' instead of 'loka gurave...' Bhagavan twice corrected me, asking me to say, 'loka gurave...'

Each of the eighteen paragraphs ends, 'Blissful Mauna Ramana, I prostrate to you; grace-bestowing Ramana, I prostrate to you,' and so on. I prostrated at the end of each paragraph.

Bhagavan remarked, 'A single prostration is enough.' And then he added, 'I have not so far heard anyone recite this work after memorising it.'

On another occasion I felt a strong desire to prostrate before Bhagavan and touch his feet. When Bhagavan entered the hall that day to eat his meal, I suddenly prostrated to him, touched his feet, and then put the palms of my hands on my eyes. As Bhagavan was not expecting this, he started and began to fall backwards. Chinnaswami, who was following him, had to catch him and support him. Chinnaswami scolded me. Even today I feel guilty for the mistake I committed at that young age. However, Bhagavan looked at me benevolently when I did it, and it appeared to me that he forgave my mistake.

One day, while we were all sitting in the hall, Bhagavan turned to my mother and asked, 'Venkataraman [her husband] was the eldest son. The next was Kittan [Krishnaswami]. Easwaran was the third. What is the name of the fourth?'

'Chandramouli,' replied my mother.

'I have not seen Chandramouli yet,' said Bhagavan.

<sup>6</sup> *Five Hymns to Arunachala*, tr. by Prof. K. Swaminathan, p. 67.

As soon as we returned to Madurai my uncle, Chandramouli, was informed about this conversation and he at once went to Arunachala and had Bhagavan's *darshan*. Years later, when he was in the final moments of his life, he reached Bhagavan's feet listening to *Aksharamanamalai*. I am reminded of a line from verse twenty-two of this work: 'Great is your fame as a giver of gifts unasked.' What more evidence is needed to prove that our whole family was taken over by his grace?

Bhagavan has bestowed on our whole family the state in which we remain totally dependent on him for everything. Because of this we endured everything while always remembering him. Our whole life has been a wonder of Bhagavan's grace. All the time, in the past as well as in the present, he is helping us. Except by the support of the power of the grace of Bhagavan, how else would it have been possible for us — we who lost our father in 1939 and who were then in very difficult circumstances — to be protected, taken care of, and placed in good circumstances?

When I started my career in the late 1950s I was initially in an outdoor job in the Railways. However, when I developed health problems, I had to take a desk job there for thirteen years. I was worried that this switch would make me lose all my promotion prospects. At this point in my career Bhagavan gave me the opportunity to attend an exam for a gazetted post. Bhagavan himself appeared before my exam paper and dictated the answers, which I wrote down. To my astonishment I was one of the twelve who passed the exam. Thus Bhagavan gave me all the promotions that were due to me, and even enabled me to spend my working life in Madurai itself, without being transferred anywhere else. How can I describe this grace of Bhagavan?

On our 1946 trip to see Bhagavan we also went to see Muruganar, who was then living in a hut in Palakottu. We went several times and on each occasion he gave us dates and sugar candy. Many years later, in 1960, I went to see him again after a gap of fourteen years. At that time he was staying in T. N. K.'s house, which was near the ashram.

Seeing someone cleaning his dentures, I asked, 'I have come to see Muruganar Swami. Where is he?'

The man replied, 'You are looking at him now.'  
I felt rather foolish.

As soon as we went inside he began to ask me about my father and mother. Afterwards, for about half an hour, he explained Bhagavan's teachings in fluent and flowing English. During our meeting I expressed regret that I had not been able to appreciate Bhagavan's greatness nor understand his teachings since I had only had his *darshan* at a very young age.

Muruganar responded by saying, 'Suppose there is a huge and fiery flame. Irrespective of whether one is young or old, whosoever goes near it will be affected identically by the heat. Proximity to Bhagavan will not leave us without first making us mature. It will, without fail, reveal the truth to you at the appropriate time.'

The last time I saw Muruganar was when I went to visit the ashram on a later visit with my brother Ramanachalam. At that time Muruganar was staying in the ashram dispensary. When we attempted to prostrate to him, he withdrew his legs, saying, 'No need to do *namaskaram* to a human.'

Then, speaking about the greatness of Bhagavan, he told us, 'Bhagavan and Arunachala are not different. They are one and the same.'

This was his final *upadesa* to us. A month after our meeting he merged into the feet of Bhagavan. ▲

## MOUNTAIN PATH

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(Sd.) V.S. Ramanan  
*Signature of the Publisher*



## KEYWORD

# Tanmayam

### Tamil

*Thaan*: I

*Mayam*: full of; pervasive.

*Thaan* in Tamil means ‘I’, and *tan* is the possessive case, that is, ‘my’. *Tan* in Tamil conveys the idea of ‘self’. It is the reflexive pronoun, conveying the meanings of ‘himself, herself, itself, oneself’, but is also used to refer to the concept of ‘self’ in general, as for example ‘the Self’, a synonym for the Absolute Consciousness or Parabrahman.

*Maya* is a Sanskrit suffix which is appended to words to indicate nature, quality, possession, abundance, property or likeness. If you were placed in mid-ocean, you would see nothing but water everywhere; you could then say, “Everywhere it is all water-*mayam*.” Other examples would be, *tejomayam*, [that which is] of the nature of light and *manomayam* [that which is] of the nature of mind.

‘*Tanmayam*’ therefore has the import of feeling the presence of one’s own Self everywhere.

The word *tan-mai*, which means, literally, ‘self-ness’ is the word used to designate the First Person in grammatical terms, the Person who says ‘I’. Thus we can see that, even in its grammar, Tamil embodies the metaphysical truth that this ‘I’ is synonymous with the sense of ‘self’. This relation is perfectly expressed in *Ulladu Narpadu*, verse 14, in which Bhagavan teaches:

If the First Person exists (*tan-mai undale*), the Second and Third Persons will also be in existence. But if, upon one's investigation into the reality of its nature, the First Person is destroyed, the Second and Third Persons will also cease to be, and Self-nature, shining alone, (*onraay olirum tan-mai*) will verily be revealed as one's own nature (*tan-nilaimai*).

*Tan-mayam*, therefore, can be said to mean '[that which is] of the nature of the Self, the Absolute Consciousness', or simply '[that which is] of one's own nature', '[that which is] of the nature of the 'I'.'

Is there a litmus test to know whether one is in ignorance (*ajnana*) or has attained self-realisation (*jnana*)? Yes, there is. So long as there is *anniyam*, perception of things and beings as *other* than oneself, we are in ignorance. Only when we are in *tanmayam*, when nothing is seen to exist apart from oneself, is there *jnana*.

*Tanmayam* is non-dual; the entire universe is our Omnipresent Being. *Anniyam* is dual; we perceive things and beings as other than ourselves. There is the sense of separation; the subject-object division.

*Tanmayam* is a beautiful and profound word. It indicates the highest meaning in both Sanskrit and Tamil — a perfect fusion in its Upanishadic import of two entirely different languages. In Sanskrit, it means *brahma mayam*, full of *brahman* (*Tat* indicates Brahman). In Tamil, it means *atma mayam*, seeing everything as pervaded by one's own Self. It is thus a unique phrase which encapsulates the *mahavakya vicara*: Thou Art That, that is, *tat tvam asi*. *Tat* and *tvam* coalesce in the phrase *tanmayam*, culminating in the vision of *tat* and *tvam* as one homogenous, boundless Self.

Bhagavan cherished a special fascination with this phrase which is manifest in many of his compositions.<sup>1</sup> Bhagavan talks of *jnana* as *tanmaya-nishtha*. Whatever one thinks of as being *tanmayam* is incorrect since it is a state of being which transcends thought. *Tanmayam* is not dependent on

<sup>1</sup> *Upadesa Undiyar*, v.26; *Ulladu Narpadu*, v.31; *Appala Paattu*, v.4; *Daskhinamurti Stotram*, *Avataarikai*, line 14 & *Mangalam verse*, line 3; *The Necklace of Nine Gems*, v.8. The celebrated *Mundaka Upanishad* exhorts every seeker to become *tanmayam*: '*sharavat tanmaya bhavet*'. *Mun.Up. II.ii.4*.

thought for the recognition that it exists. That which is the basis of thought and beyond thought, cannot be captured in thought. How can the physical eye see itself? It can only see its reflection in a mirror. Likewise, the 'I' can only indirectly 'see' itself in an object. It does not see itself but only a reflection of itself. If that is so, then how shall we proceed?

All we can do is the *sadhana* (spiritual practice) based on Bhagavan's instructions regarding self-enquiry or self-surrender. The results of our practice may turn out to be like a river in flood, as the rush of insights passes through our consciousness or they may be so sluggish as to be indiscernible, like the slow disintegration of the salt doll when immersed repeatedly in the ocean. We should not lose heart if the results of our efforts are imperceptible to us.

Learning (*sravana*), contemplation (*manana*) and practice (*nidhidhyasana*) should continue throughout our life.<sup>2</sup> Like lightning, 'suddenly something' can happen when we least expect it — when we have surrendered. The Omnipresent Being which pervades the entire universe can reveal itself as the Self. We realise that nothing exists apart from the all-pervasive Self and that alone is called *tanmayam*, which is non-dual. Effortless unbroken abidance in this vision is *tanmaya nishtha* or *kaivalaya sthithi*, the intuitive experience that 'I alone exist' or 'All that exists is Me alone'.

This recognition of Being may not continue because of residual *vasanas* and we may revert to *anniyam*, duality, which is our usual state of being a subject perceiving objects. This veils the substratum of *tanmayam*. However, having had a glimpse of *tanmayam*, the *sadhak* now has no doubt about this eternal experience called *tanmayam* which in Sanskrit is known as *nitya anubhava*, as it is ever available to the inward gaze.

*Tanmayam* and *anniyam* are mutually exclusive and not complementary. When one perceives *anniyam*, *tanmayam* is obscured; when one is in *tanmayam*, *anniyam* has vanished, only the *gestalt* changes. This can be verified by any *sadhak* within oneself. Once there is a glimpse of *tanmayam*, even though he may be pulled back again and again

<sup>2</sup> Muruganar's preface to *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, 'Within Oneself' with paraphrase.

into *anniyam*, the *sadhak* discovers endless energy and enthusiasm to strive repeatedly for immersion in *tanmayam*. Muruganar captures this struggling phase of a *sadhak* in his inimitable style in the *Ramana Puranam*.

217-20 When the 'I' thought does not arise,/and I unite [as pure being] with Him,/He remains merged with me/shining out as my very own fullness./However, the very moment/I raise my head [thinking 'I'],/to perceive His ancient [form]/He sees my oddness, scorns me,/and conceals Himself from me.

221-26 If I then bow down my head and die,/He flourishes within me,/shining His light as before./Thus, the majesty of the Lord/ will shine forth/only before the 'I' arises,/and after the 'I' subsides./ Who, then, will have the power/to tell of His greatness,/which can only be known/through the God-consciousness/in which the 'I' is absent,/and not through the awareness/in which the 'I' is experienced<sup>3</sup>

Muruganar further says: "Reality indicated by *Om* is the non-dual Self beyond thoughts and words; and hence the declaration that there is nothing to equal or excel Self. He is Arunachala, pure consciousness, illumining the intellect from within. He, being non-dual, cannot be known by individuals, who identify with body and mind by forgetting their Self-nature as pure consciousness, not withstanding their intellectual brilliance in the realm of objective matters. (Self is veiled *as it were*). And therefore, the assertion that nobody can know Him as an object. Self shines only when individuality is lost either by self-surrender or self-enquiry; that is *mouna*, the peace that passes understanding. Only in *mouna*, the feeling of *tanmayam* within, knowing (actually Being) Arunachala is possible."<sup>4</sup>

Let us pray to Bhagavan for His Grace to help us stay in *tanmayam* forever without reversion to *anniyam*. ▲

<sup>3</sup> *Ramana Puranam*, verses 217-226. From an unpublished translation by Dr.T.V.Venkatasubramanian, R. Butler & D. Godman.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on *Aksharamanamalai*, v. 13., by Muruganar.

# Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma's  
Commentary

Verse Ten

S. RAM MOHAN

10. Knowledge is never apart from ignorance, nor is ignorance apart from knowledge. True (untainted) knowledge is only that awareness (experience) of the original Self, which comes by the pursuit of the inquiry, to whom do these, knowledge and ignorance, belong?

## Commentary

The words 'knowledge' and 'ignorance' which occur in the first half of the verse refer to the knowledge or ignorance of objects in this world. These constitute a dyad. It is an integral whole. The members of a dyad have the quality that they do not appear alone, but together, as one. Knowledge and ignorance are inseparable. When there is knowledge of one thing, there will be ignorance of other things; what is knowledge to one, happens to be ignorance to another. The parameters are constantly changing.

We have previously discussed the triad of knowledge, which was the subject matter of the previous four verses. As shown in the previous verse, these triads arise from the ego. So long as the ego is accepted as real, these dyads also will also be assumed to be genuine. What appears as knowledge is actually ignorance. The ego-sense, the root or origin of these two (knowledge and ignorance) exists due to ignorance of the real Self, and since the ego dies in the state of right awareness of the Self, we discover that this dyad, because it is dependent upon the ego-sense for existence, is both misleading and unreal. We discern that worldly knowledge is not true knowledge (*jnana*).

The identification of the limited sense of 'I' with form is the primary ignorance. All knowledge of the world derives from this primal ignorance, that is, the ego-sense. Knowledge of the world is indivisible from it. The true 'I am' is not a thought dependent upon form for its existence, but is our own true nature (*swarupam*). From this flows the argument that all knowledge that is dependent on a sense of separation or appearance is not knowledge, but ignorance. Worldly knowledge is tainted by its source, the primary ignorance, and true knowledge (*jnana*) therefore cannot come out of this ignorance (*ajnana*). In other words, we should seek true knowledge within our self.

As it is affirmed here, that all that is accepted as knowledge by people in the world is ignorance, the question arises: What is true knowledge? The answer to this is given in the last sentence of the verse. The nature of the quest for the truth of the ego — i.e., who is the one who says "I know" or "I do not know" — is indicated by the question, "To whom are these two, namely knowledge and ignorance?" To this question the answer is "To me". This leads on to the question, "Who am I?". The pursuit of this question, by turning the mind inwards, leads to the right awareness of the real Self. And this awareness, says Bhagavan, is true knowledge, which is only "ceasing to know the Self wrongly, as the body, the mind or the individual soul."

The word 'original Self' is also interpreted as meaning the 'ego', the origin of the mind, the body and world. Knowing the truth of the ego is the same as knowing the real Self, because that Self is the source of the ego, and is also the truth of the ego. The ego dies as the result of the

quest, and then the Self-shining, pure real Self is experienced. This experience is described as the 'state of right knowledge.'

The term 'ignorance' at the beginning of this verse may also be taken to mean the mistaken identification of the body with the Self, which is the primary ignorance. This implies that knowledge of the world can only come to those who do not have awareness of the real Self, and that those who have this awareness do not know the world. The Upanishads make a clear distinction between the higher and lower forms of knowledge, *paravidya* and *aparavidya*, the knowledge of the Self and the knowledge of objects. The lower knowledge is driven by *avidya*, which performs two functions: veiling the real (*avarana*) and projecting the unreal (*viksepa*). Ordinary avenues of *apara vidya* like perception and inference give us knowledge of the phenomenal world projected through our primal ignorance. This 'knowledge' is nothing apart from ignorance. The implication is that right awareness of the Self alone is true knowledge, while knowledge of objects is not true knowledge, it is ignorance.

In verse 9, Lakshmana Sarma interpreted the phrase *ondru patri* (grasping 'one' thing) as subsiding on 'one thing', the ego. However there are other scholars who interpret 'one' as referring to Self. The vision of plurality is due to nescience; the perception of unity is wisdom. The One is the Real, the substratum. The 'many' are the modifications arising out of ignorance. The Katha Upanishad says, "As fire which is one, entering this world becomes varied in shape according to the object [it burns], so also the one Self within all beings becomes varied according to whatever [it enters] and also exist outside [them all]."

Verse 10 has developed the same idea, which is well expressed in the Taithriya Upanishad, "Knowledge and ignorance belong to the realm of names and forms, they are not attributes of the Self. And they, name and form, are imagined, even as day and night are, with reference to the sun."

The true knowledge referred to here is not phenomenal knowledge, but the sense of unconditioned awareness. A person who has slept well says, "I was not aware of anything during my sleep." The question arises: how does he know that he was not aware of anything? We see that without the basic, unconditioned awareness, non-knowledge or ignorance is not possible. ▲



# Encounters with Bhagavan

## Part One: A Vision of Lord Subrahmanya

T. R. KANAKAMMAL

In the old days, upon stepping into Sri Ramanasramam, one could easily be reminded of Kalidasa's immortal verse:

शान्तम् इदं आश्रमम्  
śāntam idam āśramam  
(Peaceful is this Ashram!)

Indeed upon entering, the visitor immediately sensed a deep peace and tranquillity.

Hugging the lower southern spur of Arunachala, as if resting comfortably on the lap of the Hill, near the banks of the placid waters of Pali tirtham, surrounded by majestic trees and lush gardens where

Smt. Kanakammal came to Bhagavan in 1946 and immediately took up residence nearby. Her many reminiscences of Bhagavan are recorded in her *Cherished Memories*, a favourite among devotees. The anecdotes contained in this series for *Mountain Path*, however, have never before appeared in print.

peacocks danced sprightly here and there, the Ashram setting would capture the heart of every beholder, transporting him to holy sites of ages gone by. The monkeys from the Hill, being a perennial source of amusement for children, would often surprise their young admirers with playful pranks. In the days of Bhagavan, they enjoyed unlimited liberty, as though it were their exclusive privilege.

In this setting it was common for *sadhakas* to come from far and wide to prostrate humbly before Bhagavan, pose questions about *sadhana*, and, in due course, leave again, fully satisfied with the answers they received. Others had the experience of silent seeing, simple darshan where no words were exchanged.

One day a visitor came to the darshan hall. Since his youth he had been an *upasaka*<sup>1</sup> of Lord Subrahmanya and had been faithful in following all the practices enjoined in the scriptures regarding worship of Lord Subrahmanya.

This gentleman entered the darshan hall and spoke plaintively to Bhagavan in this vein: “O Swami, all my life since my childhood, I’ve devoted myself to Lord Murugan<sup>2</sup> and yet, in all this time, I’ve not been blessed with a vision of the Lord.” Bhagavan sat in silence, merely gazing upon this devotee before him.

Meanwhile the poet Muruganar was sitting nearby, listening to this. Normally Muruganar never spoke to or even acknowledged anyone, least of all short-term visitors. Even when devotees challenged him, prodded him or tried to rouse him in some way, he would simply remain quiet. But this day was different. Upon hearing the man’s pleas, Muruganar interrupted him and with uplifted hands emphatically directed toward Bhagavan, he said:

“You’ve been waiting for the day to have Lord Subrahmanya’s darshan. Why, dear man, the day you’ve been waiting for has arrived!”

Then without the least hesitation, he gestured toward Bhagavan’s regal form reclining on the sofa before them and with words that seemed to pierce the very air itself, he cried out:

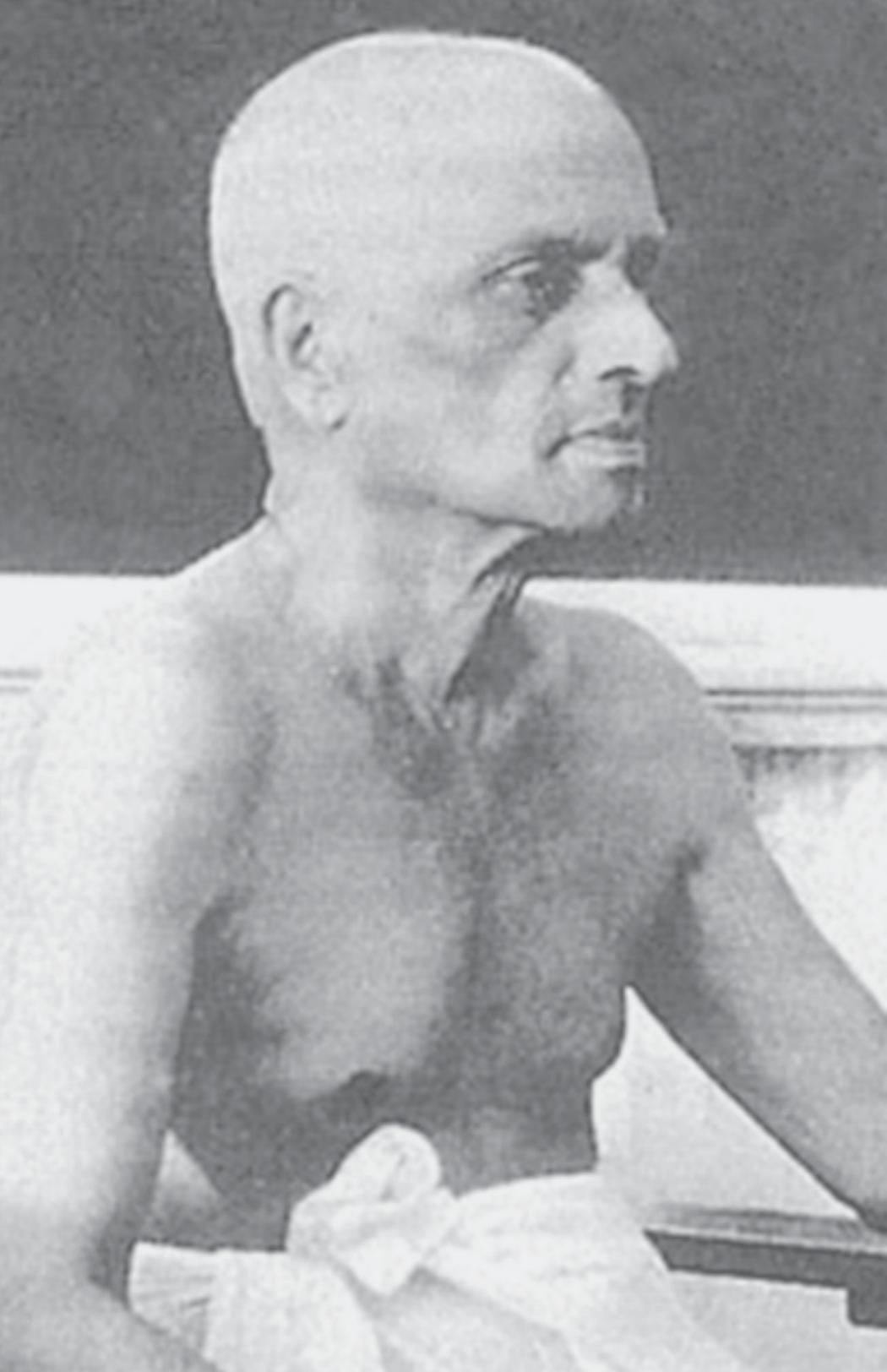
“Who else do you think this is here in front of you? Can you not see Him sitting right here before you?”

As if in response to a lifelong yearning, Bhagavan’s form was evidently transformed before this visitor’s eyes and indeed shone as Lord Subrahmanya. The man stood still, speechless, transfixed. Then he began to rub his eyes as if to be sure that what he was seeing was real and not some trick of sight. Finally with eyes open wide, mouth agape and a countenance full of wonder, profuse tears began to stream down the man’s cheeks. His voice quivered and cracked as he shouted out loud before the entire gathering, “*Aamaam, aamaam!*”— “Yes, yes!” \* ▲

\* *The details of this account come to us by way of Muruganar, who, on the evening of the day in question, was visited by this devotee. The man came to Muruganar at his residence opposite the Ashram, approaching him with pranams and prostrations and other gestures of thanksgiving for Muruganar’s role in the former’s ‘miraculous vision’ of the Lord.*

<sup>1</sup> One devoted to a single deity, in this case, Lord Subrahmanya.

<sup>2</sup> Murugan is another name for Subrahmanya, (also: Kartikeya, Kumara, Kaumara, Skanda, etc.) the son of Siva and Parvati (by Agni). He figures highly in the pantheon, especially in Tamil Nadu. Ever youthful, Kartikeya is usually depicted with his favourite weapon, the spear, and his peacock *vahana* (vehicle).



# 'I' is a Door

*On the entrance presented in 20th-century Advaita*

## Part Three: Atmananda

PHILIP RENARD

*In the two preceding parts of 'I' is a door<sup>1</sup> attention was paid to the remarkable phenomenon that the word 'I', may refer to a limited and bound entity, as well as to That which is infinite Light, sheer Freedom. The preceding articles discussed what Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj said about this phenomenon. Now we will discuss the third of the 'Great Three' (the three truly great Advaita teachers of the twentieth century): Sri Atmananda, or Sri Krishna Menon.*

*Philip Renard was born in Amsterdam. He founded in 2000 the Advaya Foundation, [www.advaya.nl](http://www.advaya.nl). In 2005 he published (in Dutch) Non-dualism, The Direct Way of Liberation.*

**S**ri P. Krishna Menon was born in 1883 in Peringara, near Tiruvalla in the state of Travancore (a part of today's Kerala). After completing a study of law he became a Government Advocate and Inspector and District Superintendent of Police. He once said that in

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<sup>1</sup> Published in two issues of *Mountain Path* in 2004 (pages 23-34 of the Jayanti issue and pages 45-57 of the Aradhana issue respectively).

his early life he prayed at length to encounter a Sat-guru, a Teacher in the true sense of the word. One day in 1919 he met such a teacher, one Swami Yogananda, who lived in Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> They met during the course of one night only. Krishna Menon was particularly touched by the utmost humility of this teacher. He later stated, “This paralyzed my ego.”

Because of this encounter, he started a *sadhana*, which contained both *bhakti*- and *raja*-yoga as well as pure *jnana*. Later on, having become a teacher himself, he would pass on to others only the *jnana*-aspect, and even criticised both the *bhakti* and *raja yoga* aspects.<sup>3</sup>

In 1923 he came to realise his true Nature. He assumed the name Sri Atmananda and began teaching. He continued to work in the Police Department upto 1939. Later on, he once said that a profession within the police or the military offers an ideal foundation for a spiritual *sadhana*, because such a profession offers in particular the maximum obstacles and temptations.<sup>4</sup>

In 1959 Atmananda died at Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala.

One of the ways by which Atmananda’s approach became known in the West was through the book *The Nature of Man According to the Vedanta* by John Levy. He was an English pupil of Atmananda who had stayed regularly with him. Levy rephrased Atmananda’s typical approach in a somewhat more Western style;

though he did retain Atmananda’s particular and unique way of dealing with logic.<sup>5</sup>

I got to know of Atmananda while a pupil of the late Alexander Smit, a Dutchman who had been a pupil of Atmananda’s pupil Wolter Keers. Alexander gave me a copy of two small books by Atmananda, *Atma-Darshan* and *Atma-Nirvriti*.<sup>6</sup> These books are Atmananda’s brief summary of his teachings; they have been written in his mother tongue Malayalam and translated into English by himself. For two years Alexander Smit thoroughly dealt with these books. I am grateful for having had the privilege to attend these meetings; owing to this opportunity I became familiar with Atmananda’s specific approach.

What is specific to his approach?

It is his own special linguistic usage, his particular logic (or ‘subjective’ logic, see footnote 5), his way of reducing all things to their ultimate nature, and in particular his emphasis on what he called the ‘I-Principle’.

To him, this ‘I-Principle’ was a synonym for Ultimate Reality, the Absolute — there is nothing which precedes it; it is what is truly meant with the word ‘I’. He said for instance: “Pure consciousness and deep peace are your real nature. Having understood this in the right manner, you can well give up the use of the words

<sup>2</sup> This is not the yogi Yogananda who became well-known in the West, nor the Swami Yogananda who was one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance pages 139-140 of *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Sree Atmananda* (of Trivandrum) 1950-1959. Taken by Nitya Tripta. Trivandrum: Reddiar Press, 1963. On page 140 of this book Atmananda uses the word ‘obstacle’ for the yoga approach. This book has been re-edited by Ananda Wood (son of Mrs. Kamal Wood mentioned on page vi), and published in digital version on the internet.

See [http://www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/downloads/notes\\_pdf.zip](http://www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/downloads/notes_pdf.zip)

Here (in the notes to this article) the book is indicated as *Discourses*; the indication of the digital version of Ananda Wood is AW, with the number of the discourse (the discourses have been numbered consecutively by Ananda Wood); the passage mentioned here is taken from AW nr. 369.

<sup>4</sup> *Discourses*, p. 544; AW page 467.

<sup>5</sup> Atmananda once phrased his specific kind of logic as follows: “They [the Grecian philosophers] go by logic and I go also by logic. But there is much difference between the logic employed by them and the logic employed by me. The logic employed by me is something subjective. The logic employed by them is something objective. That is the difference.” *Atmananda Tattva Sambhita*. Austin, TX: Advaita Publishers, 1991; p. 119. For John Levy, see the article by Hans Heimer in *The Mountain Path*, Deepam 2004; p. 29-42. John Levy, *The Nature of Man According to the Vedanta*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> *Atma-Darshan*, At the Ultimate, by Sri Krishna Menon – Atmananda. Tiruvannamalai: Sri Vidya Samiti, 1946 (reprint: Austin, TX: Advaita Publishers, 1989); *Atma-Nirvriti* (Freedom and Felicity in the Self), by Sri Krishna Menon (Atmananda). Trivandrum: Vedanta Publishers, 1952 (reprint: Austin, TX: Advaita Publishers, 1989). In 1977 and 1978 Wolter Keers published his Dutch translation of these texts.

‘Consciousness’ and ‘Happiness’ and invariably use ‘I’ to denote the Reality. Don’t be satisfied with only reducing objects into Consciousness. Don’t stop there. Reduce them further into the ‘I-Principle’. So also reduce all feelings into pure Happiness and then reduce them into the ‘I-Principle’.”<sup>7</sup>

Although Atmananda loved to use words like Consciousness and Happiness in order to refer to the Ultimate, a quote like this shows that ultimately he preferred the term ‘I-Principle’ (he once even said that compared to the I-Principle the term Consciousness can be called theory!<sup>8</sup>). He did so because he considered that the word ‘I’ has the least chance of being misunderstood. Everything that can be perceived can be subject to misunderstanding, however that which can be called ‘yourself’, that which cannot be perceived, ‘I’, cannot cause misunderstanding.<sup>9</sup> He considered the I-Principle to be everybody’s true goal, because it is in fact contained in *each* endeavour.<sup>10</sup>

The use of the word ‘Principle’ by Atmananda should not be considered a mental or philosophical attempt to understand or frame the ‘I’. It is his way of using a word for what ‘I’ is *in itself*, *I as such*. What ‘I’ *as such* really is, precisely, is prior to each mental movement or framing.

With expressions like ‘in itself’ and ‘as such’ language stops short. Here language arrives at its limits. Something is referring to itself. Something *as such* does not change the next moment into something else. It is the constant factor in the ever changing, it is its own true nature. It does not rely on anything else. Atmananda frequently used the Sanskrit word *svarupa*, true nature, which referred to this constant factor. He used it together with a number of words that he considered its synonym, such as ‘background’, ‘content’, ‘substrate’, ‘pure state’ and ‘natural state’. Atmananda used these various words as indications for one and the same thing.

<sup>7</sup> *Discourses*, p. 9; AW nr. 21.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442; AW nr. 1323.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7; AW nr. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9 and 8; AW nr. 22 and 21.

The trouble with language is that each attempt to refer to the essential nature of something can, as quick as a flash, be misunderstood. For instance a term like ‘the essence’ can suggest the presence of a tiny ‘being’ or ‘core’ within a more coarse form. As if you might discover something’s essence by enlarging it more and more using a microscope, continuously searching for what is *inside* the core. Something of this suggestion repeatedly arises in popular commentaries on the famous ‘You Are That’ passage in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, in which Uddalaka teaches his son by splitting a fruit further and further.

Atmananda was a master in emphasising the mistake that can lie in this short-sightedness. For this kind of enquiry will always get trapped in what he called the ‘objective’. Atmananda used the terms ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ in a way that is uncommon in the West. To him objective was not an indication for the impartial, but for everything that can be observed, everything that is an object for the senses and thoughts. The same goes for ‘subjective’: here he did not mean a view or opinion coloured by a person, but that which is merely Subject, — that which cannot be observed by definition, and which by Itself constantly illumines whatever is the object.<sup>11</sup>

This means that the enquiry into something ‘inside’ as a findable ‘essence’ or ‘core’ is incommensurate with any insight regarding the Ultimate. Hence, one cannot say that modern research in physics and true self-enquiry are one and the same thing, as is suggested nowadays in some advaitic circles. Physics will always remain a field of the ‘objective’.

This is likewise the case when the concept ‘all-encompassing’ is used to express notions such as Cosmos, Space or the Infinite. Atmananda gave us a useful indication or insight:

“Space (*Akasha*), though not perceptible to the senses, is certainly conceivable by the mind. So it is really objective in nature. If we take out of Space this last taint of objectivity, it ceases to be dead and inert, becomes self-luminous and it immediately shines as its background, the Reality.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See note 5, in which Atmananda connected the notion ‘subjective’ to his way of dealing with logic.

<sup>12</sup> *Discourses*, p. 18; AW nr. 42.

Everything in Atmananda's teaching is about the Subject. It refers exclusively to That which knows. That which knows is not a Knower (not a He or She), but Knowing as such (*jnana*). He named this 'Knowing as such' also 'Experience' (*anubhava*), meaning 'Experiencing as such', and also 'Feeling as such' (*rasa*). All three are synonyms for the Wonder which is in fact 'I' am. Take for instance the following: "The 'I-Principle' is the only Experience that one can have. Even though he be an ignorant man, he can only experience Himself. (...) If the experience has many objects, it is no Experience. You are superimposing objects upon your Experience. Your Experience is one and the same, always"; and "I have already proved to you that no one can know or experience anything other than one's own Self, the 'I-Principle'. (...) The only experience is 'I', and 'I' is the only word which denotes experience"; and "The 'I-Principle' is the only thing that exists; 'I' requires no proof either. The objective cannot exist independent of this 'I', and therefore the 'I-Principle' is the only ultimate Reality."<sup>13</sup>

This radical way of speaking, in which virtually everything can be reduced to That which knows, implies that objects need not be ignored or removed, but can be considered *pointers* to Reality. In order to recognize the Self, most texts in the Advaita tradition consider it a must for a student to learn not to pay attention to sensory objects. However, Atmananda made it clear that nothing is an obstacle. One is never really swallowed by an object, or hindered by an obstacle. Nothing needs to be removed. "Nothing hides consciousness."<sup>14</sup>

The so-called ego too, is not an enemy; on the contrary, Atmananda said it is a help: "Even the much despised ego is a great help to the realization of the Truth. The presence of the ego in man, though in a distorted form, is infinitely better than the absence of it, as for example in a tree"; and "It is the whole ego that seeks liberation and strives for it. When it is directed

<sup>13</sup> *Atmananda Tattva Sambita* (see note 5), p. 154 and 157; *Discourses*, p. 218 and 184; AW nr. 600 and 496.

<sup>14</sup> *Atma-Nirvriti*, Chapter 20; p. 25.



to the ultimate Reality, the material part automatically drops away and the Consciousness part alone remains over as the real 'I-Principle'. This is liberation."<sup>15</sup>

Atmananda's emphasis on radical non-duality does not mean that he assumed that in the day to day contact between people, the ego has already totally dissolved, and that this was also the case in the contact his students had with him as their teacher. In other words, he did not have the illusion that that which he outlined to be ultimately true, was already true for his students or readers in their activities. Thus, he did not think it helpful to honour 'differencelessness' or non-duality in his actual activities as teacher and police officer. He considered it a pitfall to shout all too soon that 'everything is Consciousness' in a worldly or relational environment, and he continued pointing out 'difference' as long as this was the true state of affairs to the student. Thus he considered *advaita*, non-duality, not applicable to the relationship between teacher and student. "Think of your Guru only in the dualistic sphere," he said, "apply your heart wholly to it and get lost in the Guru. Then the Ultimate dances like a child before you."<sup>16</sup> And moreover: "Advaita is only a pointer to the Guru. You do not reach Advaita completely until you reach the egoless state. Never even think that you are one with the Guru. It will never take you to the Ultimate. On the contrary, that thought will only drown you. Advaita points only to the Ultimate."<sup>17</sup>

Atmananda considered a devotional attitude to be a great help. But in an instruction he made it clear that such an attitude is only appropriate

<sup>15</sup> *Discourses*, p. 191 and 272-273; AW nr. 512 and 802. That which Atmananda called here 'the material part', is similar to what Ramana Maharshi indicated by the term 'this' (*idam*), as distinguished from 'I' (*aham*). See "I is a door", part 1. Atmananda sometimes used these terms as well: "Without the 'I' (*aham*) being there, there can never be the 'this' (*idam*)."<sup>15</sup> *Discourses*, p. 443; AW nr. 1324.

<sup>16</sup> *Discourses*, p. 270; AW nr. 790. Also see p. 251; AW nr. 713. Ramana Maharshi has also emphasised this repeatedly. See *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, nr. 39, and *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1955; Talk No. 458.

<sup>17</sup> *Discourses*, p. 176; AW nr. 466.

towards your own Guru. "That particular Person through whom one had the proud privilege of being enlightened, that is the ONLY FORM which one may adore and do *Puja* to, to one's heart's content, as the person of one's Guru. It is true that *all* is the Sat-Guru, but *only when the name and form disappear* and not otherwise. Therefore the true aspirant should beware of being deluded into any similar devotional advance to any other form, be it of God or of man."<sup>18</sup> In another statement he reveals how strict and dualistic he was in respect to the student and guru relationship: "A disciple should never bow allegiance to two Gurus at the same time"; to which he added that "accepting more than one guru at a time is even more dangerous than having none at all."<sup>19</sup>

The following story illustrates how in his daily life Atmananda showed that each of the levels (the Absolute and the relative) requires its own approach, and that consequently, one does not apply the non-dualistic approach to the relative level of being. At the beginning of his career as a station inspector of the Police Department, Atmananda once interrogated a man he suspected of having stolen something. The man had constantly denied it. Then Atmananda told him: "If you have really committed the theft, as I believe you have, it will be better that you confess it and admit your mistake. If, on the other hand, you want to hide the truth from me, you may be able to do so for the time being, but that Principle in you which is watching all your actions will make you suffer throughout the rest of your life for having lied once. You will never be able to hide the Truth from that Principle in you."<sup>20</sup> This shows the sensitivity required to live the truth, and not peremptorily claim that untruth is simply Consciousness as well. Imagine the implication of Atmananda's statement: to lie once would end in lifelong suffering! If you realise that this statement is made by a truly radical non-dualistic teacher, it stimulates

<sup>18</sup> *Discourses*, p. 16 (not in AW). The expression 'name and form' (*nama-rupa*) is a classic expression in Advaita Vedanta for all manifestation, but also for the 'seed of the world' not yet manifested.

<sup>19</sup> *Discourses*, p. 545 and 544, and xii ; AW pages 468 and 467.

<sup>20</sup> M.P.B. Nair, *Rays of the Ultimate*. Santa Cruz, CA: SAT, 1990; p. 53-54; and *Atmananda Tattva Sambhita* (see note 5), p. 45-50.

us to consider the apparent paradox between what Atmananda teaches at the highest level of understanding and the recognition of the consequences of the actions made by individuals in their day to day activities. If we are identified with the dualistic world we will experience the effects of our actions.

In spite of this accurate handling of ‘difference’, on the level where differences simply have to be handled, Atmananda was a truly radical non-dualist. His radicality made him use a style of writing in which he does not speak *about* an ‘I’ or an ‘I-Principle’, but *from* the perspective of that. In *Atma-Darshan* he wrote some passages in which Consciousness itself is speaking, in which ‘I’ is speaking, not one so-called ‘Atmananda’. It invites the reader to look at things from this ‘I’- point of view, as the one and only Reality:

“I am that Consciousness that remains over after the removal of everything objective from Me. (...) Realising that every object wherever placed is asserting Me, I enjoy Myself everywhere and in everything”; and: “It is in Me that thoughts and feelings rise and set. I am their changeless Witness. I am the Light of Consciousness in all thoughts and perceptions and the Light of Love in all feelings.”<sup>21</sup>

A couple of years later he continued this style of writing in *Atma-Nirvriti*: “The world shines because of My light: without Me, nothing is. I am the light in the perception of the world”; and: “How can thoughts which rise and set in Me, be other than Myself? When there is thought, I am seeing Myself; when there is no thought, I am remaining in My own glory.”<sup>22</sup>

These are beautiful texts, which through their originality can bring about a shock of recognition even more so than traditional texts about ‘the’ Self. *The* Self, after all, remains an indication for something in the third person. Whilst speaking about *the* Self, the suggestion can linger that that is something else than ‘me’ who is after all, simply I, first person. No, I am already That. I am That. ‘*The* I’ is not That. It

<sup>21</sup> *Atma-Darshan*, Chapter 16 (p. 23) and 17 (p. 24).

<sup>22</sup> *Atma-Nirvriti*, Chapter 1 (p. 1) and 11 (p. 12).

is about the recognition of the fact that I am now already That, Consciousness Itself, and that, therefore, I am allowed to speak as such about Myself. The author is giving us, the readers, the example of how to recognise Yourself, and then to speak from that perspective as a consequence. The reader is likewise invited in the following passage to experience this recognition: “I am pure happiness. All the activities of the sense-organs and the mind aim at happiness. Thus all their activities are *puja* [acts of worship] done to Me. I am ever in repose, disinterestedly perceiving this *puja*. Again and again they touch Me unawares and lapse into passivity. Coming out of it, they continue their *puja* again. Once they understand that by their activities they are doing *puja* to Me, and in passivity they lie touching Me, all their suffering ceases. Thereafter, action done will be no action, and passivity will be no passivity, because ignorance has been rooted out.”<sup>23</sup>

Atmananda deftly conveys in these texts the understanding that in our thinking and speaking about ourselves a reversal can occur. We are already looking *from* that which we are looking *for*; we really need not go anywhere. Many authors describe thinking and feeling as enemies, but actually these faculties express the celebration of Us. All my thinking is ‘heading’ in My direction in order to arrive at a dissolution in the peace that I am, and this movement in My direction is not an assault but a natural homecoming.<sup>24</sup> The wrong supposition that thoughts or feelings have to be removed first, results from the identification with someone who suffers — a someone who is disturbed by these thoughts and feelings. Atmananda justly calls this a *puja* (and translates *puja* as meaning ‘acts of worship’) because That towards which this

<sup>23</sup> *Atma-Nirvriti*, Chapter 19 (p. 22-23). See also *Discourses*, p. 179; AW nr. 476.

<sup>24</sup> Atmananda would say: “are doing puja in the direction of Me”, or “in the direction of ‘I’”. I am deeply grateful to Sri Atmananda for showing me this in the chapter entitled ‘The Puja of the Sense-organs and the Mind’ from *Atma Nirvriti*. The meaning is a kind of turning around, in the sense that the ‘I-Principle’ is not the *source* of the *vasanas*, but their final goal. We should also remember that the ‘I-Principle’ is not a place or a spot, towards which something can ‘focus’. I *am* That.

worship is directed is so totally No-thing, that it can only be devoured Therein. It is, therefore, appropriate to say that I, being No-thing, am the only true direction for all thoughts and feelings — they form a plea to be dissolved, to be ultimately allowed to rest in Me.

“The real nature of thought is Consciousness, and the true nature of feeling is Happiness. Whenever a thought or feeling arises, you are in your Real Nature as Consciousness and Happiness”; and: “When you are in deep sleep, you are in your Real Nature. When you are in deep sorrow, you are in your Real Nature. When you are in extreme dispassion, or when you are terror-stricken, you are in your Real Nature. When you are in heated logical argument, you are in your Real Nature. When you come to the end of all activity (what is called death), you are in your Real Nature. In all these experiences you stand divested of even the idea of a body or mind, and when you transcend the mind, you are always in your Real Nature.”<sup>25</sup>

This passage really covers *all* states we can experience, there is no more to be said. I am never deprived of my Real Nature, I can never escape It. This ‘I’ which everybody speaks of — exactly the same word — always ‘I’,<sup>26</sup> always pointing to Itself, which everybody experiences as ‘Myself’, is my Real Nature. Every state or feeling of separateness has been devoured in Me. ‘I’ is no door anymore, but the Devourer Itself. ▲

(Translated from Dutch by Johan Veldman)

<sup>25</sup> *Rays of the Ultimate* (see note 20), p. 125 and 126.

<sup>26</sup> See *Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad* (the oldest Upanishad) I.4.1: “In the beginning this (world) was only the self (*atma*), in the shape of a person (*purusha*). Looking around he saw nothing else than the self. He first said: ‘I am’. Therefore arose the name of I (*aham*). Therefore, even to this day when one is addressed he says first ‘This is I’ and then speaks whatever other name he may have.” *The Principal Upanisads*. Translated by S. Radhakrishnan. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953; p. 163.

# Internet Resources

## Part Two

DENNIS WAITE

### Internet-specific resources

#### 1. General information on Advaita

<http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/> is the **Advaita Vedanta** site maintained by S. Vidyasankar. Based around Shankara, it is a very authoritative site, winner of several awards and cited by the Encyclopaedia Britannica (though it does use a non-standard transliteration scheme for the Sanskrit). There are general descriptions of Advaita with detailed information on many aspects accessible through comprehensive hyperlinked references. There is a biography of Shankara and details of his lineage with scholarly discussion of many related aspects, such as dating his birth and death. The teachings of pre- and post-Shankara philosophers are also discussed in the same rigorous, academic manner. The many schools of philosophy that cite the Upanishads as their source are discussed and their relationships explained. Overall, the site is excellent

This article is from an appendix to the book *Return to Truth* by Dennis Waite, scheduled for publication by O Books in 2007.

as a source of reference material and very professionally produced. It is clearly aimed primarily at the serious student.

<http://www.geocities.com/advaitins/> is the home page for the email discussion group called the **Advaitin** List. There is information about Shankara and extracts from his works, general information about Advaita and Hinduism, details of history, terminology and Vedantic scriptures. The site also contains a number of related links and the opportunity to join the Advaita E-Group (see below).

There is an excellent set of bookmarked links, available only to members of the Advaita E-Group. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/advaitin/links> is maintained by Sunder Hattangadi, who seems able to provide references to any Advaita related topic imaginable.

**Non-Duality Salon** is maintained by Jerry M. Katz. Amongst other things it has some extremely useful pages listing living teachers, alphabetically or by location. Each entry contains a few quotations, together with a pointer to the teacher's own website, if applicable. There are also many personal accounts of satsangs with various teachers. The links can keep you surfing for some considerable time! <http://nonduality.com/>

**Realization.org** is a very professionally produced site with a wealth of information and articles on many topics with regular updates. There are biographies of sages and excerpts from books, articles on Advaita, bhakti and j-nAna yoga, meditation, Sanskrit and much more. Each page has links to associated material. The editor of the site is a Ramana Maharshi devotee. <http://www.realization.org/>

**Sentient.org** is based around Ramana Maharshi, his teaching and teachers who have been influenced by him. There are also essays on awakening and on teachers in general. <http://www.sentient.org/index.html>

**Wikiverse** — <http://advaita-vedanta.wikiverse.org/> - has a number of pages of general description on aspects relating to Advaita in an encyclopaedic style.

**Pathways to Metaphysics** — <http://geocities.com/egodust/> - is the site of Frank Maiello (egodust), who has been principally influenced by Ramana Maharshi. It presents the teaching of Vedanta for 'novices to sadhus' and is a large site containing lots of information and valuable insights.

**3rd Millennium Gateway** is a large site with only some of the content directly relating to Advaita. There are links to current and past teachers, resources, articles and books. In addition, there are pages on spirituality, cosmology, religion in general, new age, frontiers of science, scriptures, social issues and environment. There are articles, interviews and reviews. Everything is supported by lots of annotated links. <http://3mg.fcpages.com/> It has a new URL - [www.thirdmg.com](http://www.thirdmg.com)

**Amigo** — <http://www.ods.nl/am1gos> is a free Web magazine about Non Duality. There are articles by the editor Wolter Keers, a disciple of Ramana Maharshi and others such as Douglas Harding, Krishna Menon and Tony Parsons. Dutch teachers such as Jan van Delden and Hans Laurentius also have essays and satsang extracts translated into English. New issues become available several times per year. They are professionally produced and some of the articles are excellent. See Issue 2, for example, for lucid discussions on the topic of free will (or not!).

Another web magazine is published less frequently by **Harsha Satsangh**, another of the Advaita E-Groups hosted by Yahoo. <http://www.nonduality-advaita.com/>

**Dancing with the Divine** is an on-line magazine containing articles and poems of non-dual wisdom. <http://www.dancingwiththedivine.com/>

**Pure Silence** is the website of Mark McCloskey, who is selflessly (!) spreading the message of non-duality without thought of personal gain. There are a large number of short articles on various aspects of life, emphasising the need to live in the present from the silence that is our true nature. There are also several audio extracts from his acclaimed "Pure Silence" CD. <http://www.puresilence.org/>

**When I awoke** — <http://www.wheniawoke.com/> - contains tales of awakening in various non-dual traditions (though principally Advaita). Essays from a number of teachers describe their enlightenment experience and there is a practical exercise from Ken Wilber.

**Wide Awake Living** is about enlightenment and waking up to what is already here, now. There are essays, poetry, links and an offer to participate in the creation of personalised journals with questions and answers to act as a practical tool. <http://www.wideawakeliving.com/index.html>

Benjamin, who is interested in Buddhism and Western Idealist philosophies as well as Advaita, maintains a website — **SunyaPrajna: Nondual Spirituality** containing a collection of readable and literate articles on consciousness and other topics. <http://www.sunyaprajna.com/>

There are some interesting musings on aspects of Advaita as well as some autobiographical stories from **Michael Reidy** and a number of quotations. Not a high-tech website (!) but well worth a visit. <http://homepage.eircom.net/~ombhurbhuva/>

**nonameorform** is the website of Ken Knight, another active member of the Advaita E-Group. Its aim is to support his research into ineffability, language and meaning. This research is located in the non-dual context of spiritual or religious experiences and the nature of consciousness. As there is a sophisticated traditional South Asian philosophy of language from the Vedas onwards, the works of Bhartrihari, Shankara and Abhinavagupta are being examined to place their insights into our current enquiries into the nature of consciousness and the search for a common core in spiritual experience. <http://www.nonameorform.co.uk>

If pictures help you to understand new concepts and you have the Shockwave plugin Flash 5.0 installed, you may be interested in **Who Are You?** This poses a set of visually stimulating questions on the nature of ourselves and the world of appearances. <http://www.ods.nl/ikben/gb/>

There is an e-book **Introduction to Advaita** by D. Krishna Ayyar that can be read in full on-line. Despite claiming to be “a presentation for beginners” this is very comprehensive, covering practically any topic that you might think of. This is a classical treatment that uses all of the correct Sanskrit terminology. <http://www.katha.org/Academics/Advaita-FrontPg.html>

Another e-book is partially presented at “**Garland of Advaitic Wisdom**”. This advertises the complete book by Ajati, a devotee of Ramana Maharshi. With an emphasis on ajatavada, the theory that nothing has ever been created, a number of pages are available on line. There are quotations from a number of classic Advaita scriptures as well as from Ramana Maharshi, Zen and Tao. <http://www.ajati.com/>

An excellent, step by step, **Introduction to Advaita**, presented in the form of a dialogue (of 1008 single lines) has been written by

Professor V. Krishnamurthy (see below). <http://www.geocities.com/profvk/advaitadialoguepage1.html> presents the pages for viewing on-line. Alternatively, the complete dialogue may be downloaded as a PDF file from the Advaitin site at <http://www.advaitin.com/advaitadialogue.pdf>.

**Ananta Yoga Learning Center** presents essays, poetry and links which are a mixture of Kashmir Shaivism, Patanjali’s Yoga and Advaita. A number of classics from the scriptures may also be viewed on-line or downloaded. <http://www.upnaway.com/~bindu/anantayogaweb/>

**Ahwan - The Spiritual Approach to Life** has a large number of articles based on the lectures of Sri Bimal Mohanty expounding the traditional teaching of Vedanta. Subscription requested for access to further articles. <http://www.ahwan.com/>

**Philip Teertha Mistlberger** — Teachings and Writings on the Spiritual Path. A wide selection of writings from various traditions, including Zen, Tibetan Buddhism and Tantra. A book is advertised, entitled “A Natural Awakening: Realizing the Self in Everyday Life” with the first two chapters on-line and the first of these provides a crystal clear description of the seeker’s situation and the nature of enlightenment as described by Advaita. (Several extracts that I have chosen from the book may also be read at my own website.) Another short article lists the “Nine Essential Points of Spiritual Enlightenment”. <http://www.geocities.com/annubis33/>

Musings, quotations, essays and links from Charlie Hayes may be found at **Awakening to the Eternal**. <http://home.earthlink.net/~awakenow/>

**Arsha Vidya Satsangs** has details of satsangs held by Arsha Vidya Gurukulam at various locations in the US as well as Australia and Canada. Also, however, there are many pdf file and mp3 audio files of satsang excerpts from Swamis Dayananda, Vidadatmananda, Tattvavidananda and Pratyagbodhananda. These can all be downloaded and contain a wealth of material on assorted topics. <http://www.avgsatsang.org/>

**Self Knowledge** is a journal (of Adhyatma Yoga and Advaita Vedanta) produced by Shanti Sadan. There are articles on key yoga teachings and a selection from the archives. <http://www.self-knowledge.org/index.htm>

E. J. Shearn uses the model of Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Step Program to suggest a program of Self-Enquiry at <http://www.12stepliberation.com/>.

Jean-Pierre Gomez, a student of 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, answers a number of questions that frequently arise for the 'seeker of enlightenment' at <http://www.heartsongflutes.com/HERE-&-NOW-YOU-ARE.html>.

**Advaita Vedanta** — An extensive site containing quotations from Sivananda and others, explanations of key aspects of Advaita, articles by a number of authors, excerpts from scriptures, glossary of Sanskrit terms, a bulletin board and links. It also provides a tourist based introduction to Rishikesh. <http://www.geocities.com/radhakutir/>.

**It Is Not Real** is the website of Edward Muzika. Principally a homage to his teacher, Robert Adams, it contains a biography of and satsang extracts from Robert Adams along with details of their relationship. There are also sections on spiritual practices, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Zen Buddhism, psychoanalysis, book recommendations and a philosophical essay on Self and Consciousness. Highly recommended. <http://www.itisnotreal.com/>

**Living in Peace: The Natural State** — Stephen Wingate, a disciple of Bob Adamson and John Wheeler provides essays, poems, dialogues and links. Correspondence is invited. <http://www.livinginpeace-thenaturalstate.com/>

**Non-Identity** — A record of essays, dialogues and quotations from Nishkaama Naishkarmya Asamvedi, a j-nAni who lived in Madras from the 1930s to the 1990s. The author was associated with Asamvedi from 1981-1987. <http://www.mounam.org>

## 2. Hinduism

One of the best general sites on **Hinduism** and related topics has pages on many topics with an easily accessible index to all of the pages. Both philosophical and practical aspects are covered. <http://www.hinduism.co.za/>

Many of the classics of Hinduism and Advaita are available as public domain downloads at the **Internet Sacred Text Archive**,

including the Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharata and Ramayana. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/>

**India Divine** — has general information on Hinduism and scriptures with articles, downloads, screen-savers etc. Audio lectures on Vedanta may be heard on-line or downloaded. There are bi-monthly newsletters published by Bhaktivedanta Ashram in India and much more. <http://www.indiadinive.com/>

**Hinduism Online** is another large site specialising in all topics relating to Hinduism. <http://www.himalayanacademy.com/>

**Science and Spirituality** — <http://www.geocities.com/profvk/>

Prof. V. Krishnamurthy has made extracts from his books available here. There are a wide range of topics relating to Hinduism in general and Vedanta in particular, and new topics are being added all the time!

**Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham** (also listed under Indian Organisations) — contains lots of general information on Hinduism. In particular, there is an English translation of two volumes of "Hindu Dharma" from the Tamil, containing talks on many subjects by Sri Sri Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Mahaswamiji. There are also a number of articles by various people on, for example, the life and teaching of Shankara. Five hours of audio and video are also offered. <http://www.kamakoti.org/>

An excellent hierarchical index of a great many sites may be found at the Khoj India Directory. [http://www.khoj.com/Society and Culture/Religion and Spirituality/Hinduism/](http://www.khoj.com/Society%20and%20Culture/Religion%20and%20Spirituality/Hinduism/)

## 3. Indian Philosophies

**Indian Philosophy and Religion** provides links to sites of general interest on Indian religions; publishers of related books and relevant E-Groups. There is a list of pointers to sites containing texts of many of the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahmasutras and other texts such as the Astavakra Gita and Patanjali Yoga sutras. There are links to traditional schools and temples, etc. as well as modern schools. <http://www.geocities.com/gokulmuthu/> ▲



# Jnana Becomes Bhakti

KAMALA DEVI

As a young person, I was very attracted to intellectual pursuits. I liked to read and have philosophical conversations, exchanging ideas with my friends. Though physically somewhat lazy, intellectual considerations gave me pleasure.

I first heard of Bhagavan from the book, *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton. How many people have been drawn to Bhagavan due to this book! As I read Brunton's description of his entering the hall and beholding Bhagavan sitting silently, surrounded by devotees, I felt my whole body respond, my heart leaping and hairs standing on end. I knew in that moment that I had found my guru. I was so certain that I

Kamala Devi lives on the East Coast of Australia and visits Sri Arunachala frequently. The *Hill of Fire Sanctuary* is dedicated to Sri Ramana. It is a haven for wild life and a peaceful setting for devotional music and a healthy lifestyle.

did not stop to wonder if he would accept me as one of his own. When I saw a photo of Bhagavan, I saw confirmation in his eyes and felt his living presence in the radiance and love of his glance.

From then on, there was a single focus for my life and my nature seemed to change. Everything I did could now be done as an offering to Bhagavan the Beloved One. I felt full of energy. I no longer hurried through my tasks but paid attention to doing them carefully. The *Hill of Fire Sanctuary* offered endless opportunities for creative service, looking after my children, the other inmates, the few visitors, yoga students, vegetable and flower gardens and rooms. I had no desire to go out. The Sanctuary became almost synonymous with Bhagavan, a place in which I could give my whole Self.

My mind was taken up by thoughts of Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala. Two books were my great joy and inspiration for many years: *Talks* and the *Collected Works*. I became attracted more and more to Bhagavan's sublime hymns to Sri Arunachala. Reading them, I never ceased to be breathtaken by the beauty of His words, even in translation. Mind became empty as Heart became full. *Arunachala Pancharatna* became especially dear to me; so much so that I had a strong desire to be able to read it in the original Sanskrit. Though I had tried previously to learn the Sanskrit letters, I had found the task too difficult, but now, as I studied the words of the hymn, one by one the letters became familiar to me, until I slowly learned to read. When I could read the hymn right through, I found that I wanted to sing it. As I emphasized the long sounds, a tune suggested itself. Many years later, when I heard the hymn sung in Sri Ramanasramam, I was greatly surprised to find that it was the same tune which I had been singing. When I lay down at night to sleep, I would silently repeat the five verses in English until I drifted into sleep.

Be Thou the Sun and open the Lotus of my Heart in Bliss!

Was there ever a more beautiful prayer than this?

Some days, I would be afflicted by thoughts due to some unfortunate communications in my relationships or other difficulties, conflicts and worries. At such times I was unable to stay in Self-enquiry. The pain of having such a tortured mental state led me to adopt the

persistent, silent repetition of the two words Arunachala Ramana. These words became a soothing balm, eventually calming the storm of thoughts and feelings, returning my attention to the present moment. It is amazing that the purifying power of these names gets stronger and stronger with use.

In this way, I have seen how a simple, regular, spiritual practice can become so potent that it can bring about Instant Bliss.

I came to understand more about the nature of addiction through these practices. In the West, many remedies have been tried to help people overcome addictions of different kinds. Understanding the nature of the mind, it becomes clear that to develop other 'addictions' of a spiritually beneficial nature can gradually (or even quickly) lessen the hold of harmful and unhappy tendencies. As A. Ramana of Arunachala AHAM Ashram points out, "What we resist, persists"; so it is no use fighting addiction, as egoic 'will power' is unreliable.

Acknowledging our powerlessness, we can surrender the limiting habit to God or Guru and practise Self-Abidance — or in more tumultuous states of mind, we can practise pranayama (breath control), japa (mental or verbal repetition of mantra or prayer) and kindness to others. I am reminded of the Serenity Prayer said by the Alcoholics Anonymous Community world-wide:

Lord, grant me the serenity to accept that which I cannot  
change,  
The courage to change that which I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Bhagavan has clearly stated that whatever we undertake with an attitude of humility will have good results.

Having heard the Truth from Bhagavan, I realized that I need learn nothing more, but only practise remaining open to the Grace of Remembrance. So, this former intellectual became a bhakta, delighting in Service and Singing to the Lord. Along with Bhagavan's *Reply to the Mother*, which I took as upadesa, it was impossible to ask Bhagavan for anything further, although sometimes in extremis I have begged him to "Help me!" And he does, he responds immediately.

He who is contented with his lot  
 From jealousy is free  
 Balanced in affluence and mishap  
 Not bound by action he.

The above verse paraphrased from the Bhagavad Gita and quoted in *Collected Works* made a deep impression on me. I have found it helpful in many circumstances. Contemplating Bhagavan's words, I began to 'taste' the meaning of Surrender. Of course, I had known the word, but I came to understand that it was a state which I could practise.

The wonder of Bhagavan's teaching is that it is intensely practical and reasonable. Some people may think that spiritual life is living with one's head in the clouds, but Bhagavan's way removes the clouds to let us abide in the full light of the present moment, where we can operate efficiently, but without attachment to results. Many beautiful books have been written about the Way of Truth but Bhagavan engages us in direct knowledge — Jnana.

To love is to know me  
 My innermost being, the Truth that I am.  
 Through this knowledge he enters at once to my Being.  
 All that he does is offered before me in Utter Surrender.  
 My Grace is upon him, He finds the Eternal,  
 The place unchanging. *Bhagavad Gita*

Another saying of Bhagavan's which offers us tremendous encouragement is:

Earnest efforts never fail  
 Success is bound to result

So, we need only give full attention to the task of each moment, which is really the supreme task of Being, not Doing. In loving the Guru, we will never be abandoned.

Melting more and more with longing,  
 I took refuge in you.  
 There itself you stood revealed, Arunachala! ▲

# Approaches to the Study of Sankara

## Part Two

JONATHAN BADER

*This series of articles on Sankara has been adapted by the author from his Meditation in Sankara's Vedanta published by Aditya Prakashan Publications, 2/18 Ansari Road, Delhi. Their email address is [contact@bibliaimpex.com](mailto:contact@bibliaimpex.com)*

In the previous essay we briefly reviewed the traditional, historical and philosophical approaches to the study of Sankara and his school of thought. There remains the problem of determining how Sankara himself is to be understood. In India he is defined largely in terms of the traditional accounts of his life. These sources portray him as a divine figure, an incarnation of Siva who has descended to earth in order to restore the true teachings of Hinduism in the face of encroachments by Buddhism and other 'heterodox' cults. He is aided in this task by his supernormal powers which enable him to fly through the air, assume other bodies, and predict the future. His life story is that of a prodigy who masters all branches of learning in his childhood

and fulfills his entire mission in the brief span of thirty-two years. This mythical perspective is in obvious contrast to the sort of perceptions arising from a critical approach, be it historical, psychological, or sociological. Yet as Eliade, Levi-Strauss, and others have shown, there is no need to assume that mythical thought is any less rigorous than scientific thought. To dismiss these mythical accounts as a series of stories concocted to impress Sankara's greatness upon credulous minds, is as simple-minded as the criticism this attitude intends. Neither is the notion that myth involves a valid mode of thought meant to suggest that it represents a crude or primitive forerunner to modern science. Rather, the point is that in addressing itself to recognizable areas of concern — the social, religious, or philosophical — mythical thought functions on the basis of assumptions and perspectives which are merely different from those of critical scholarship.

The myth of Sankara might be seen, in part, as a response to the problem of individuality. Louis Dumont has drawn attention to the fact that the individual represents something of an anomaly in Indian society. His contention is that the renouncer stands out as the only real individual in a society which defines the particular man solely on the basis of his relationship to the group by virtue of his family and caste affiliations.<sup>1</sup> The renouncer (*sannyasin*) surrenders his caste identity, leaving the world behind in his quest for liberation. This marks him as an individual and sets him apart from society as a whole. Though he probably has a guru and may even take up residence in an *asrama*, his spiritual practice remains his own responsibility. He is entirely on his own. His unique position in the society, or rather the fact that he is not bound to it, leaves him free to question all. As a result, he becomes, according to Dumont, the primary innovator in Indian thought and society.

That the renouncer is uncomfortable with the fact of his own individuality is, in Dumont's estimation, shown by his efforts to eliminate or transcend it. But how, in turn, does the society overcome

<sup>1</sup> Louis Dumont, "World Renunciation in Indian Religions", in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, IV (1960), p. 42.

its anxiety about the sannyasin? If he is truly outside the society is he not a threat to its stability? A scriptural justification of his position would be one obvious solution. The sannyasin's role and duties are indeed prescribed in a number of sources, such as Manu's authoritative *Dharmasastra*.<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps this alone is not enough. At least on the more popular level, the realm of myth and the supernatural seems to provide an appropriate context into which the renouncer may be fitted. In his field-study of a multi-caste village, M. N. Srinivas provides a good indication of just how the man-in-the-world perceives the sannyasin:

"He was holy, and he could rise above the demands of the body... they could subsist on the leaves of some plants and fresh air, cure diseases normally incurable, convert base metals into gold and even make themselves invisible. The appearance of a sanyasi, his gestures, talk, food, etc. were reported in such a way as to suggest the existence of supernatural powers. I wondered how individuals who were as keenly intelligent and hard-headed as the villagers could suspend their disbelief so willingly..."<sup>3</sup> This study was made in 1948, at a time when the village of Rampura had not yet been subjected to very extensive urban influence. There would most probably be more scepticism expressed there nowadays. Still, it is likely that the attitudes Srinivas describes remain fairly widespread, at least in the rural areas.

This would suggest that the householder chooses to identify the renouncer with the supernatural. It may be that the threat posed by the sannyasin is not so much because he is outside the society, but rather that he is out of context. By slotting him back into place, a sense of order is restored. In this light, it is not surprising to find that Sankara, one of the foremost among *sannyasin*-s, has become the key figure in a mythical drama.

In India, the realm of myth exhibits some striking similarities to the social order. This is particularly apparent in the complex but highly

<sup>2</sup> See 6.33 ff. Sankara seems particularly partial to the authority of this *dharmasastra*.

<sup>3</sup> M. N. Srinivas, *The Remembered Village* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), p. 162.

organized hierarchy of the various divine and supernatural forces. This pattern is clearly manifest in the myth of Sankara. Here the leading role is assigned to Siva, Lord of ascetics, in whose honour Sankara has been named. Brahma incarnates as Sankara's chief rival and eventual disciple, Mandanamisra. The goddess of learning, Sarasvati, naturally enough, becomes Mandana's wife, Ubhaya-Bharati. Three Vedic deities, Varuna, Vayu, and Agni, take birth as the other leading disciples of Sankara: Padmapada, Hastamalaka, and Totaka.<sup>4</sup> It is in terms of this familiar and orderly context that Sankara's life is portrayed in the traditional biographies.

While these accounts strive to remove, or at least modify, Sankara's individuality, most critical studies seem to take the very opposite approach. In its most extreme form, this attitude culminates in a European 'myth' of Sankara. For the origins of this myth, one need look no further than the 19th century Indologists. In particular, it was Paul Deussen who most clearly proclaimed Sankara as *the* Indian philosopher — a south Asian equivalent of Plato, Kant, or Schopenhauer. Yet even those scholars who are far less lavish in singing Sankara's praises, tend to see him in terms of the individual, the philosopher. Accordingly, he is expected to be consistent, systematic, and original. Where these qualities are lacking, he is soundly criticized. When, for instance, he appears to blithely explain away a serious philosophical issue, one critic cannot resist castigating his 'refuse disposal' of problems. One manner of coping with the inconsistencies in Sankara's work is to reorganize them into a pattern which will demonstrate the evolutionary development of his thought. The creation of such a chronological chart lends a sense of order and clarity to what otherwise might seem an unwieldy mass of material, full of contradiction. But is this too not a kind of myth making?

<sup>4</sup> These details occur in the *Sankara-dig-vijaya*, which is by far the most popular of the Shankara hagiographies. There is also an English translation: *The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracarya* by Madhava-Vidyaranya, tr. Swami Tapasyananda. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978. See also my *Conquest of the Four Quarters*, Aditya Prakashan Publications. 2000.

Looking at the nature of mythical discourse from the Structuralist point of view, this assumption does not appear quite so far-fetched. According to Levi-Strauss, the purpose of myth is "to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction".<sup>5</sup> This is precisely the intention of those who would discover a chronological structure in Sankara's work. However, as Levi-Strauss points out, the quality of a real contradiction is such that it cannot be resolved. As a result, mythical discourse "grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has originated it is exhausted".<sup>6</sup> In other words, so long as the contradictions represent a significant problem, the myth will continue to be retold in a series of ever-changing versions. A similar situation presents itself in the striking variations one meets in the different accounts of Sankara's evolution.

Madeleine Biarreau prefaces her observations on Sankara's development with an appropriate note of caution: "There is, perhaps, a danger in wishing to over-systematise the thought of an author and to perceive relationships between different aspects of his work which appear as being independent because they respond to different problems."<sup>7</sup>

An attempt to explain any author's work, especially that of a traditional metaphysician, in terms of an evolutionary development of his thought has its obvious shortcomings. Wilhelm Halbfass comments that "It is important to keep in mind that [the] construction of Sankara's development remains inevitably hypothetical. We have no factual biographical framework to which we could relate doctrinal variations; the framework itself has to be construed out of such variations. This is further complicated by the fact that Sankara's writings do not simply present us with 'doctrines', but also with complex and ambiguous patterns of relating one basic teaching or intent to a great variety of approaches and expressions, it requires extreme caution to

<sup>5</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth", in *Structural Anthropology*, translated by C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (London, 1968), p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Madeleine Biarreau, "Quelques Reflexions sur l'Apophatisme de Sankara", IIJ, 3 (1959), p. 87.

identify ‘inconsistencies’ and ‘contradictions’ which would be illegitimate in Sankara’s own horizon and which would provide reliable, unambiguous clues for actual changes in his thought and for a development from earlier to later positions.”<sup>8</sup>

First of all, the differing perspectives from which each of these studies on Sankara is undertaken seems to be a major factor in determining what conclusions are obtained. There is the additional problem that Sankara, as Biarreau herself has noted, may well have written a particular work in direct response to certain specific issues. This would result in differences in his works which cannot be explained merely in terms of development. Nevertheless, each of these critical studies happens to represent an important piece of scholarship, offering valuable insights into Sankara’s thought. In pointing to the dynamic tensions, the logical contradictions, and the unresolved questions in his work, they raise issues which encourage further study of his thought. Some traditionalists, on the other hand, in seeking to minimize the contrasts in Sankara’s nature, portray him as a rather dull and pedantic character who would inspire very little in the way of vital discussion.

One might well argue that all the material about Sankara could be taken as mythical discourse. Like the traditional accounts, the application of critical methods may be seen as efforts to create a sense of order in the face of the contradictions inherent in Sankara’s life and work. Both perspectives, in turn, may perpetuate their own particular sets of contradictions. In the myths, for example, Sankara appears as the model sannyasin who renounces all earthly attachments. Yet he maintains a strong bond with his mother and breaks with tradition in performing her funeral rites. Although upholding the vow of celibacy from the time of his childhood, he revivifies the body of a dead king and proceeds to indulge himself in the pleasures of his wives and mistresses in order to master the amatory arts (*kamasastra*). Both the traditional accounts and the critical studies involve a restructuring, a reconstruction of the pattern of Sankara’s life. Neither is in itself

<sup>8</sup> *Studies in Kumarila and Sankara*, Reinbek, 1983, p. 39.

sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of his thought. Yet both may be equally helpful, or distracting, in the search for an approach to the study of Sankara.

In the context of these essays, Sankara is not seen as an original thinker, but rather one who sought to reinterpret the message of the Upanishads in terms of what is perhaps their boldest metaphysical doctrine. Yajnavalkya and other early Vedantins had expressed the notion of a non-dualistic absolute reality, a quality-less Brahman. Sankara’s contribution lay in his determination to demonstrate that this was the underlying truth which unified the diverse teachings of the Upanishads. His *bhasya* on the *Brahmasutras* established a precedent which no later commentator could afford to ignore, however much he might disagree with Sankara’s position. In addition to his role as an exegete, Sankara was very much involved in the transmission of Vedanta teachings. This is demonstrated by the large number of practical treatises which are traditionally ascribed to him. Even if only one among these, the *Upadesasahasri*, is authentic, there is still available to us sufficient evidence of his teaching methods.

Aside from the influence Sankara’s thought has had upon his direct disciples and the Advaita school as a whole, his teachings have gradually been infused into the mainstream of Indian culture. Even the unlettered man may have at least a rough idea of Sankara’s message. His place in society is therefore quite different than that of, say, Kant or Bradley. While we are not really accustomed to regarding profound metaphysical speculation as a cultural achievement, it is precisely on this basis that Sankara’s thought commends itself to us. It would, of course, be foolish to approach Sankara in the hope that his work will reveal to us the nature of the Indian psyche. Rather, it is in Sankara that we find expression of some of its most noble aspirations. ▲

VERSE

## The Urge Within

V. DWARAKNATH REDDY

Your commitment to the meditation hall  
Is deeply appreciated by one and all,

Yet, longing for heaven, one may end up in hell  
So there is no harm in heeding good counsel.

We know you intend to be silent to the core,  
But can you not silence that vibrating snore?

You are careful not to speak or sigh or laugh,  
But can you do something about that explosive cough?

Your movements are hushed and yet if you please,  
Can you find some way to stifle that sneeze?

We mean to say many sounds may demand expression,  
But meditation thrives on willing their suppression. ▲

## Bassui Tokusho Zenji and Self- Enquiry

REINHARD JUNG

*Students of the Way should see directly into their inherent nature. Knowledge, ignorance, clarity, and confusion miss the point. Who is it that hears or doesn't hear; who is it that sees or doesn't see? If you can answer, you get thirty blows. If you can't answer, you also get thirty blows. What can you do to become intimate with your true nature without committing this offence?*

— Bassui, *Mud and Water*

There is nothing more inspiring than the example of determined seekers who give their lives to the quest for the Self and achieve Self-realisation, the Living Truth alive in a person. We can learn about the immense practicality and transforming power of Self-enquiry, and its timeless, flexible universality through the records of a Zen-master who lived some six hundred years ago. His teachings are quite akin to Bhagavan's and sometimes their use of key words are similar.

Reinhard Jung has studied Bhagavan's truth in all major traditions, which follow the path of self-enquiry. He teaches preliminary knowledge and practice as well as being a doctor of natural therapies.

As Roshi Philip Kapleau in his *Three Pillars of Zen*, expressed it: “There is little written by outstanding Zen-masters which is so squarely aimed at practice or is as inspiring as these writings. Bassui speaks as directly to the reader of today as he did to his correspondents of the fourteenth century, guiding and inspiring him at every turn. Added to this is a pungent sense of paradox coupled with a profound simplicity that has made the Dharma-talk and these letters immensely popular in Japan to the present day.”<sup>1</sup>

Bassui Tokusho was born in a Samurai family in 1327, at a time that was torn by incessant warlord feuds and insecurity. It seems to be a rule that in periods where outer traditions and values lose their foundation, gifted souls turn inward with increased zest to seek answers to the fundamental questions about existence.

His biographer, a disciple named Myodo, wrote that even as a child Bassui was perceptive and curious. He was a sensitive child and is said to have asked at the age of seven, at the memorial service for his late father, why did the family priest offer food when his father didn't have a body and could not eat the offerings? And if the food was for his father's soul, then surely as his son, he too had a soul.

It was also related that he was kept awake at night by intense encounters with a brilliant, inexplicable light that was succeeded by an all-encompassing darkness. These experiences ignited in him an ardent quest to know the nature of his soul. “How terrible to be consumed by the flames of hell!... If after death the soul suffers the agonies of hell or enjoys the delights of paradise, what is the nature of this soul? And if there is no soul, what is within me just now seeing and hearing?”<sup>2</sup> This question gripped his mind incessantly as a natural koan. It is a sign of the genuineness and maturity of Bassui's mind that he could go with such directness to the first person subject, the perceiving consciousness, without any outer formal instruction. Here already, at

<sup>1</sup> *Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau p.160. John Weatherhill, Inc. Tokyo 1965. The presently available edition of the *Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau, is copyrighted (c) 1989 by Roshi Philip Kapleau. Afterword by Bodhin Kjolhede. Permission of Anchor Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.156.



the age of ten, when most of us are innocent of such questions, is an example of a true seeker, uncompromising and unwavering in his quest regarding who he is. His Guru was his intense, sustained search itself, which put him into the state, which Bhagavan Ramana spoke of as like that of a man whose head is held under water fighting for his life. Bassui's first enlightenment came inevitably one day when he was enquiring for hours on these lines as to exactly what and who is perceiving. Suddenly he realized directly that the essence of all things is an existent Emptiness, and that in it is nothing we can call a body, a mind or a soul. Greatly relieved, he broke into laughter.

But his basic insecurity as to who sees and hears had not yet been finally resolved, and his quiescent doubts suddenly resurrected when he read one day: "Mind is host and body guest" or, as Bhagavan puts it, the body is within the Self, not vice versa.<sup>3</sup>

At the age of twenty-nine Bassui had his head shaved, marking his initiation into Buddhist monkhood, but his urgent search, which consumed every bit of his inner strength, naturally kept him away from all the ceremony, luxurious living and political intrigues in which the priesthood was then much involved. He refused to wear a robe or stay in a temple overnight, but chose instead some hut or stayed in the woods, where he might climb a tree to guard against sleep. Perched among the branches he inquired into the question, 'Who is the perceiver?' In the morning, perhaps without sleep or food, he would go to the temple for *dokusan*, an interview with the Roshi.

Bhagavan has told us that the Guru appears when the disciple is ready. For Bassui from childhood the Guru had been the intensive search itself. It compelled him to give his all to it and he felt little need for outward instruction even when he reached manhood. Only when the final step had to be taken, did he come to know about Koho-zenji, a fully realised master of his day. Koho, sensing the extraordinary ripeness and purity of Bassui's mind, invited him to stay at the temple in which he was the resident abbot. Although Bassui recognized in Koho the

<sup>3</sup> See *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 487.

great master he had been searching for, he nevertheless refused to live in the temple, but stayed in a nearby hut and came daily for *dokusan*.

One day the Roshi asked him: "Tell me, what is Joshu's Mu?"

Bassui began: "Mountains and rivers, grass and trees are equally Mu ..." when Koho suddenly stopped him: "Don't use your mind!"

All at once Bassui felt as though he had "lost his life root, like a barrel whose bottom had been smashed open". Sweating profusely while leaving Koho's room, he was in such a daze that he bumped his head several times when trying to find the outer gate. Upon reaching his hut, he wept for hours from his very depths, the tears "pouring down his face like rain". Bassui's previous conceptions and beliefs were said to have been completely washed away by this 'heart-stream'. Koho confirmed this deep enlightenment the next day and gave him the name Bassui, 'high above the average'.<sup>4</sup>

Bassui continued his solitary life to stabilize in Truth. He was fifty, when he settled permanently near the town Enzan in Yamanashi prefecture and built a hut in a mountainous area. His presence attracted many seekers and in course of time he became the abbot of a large monastery called Kogaku-an with over a thousand monks and laymen.

In 1387 at the age of sixty Bassui left his body in a dramatic way. He sat in lotus-posture and addressed his disciples: "Don't be misled! Look closely! What is this?" He repeated these words and calmly left the body.<sup>5</sup>

The following quotes give a general indication of Bassui's approach, which is very straightforward and typical of his insistence that one directly inquire into the perceiving subject. Every serious inquiry we make will lead to the insight that our dualistic intellect is incapable of experiencing directly the non-dual truth. As God said to Moses: "No one can see me and live", a sentence often understood superficially that actually refers to this Knowledge gained through identity with Truth. Bassui points directly to this dualistic misunderstanding, urging his disciples to willingly open themselves up to this impasse. In

<sup>4</sup> *Three Pillars of Zen*, pp.157-158.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.

Bhagavan's experience in Madurai we find the same elements of helplessness and final total surrender that led to the dissolution of his personal identity. Again and again Bhagavan emphasizes that all our effort can only lead up to the realisation that we cannot attain Truth through our personal will and effort. This state he compared, as did Jesus, to a six months old child which, in its complete surrender, is apt to be taken into Truth by Truth itself. It is the defining characteristic of the ego that it believes that it has power, and is the doer, and its greatest arrogance is its idea that it can attain Truth like other imagined possessions. Therefore this experience of helplessness is the most 'propitious' condition, a most necessary humiliation, a dark night of the ego-ghost and the only door to the Infinite. "Your glory lies where you cease to exist," said Bhagavan. He also said that for every seeker a time would come when he found that his most cherished sadhana did not work any more and this helplessness would indicate the threshold for complete surrender to Truth.

"If you would free yourself of the sufferings of samsara, you must learn the direct way to become a Buddha. This way is no other than the realization of your own Mind. Now, what is this Mind? It is the true nature of all sentient beings, that which existed before our parents were born and hence before our own birth, and which presently exists, unchanging and eternal. So it is called one's Face before one's parents were born (lit. 'original face'). This Mind is intrinsically pure. When we are born it is not newly created, and when we die it does not perish. It has no distinction of male or female, nor has it any colouration of good or bad. It cannot be compared with anything, so it is called Buddha-nature. Yet countless thoughts issue from this Self-nature as waves arise in the ocean, or as images are reflected in a mirror.

"To realize your own Mind, you must first of all look into the source from which thoughts flow. Sleeping and waking, standing and sitting, profoundly ask yourself, 'What is my own Mind?' with an intense yearning to resolve that question."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Three Pillars of Zen*, p.160. This is an expression that could stem from Bhagavan. Compare the talk in *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, by David Godman, p. 263: "It is sufficient to go on observing the place from where the mind rises."

"What kind of master is it that this very moment sees colours with the eyes and hears voices with the ears, that now raises the hands and moves the feet? We know these are functions of our own mind, but no one knows precisely how they are performed. It may be asserted that behind these actions there is no entity, yet it is obvious they are being performed spontaneously. Conversely, it may be maintained that these are the acts of some entity; still the entity is invisible. If one regards this question as unfathomable, all attempts to reason (out an answer) will cease and one will be at a loss to know what to do. In this propitious state deepen and deepen the yearning, tirelessly, to the extreme. When the profound questioning penetrates to the very bottom, and that bottom is broken open, not the slightest doubt will remain that your own Mind is itself Buddha, the Void-universe. There will be no anxiety about life or death, no truth to search for..."<sup>7</sup>

Let us end this article with a letter of Bassui to the Venerable Gekokaku:

"The four elements are without self. I am originally without a master. This masterless master is the body, and this selfless self is true nature. Body and nature are not two, and the ten thousand Dharmas are one. In this unity there are no sages and no ordinary people. Where can life, death, and nirvana come from? The merit of existence and non-existence does not apply to this wondrous wisdom. How can words or silence, movement or stillness affect it? Just abandon the myriad Dharmas, discard reason, let go of loss and gain, good and bad, this instant, and return to yourself and look cuttngly – who is it that looks?

"When you thoroughly penetrate this, the clarity stands out as lacquer black as a coal goose standing in the snow."<sup>8</sup> ▲

<sup>7</sup> *Three Pillars of Zen*, pp.161-162.

<sup>8</sup> *Mud and Water: The Collected Teachings of Zen Master Bassui* by Arthur Braverman, p. 208, 2002. Reprinted with permission of Wisdom Publications, 199 Elm Street, Somerville, MA 02144 U.S.A, [www.wisdompubs.org](http://www.wisdompubs.org) The quotation on the title page of this article is taken from p. 209.



# Seshadri Swami's Childhood Home

V. V. RAGHAV

Beginning in 1969-70, the Tamil magazine *Ananda Vikatan* wrote on the glory of Arunachala in a series of articles extending some 101 weeks. Though the serial was started as a commemoration to Sri Seshadri Swami on his birth centenary, ultimately the life and teaching of Sri Bhagavan came to be its highlight. Nevertheless there appeared numerous reflections on the life of Seshadri Swami who was at the time largely unknown to the world except for the residents of Tiruvannamalai and devotees of Sri Ramana. Even Seshadri Swami's *samadhi* adjacent to Sri Ramanasramam remained mostly unnoticed until recently. It was only in the 1980s, some fifty years after Seshadri Swami's *Mahasamadhi*<sup>1</sup> that devotees began to visit his *samadhi* and administrators began offering accommodation for visitors.

The relationship between Bhagavan and Seshadri Swami goes back to the very first days of Bhagavan's arrival in Tiruvannamalai. Having arrived some six years before Bhagavan, Seshadri Swami knew the lay of

<sup>1</sup> Seshadri Swami attained *siddhi* on January 14, 1929.



Bhagavan. On numerous occasions, Seshadri Swami directed devotees to Bhagavan and even turned away Bhagavan devotees who came to him for advice both because he believed one should have only one guru, and because he held Sri Bhagavan in such high esteem.<sup>2</sup> In light of this it is no wonder that the series of articles in *Ananda Vikatan* ended up focusing more on the life of Bhagavan.

The author of the serial, Sri Bharanidharan, was devoted to Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam Paramacharya, Sri Chandrasekara Saraswati Mahaswamigal. During a discussion with the Paramacharya, the topic of identifying the childhood home of Seshadri Swami arose and the Mahaswami urged the author to try and locate it. After extensive research, a small dwelling on the perimeter of the Sri Varadarajaswamy temple wall in Vishnu Kanchi was identified as Seshadri Swami's family house.<sup>3</sup> In 1977, at the Paramacharya's insistence, the house was acquired by the Peetam for posterity and a committee was formed to maintain it. Mahaswami asked Sri Bharanidharan to prepare a large colour portrait of Seshadri Swami for installation inside. After all the renovations had been carried out, the Paramacharya pointed out an interesting coincidence: five of the persons involved in the project, though unrelated, bore the name 'Seshadri'. On a subsequent occasion, when speaking of the greatness of Seshadri Swami, the Mahaswami posed the following vibrant question: "Will I ever become like Seshadri Swamigal? Can I ever reach such supreme eminence?"<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, Sri Chandrasekara Saraswati Mahaswami had high regard for Seshadri Swami, so much so that he took pains to establish a permanent shrine at the saint's childhood home. For pilgrims and devotees wishing to visit, the site is located at No. 6 Varadarajaswamy Temple, South Mada Street, Vishnu Kanchi in Kanchipuram and has a full-time priest attending. ▲

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 25 of *Ramana Leela*.

<sup>3</sup> Seshadri Swami was born in Vandavasi. At an early age, his father died unexpectedly and young Seshadri went to live with his mother's musician-scholar uncle, Kamakoti Sastriar, who raised the lad.

<sup>4</sup> *Age of Love and Grace*, First Edition 2005, p. 102.

the land and came to the young Bhagavan's rescue on a couple of occasions. It was Seshadri Swami who protected Bhagavan from local urchins and who was instrumental in having Bhagavan taken out of Patala Lingam when his body was in need of care.

Sri Seshadri was senior to Bhagavan by nine years and once, while admonishing a devotee, Tiruvallur Subrahmanya Mudaliar, an ambitious businessman who was regularly entangled in legal disputes, the Swami said, "Look, the income of the younger brother is ten thousand per month; for me it is one thousand. Why don't you try to earn at least a hundred?" Mudaliar understood that the 'income' mentioned by the Swami meant spiritual wealth and that 'younger brother' meant Sri

# Bhagavan, Manikkavachakar and Tiruvachakam

## Part Three

ROBERT BUTLER,  
T. V. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN  
AND DAVID GODMAN

### *Tiruvachakam* references in Bhagavan's replies to devotees

*When Bhagavan replied to devotees' questions, he sometimes illustrated the point he was trying to make by quoting extracts from the Tiruvachakam. In this section we have put together all the instances we could find, and prepared new translations of all the lines that Bhagavan referred to:*

(1)

[A young man asked] 'It is said that a *jnani* does not have happiness or sorrow, bodily ailments or the like; Sundarar and Appar are reported to have jumped with joy when they had a vision of God. Even Ramakrishna Paramahansa is reported to have grieved terribly when he did not get a vision of the Holy Mother and to have gone into ecstasies when he did get a vision. Not only that; when Ramakrishna Paramahansa had some bodily ailment, he used to cry out for Mother. What does it mean? Do *jnanis* have happiness and sorrow?'



Bhagavan answered him, 'You say all that in relation to the body, don't you? It is not possible to judge a *jnani* by his bodily ailments. Manikkavachakar sang a hymn the purport of which is, "O Iswara, you have showered on me your blessings even before I asked for them. How kind of you! Even so why is it I do not feel grieved? Is my heart made of stone? My eyes do not get wet. Are they made of wood? Not only with these two eyes, but I wish that my whole body were full of eyes so that I could weep with them. I would then be very happy. I wish my heart would melt and become watery so that it could become integrated with you." That is the purport. But then is that grief real grief? Some people give vent to their happiness by loudly expressing it when they get a vision of God, and some shed tears of joy. It was the same with Ramakrishna Paramahansa. "Mother, how kind of you! How merciful!" he used to say and weep, and sometimes he used to laugh. Anyway, if we want to know about his real state, we should first know about our own state,' said Bhagavan.<sup>1</sup>

'You upon whose spreading, matted locks  
Ganga's flooding waters downward plunge!  
Rider on the Bull! Lord of Heaven's Host!  
No sooner do they hear these words, Your devotees,  
than, melting, gasping, thirsting in their hearts,  
they tumble, like torrents rushing down a mountainside,  
to stand at last in expectation of Your grace.  
Yet I it was, [not them], You came to rule!  
O my Father, still this body does not all heart become,  
and melt from sole of foot to crown of head,  
nor transformed all into eyes, does it shed  
a flood unstoppable of tears.  
Truly, in one of evil karma such as I,  
the heart is stone, the eyes, two knots of wood.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 4th April 1948.

<sup>2</sup> 'Tiruccatakam', verse 3.1.

(2)

Mr B. C. Das, the physics lecturer, asked, 'Contemplation is possible only with control of mind and control can be accomplished only by contemplation. Is it not a vicious circle?'

**Bhagavan:** Yes, they are interdependent. They must go on side by side. Practice and dispassion bring about the result gradually. Dispassion is practised to check the mind from being projected outward; practice is to keep it turned inward. There is a struggle between control and contemplation. It is going on constantly within. Contemplation will in due course be successful.

**Devotee:** How to begin? Your grace is needed for it.

**Bhagavan:** Grace is always there. 'Dispassion cannot be acquired, nor realisation of the truth, nor inherence in the Self, in the absence of the Guru's grace,' the Master quoted.

Practice is necessary. It is like training a roguish bull confined to his stall by tempting him with luscious grass and preventing him from straying.

Then the Master read out a stanza from *Tiruvachakam* which is an address to the mind, saying, 'O humming bee [namely, mind]! Why do you take the pains of collecting tiny specks of honey from innumerable flowers? There is one from whom you can have the whole storehouse of honey by simply thinking or seeing or speaking of Him. Get within and hum to Him [*brimkara*].'<sup>3</sup>

Do not sip the nectar,  
tiny as a millet seed  
found in any flower,  
but speed to that mystic dancer  
and hum the praise of Him, King Bee,  
He who, whenever we think of Him,  
whenever we behold Him,  
whenever we speak of Him,

<sup>3</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No.220.

perpetually pours forth the honeyed bliss  
that melts all our bones to the core.<sup>4</sup>

(3)

**Bhagavan:** These questions [about seeing Siva in visions] arise because you have limited the Self to the body; only then the ideas of within and without, of the subject and the object, arise. The objective visions have no intrinsic value. Even if they are everlasting, they cannot satisfy the person. Uma has Siva always with Her. Both together form Ardhanariswara. Yet she wanted to know Siva in His true nature. She made *tapas*. In her *dhyana* she saw a bright light. She thought, 'This cannot be Siva for it is within the compass of my vision. I am greater than this light.' So she resumed her *tapas*. Stillness prevailed. She then realised that BE-ing is Siva in His true nature.

Muruganar cited Appar's stanza:

'To remove my darkness and give me light, Thy grace must work through ME only.'

Sri Bhagavan mentioned Sri Manikkavachakar's: 'We do *bhajans* and the rest. But we have not seen nor heard of those who had seen Thee.'

'One cannot see God and yet retain individuality. The seer and the seen unite into one Being. There is no cogniser nor cognition, nor the cognised. All merge into one Supreme Siva only!'<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the claims of the learned ones  
who say: 'In all the elements You dwell!  
who dance and sing: 'You come not, neither do You go!',  
we have neither known nor heard of anyone  
who has seen You or has known You.  
King of Perunturai, that cool rice fields surround!

<sup>4</sup> 'Tirukkottumbi', verse 3. Devaraja Mudaliar has also noted (*My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana* p. 52) that Bhagavan spoke very highly of the sentiments expressed in this verse.

<sup>5</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 450.

You whom even thought is powerless to reach!  
You who come before us, abolishing our flaws,  
subjecting us to Your compassion's rule, our Lord,  
Arise from Your couch, in grace, come forth!<sup>6</sup>

(4)

**Devaraja Mudaliar:** Bhagavan would frequently refer to the seventh stanza [of 'Koyil Tiruppatikam'], especially to the line 'Approaching and approaching, getting reduced into an atom, and finally becoming one [with the Absolute]' and also to the tenth stanza.<sup>7</sup>

There you stood, Your nature manifest,  
granting me this day Your grace,  
rising like a sun within my heart,  
driving out the darkness of ignorance.  
My thoughts upon that nature dwelt  
till thoughts there were no more.  
There is nothing else other than You.  
Approaching and approaching,  
I became worn down to an atom,  
then worn away till I was one with Him.  
Hail Siva, dwelling in Holy Perunturai!  
There is nothing that You are,  
yet without You nothing is!  
Who indeed can know You?<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 'Tiruppalliezhucci', verse 5.

<sup>7</sup> *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 52. Muruganar used the same image to describe the way that Bhagavan eroded his own ego: 'Radiant *Padam* [Bhagavan] destroyed my ego, demolishing it over and over again. It wore it down and down, smaller and smaller, to the size of an atom, until it became one with itself.' See *Padamalai*, p. 349. Bhagavan also mentioned the first part of this verse when he was speaking to G. V. Subbaramayya. See *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, 1967 ed., p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> 'Koyil Tiruppatikam', verse 7. The tenth verse will appear later in the article.

*The same verse was also mentioned in the following discussion:*

Bhagavan continued to speak of the dvaitism of the Vaishnavites and quoted the Nammalvar song beginning ‘*Yaane ennai ...*,’ the gist of which is: ‘Not knowing myself, I went about saying “I” and “mine”. Then I discovered that “I” is “You” and “mine” was “Yours,” O God.’

He [Bhagavan] said, ‘This is clear *advaita* but these Vaishnavites would give it some interpretation to make it accord with their feeling of duality. They hold that they must exist and God must exist, but how is that possible? It seems that they must all remain forever doing service in Vaikunta, but how many of them are to do service, and where would there be room for all the Vaishnavites?’

Bhagavan said this laughing, and then after a pause he added, ‘On the other hand *advaita* does not mean that a man must always sit in *samadhi* and never engage in action. Many things are necessary to keep up the life of the body, and action can never be avoided. Nor is *bhakti* ruled out in *advaita*. Sankara is rightly regarded as the foremost exponent of *advaita*, and yet look at the number of shrines he visited (action) and the devotional songs he wrote.’

Bhagavan then gave further quotations from the eighth ‘Decad’ of *Thiruvoymozhi* to show that some of the Vaishnavite Alvars had clearly endorsed *advaita*. He particularly emphasised the third stanza where it says: ‘I was lost in Him or in That’ and the fifth which is very like the *Tiruvachakam* stanza that says the ego got attenuated more and more and was extinguished in the Self.<sup>9</sup>

To attain through His grace Him who is unique among those who are elevated in *jnana*, I established Him in my consciousness. That too was due to His sweet grace. To gain the *jnana* that the mind, the *prana*, the body and the rest of the [apparently] indestructible entities are flawed, I crawled strenuously to the very end, till my ego was extinguished in Him.

<sup>9</sup> *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 27th June 1946.

Having realised myself the one enduring [reality], there is nothing in its attribute-free subtle nature for anyone to know in an objective way as ‘this’ or ‘that’. Even to see it is impossible. Impossible to know as either good or evil, it totally transcends objective knowledge. Approaching and approaching It, and being worn away more and more, I was destroyed without any residue.<sup>10</sup>

(5)

**Devotee:** I am a sinner. I do not perform religious sacrifices [*homa*], etc. Shall I have painful rebirths for that reason? Pray save me!

**Bhagavan:** Why do you say that you are a sinner? Your trust in God is sufficient to save you from rebirths. Cast all burdens on Him.

In the *Tiruvachakam* it is said: ‘Though I am worse than a dog, you have graciously undertaken to protect me. This delusion of birth and death is maintained by You. Moreover, am I the person to sift and judge? Am I the Lord here? O Maheswara! It is for you to roll me through bodies [through births and deaths] or to keep me fixed at your own feet.’ Therefore have faith and that will save you.<sup>11</sup>

Dog I am and lower than a dog,  
yet to me You showed Your love  
and came Yourself to make me Yours.  
This birth and death, *maya*’s delusion,  
should be placed under Your supervision,  
and I should remain still.  
Is it any longer my prerogative  
to pass judgement on this?  
You who wear an eye upon Your brow!  
Put me in a body if You will.  
Or place me at Your holy feet.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Thiruvoymozhi*, by Nammalvar, verses 8.8.3 and 8.8.5.

<sup>11</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 30.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Kuzhaitta Pattu’, verse 8.

*In many parts of the Tiruvachakam Manikkavachakar complains about his unworthiness or his uncontrolled desires. The Tevaram authors – Jnanasambandar, Appar and Sundaramurti – expressed similar sentiments in their own poems. Bhagavan pointed out that all four saints revealed their true experience of the Self in the very first verse that they wrote,<sup>13</sup> thus implying that their later complaints, which suggest separation from God, are merely poetic devices.*

*Bhagavan commented on this traditional practice of saints denigrating themselves in the following exchange:*

In many of his works Sivaprakasam Pillai laments over his lack of devotion and his inability to follow Bhagavan's teachings.

A devotee once asked Bhagavan about this, saying, 'Sivaprakasam Pillai, who is such a good man, such an ardent devotee, and a longstanding disciple, has written a poem saying that Sri Bhagavan's instructions could not be carried out by him in practice. What can be the lot of others then?'

Sri Bhagavan replied, 'Sri Acharya [Adi-Sankaracharya] also says similar things when he composes songs in praise of any deity. How else can they praise God?'<sup>14</sup>

*In the second line of 'Siva Puranam', the first poem in the Tiruvachakam, Manikkavachakar states his experience of Self-abidance by saying that Siva's feet never ever leave his heart:*

Long live [the mantra] *Nama Sivaya!*  
 Long live the feet of the Master!  
 Long live the feet that never, even for an eye's blink,  
 leave my heart!  
 Long live the jewel among gurus, who in Kokazhi,<sup>15</sup>  
 bent me to his rule!

<sup>13</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 306.

<sup>14</sup> *The Power of the Presence*, part one, pp. 45-6.

<sup>15</sup> 'Kokazhi' means 'great port', a reference to Perunturai, where Manikkavachakar first encountered Siva.

Long live the feet of him who,  
 as the *Agamas*, sweetly dwells!  
 Long live the holy feet of the One,  
 the Many, the Being Supreme!<sup>16</sup>

*Bhagavan also commented on this line by Manikkavachakar when a devotee complained that this particular truth had not been realised by him.*

**Bhagavan:** It will be realised in due course. Till then there is devotion (*bhakti*). 'Even for a trice you do not leave my mind.' Does He leave you [at] any moment? It is you who allow your mind to wander away. He remains always steady. When your mind is fixed you say, 'He does not leave my mind even for a trice'. How ridiculous!<sup>17</sup>

*'Siva Puranam', the most frequently recited portion of the Tiruvachakam, was a particular favourite of Bhagavan. He once told Devaraja Mudaliar, 'If ten persons should join together and sing it harmoniously, how grand it would be!'*<sup>18</sup> ▲

(The final instalment of this article will appear in the next issue.)

<sup>16</sup> 'Siva Puranam', lines 1-5. A translation of all the lines of 'Siva Puranam', made by the authors of this article, can be found at [www.davidgodman.org](http://www.davidgodman.org).

<sup>17</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk No. 306.

<sup>18</sup> *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 52.



## The Children Who Live at Sri Ramanasramam

*Arunachala Pati:* All of us are children of Bhagavan. This time we will find out more about the Children of Bhagavan, who are residents of the ashramam. Yes, I am referring to the young Veda Patashala boys. You have seen them recite the Veda Parayana in the morning and in the evening at Bhagavan's Samadhi. What a privilege, to be able to live, go to school, all in the holy atmosphere of the ashramam! Just like you, I wanted to find out more about these fortunate boys. What do these boys do the whole day? Why are they staying away from their families? So I went ahead and talked to the current teacher of the Veda Patashala — Sri Senthilnatha Ghanapati — who was enthusiastic in sharing about the fine work being done at the patashala.

*Ghanapati:* The Veda Patashala at Sri Ramanasramam is one of the few thriving patashalas in the country. We follow a very structured, well recognized programme of study. The first level of course is called the Kranantha, which usually takes 8 years of rigorous study. Those students desiring to move onto the advanced level may pursue the Ghanantham course, which could take another 3-4 years. Students take an annual

examination held by V.R. Trust from Kancheepuram. The final exam at the end of 8 years is held at Kancheepuram, Sringeri or Datta Peetam. The examination is completely oral. Certificates are issued at the end of the exam, last year we had 3 students attain 1<sup>st</sup> class in their final exams.

At the Patashala we usually have around 15 students. Currently we have 4 students in their 5<sup>th</sup> year of study and 12 students in their 4<sup>th</sup> year of study. The qualifications for admission are straight-forward: Brahmin boys who have had their Upanayanam, and are between 8 and 12 years of age. Sri Ramanasramam provides excellent Vedic education to the students, along with accommodation, food and medical care, all at no-cost.

In the first year of study, students learn Sanskrit and Grantham. The students spend a lot of time practising the scripts. After the mastery of the scripts, there is no need for paper or pen. Thereafter it is predominantly memory work.

To be able to complete the Kranantha course within 8 years, daily 8 hours of rigorous study is required. The daily schedule runs as follows:

4.30 – 6 am; 8 -11 am; 1 - 4 pm; 6.30 – 7.30 pm and finally, 8 - 9.30 pm.

The breaks in between are used for completing their chores such as washing one's clothes or for relaxation. The students seem to enjoy playing cricket as well.

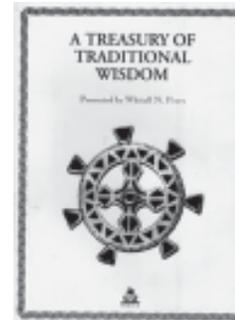
Initially when students join the patashala, they experience some anxiety about being separated from their families. In 4-6 months, they bond with other students. Also the student and teacher feel a special bond/respect, referred to as Guru Shishya Bandham. Annually, the students have 10 days vacation during Deepavali, and 20 days leave in May.

Vedic study is very unique, the method has been followed for hundreds of years. The method is intense on memory work. Here is an instance of the method: Lessons are organized every 11 days. The same lesson is repeated for 11 days. Each lesson comprises of 50 panchashats. One panchashat (verse) is equal to 50 padams (words). The student learns by repeating each lesson 10 times which takes 5 hours in a day. By the end, one panchashat would have been recited 100 times. The students mainly learn by listening and through repetition. Books are seldom used.

The career prospects at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> course of study are very promising. Based upon aptitude, the student could choose different lines: one could become a priest at a temple, a purohit who conducts functions at homes, a Sanskrit scholar, a teacher, etc. Students are provided specialized training for the field they want to pursue.



## BOOK REVIEWS



A TREASURY OF TRADITIONAL WISDOM  
ed. by Whitall N. Perry. Indica Books, D 40/18  
Godowlia, Varanasi 221 001, Rs. 950, pp. 1144.  
[indicabooks@satyam.net.in](mailto:indicabooks@satyam.net.in)

It was Aldous Huxley who first published a modern comprehensive survey in quotations of the mystical traditions throughout the world, entitled *The Perennial Philosophy*. The scope of the project was limited and eclectic. There is a new compendium available which supersedes it.

Whitall Perry is that rare combination of scholar and seeker. The range of his reading and his deft use of quotations is truly astonishing. He was successively a student of A.K. Coomaraswamy, Rene Guenon and Frithjof Schuon. He has assiduously studied the metaphysical treatises of the world religions and has presented perhaps the most comprehensive guide for spiritual seekers who wish to imbibe the wisdom of the various mystical traditions. Though the selection is wide-ranging, there is a sense of unity and purpose evident behind the quotes no matter how divergent the culture. Perry has devised an ingenious system of cross references which makes it easy for readers to study as the spirit moves them. It is not a book to read from cover to cover, it is a lifetime companion which offer new insights at each opening.

The scheme of the book carries us through the various stations seekers will experience on their journey. It contains three 'Books': Justice-Fear-

To be able to recite Vedas one needs 8 years of intense study, plus everyday 1 hour practice, even after becoming a priest. Those who can recite the Vedas are much in demand especially for Veda Parayana sessions conducted for ten days at a stretch at temples, festivals, or special occasions at homes.

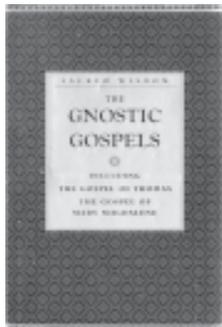
Today, people who know the importance of the Vedas are diminishing. One in 1000-2000 families prefer Vedas, or would even consider sending their sons to a Veda Patashala. Currently there may be 50 Veda Patashalas in India, only 20 are functioning well due to funds, right teachers, and right students. This is a pity, since the effect of negative things in the world needs to be balanced by Veda Ghosham. We are very happy to say that Sri Ramanasramam is one of the best in promoting Vedic study.

*Arunachala Pati:* What an incredible amount of dedication these students have, to pursue such a rigorous programme of memorising 8 hours a day for 8 years! The next time you start to feel like you have too much homework, think about the Veda Patashala boys. We are proud not only of their determination, but feel blessed to have youth who are keen on preserving our tradition. It is by Bhagavan's Grace that such an outstanding Veda Patashala continues to thrive at our ashramam! ▲

Action; Mercy-Love-Contemplation; and Truth-Knowledge-Union. Each Book is further subdivided into Parts. For example in Book Three, the first part, Discernment-Truth, contains quotes on: Spiritual Drowning; Knowledge; Reality; The Eye of Eternity-Supreme Centre.

I would recommend this volume to all who wish to be inspired by those who have gone before. This book is a classic and has not been bettered nor is likely to be.

*A Treasury* was first published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London in 1971. Indica Books are to be congratulated for making this great volume available again at a reasonable price considering the scope and magnitude of this compendium. — Peter Pichelmann

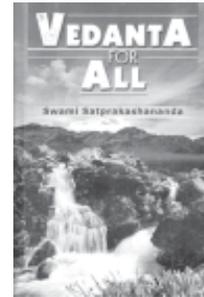


**SACRED WISDOM: THE Gnostic GOSPELS** by Alan Jacobs, with an introduction by Rev. Dr. Vrej N. Nersessian. Sacred Wisdom, Watkins Publishing, Sixth Floor, Castle House, 75-76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QH, 2005, \$9.95 CAN, pp. 250.

This handsome little volume is a selection of 13 treatises from the Nag Hammadi Library, the collection of 53 Early Coptic manuscripts discovered in Upper Egypt in 1945. The scrolls are thought to have belonged to Pachomian monks living in the area during the fourth century and may have served to defend the practices of the monks from charges of heresy in their day. Translated early on into Coptic from the Greek, the collection illustrates and emphasizes the teaching of the Gnostics.

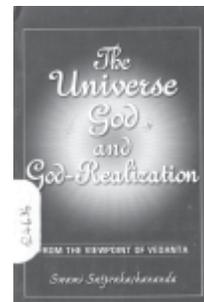
The author does a fine job rendering readable the more important and relevant (for modern readers) texts of the corpus. *The Fable of the Pearl* is an ancient Hebraic motif known to the outside world in the Gospel parable of 'The Prodigal Son'. But the version here has some interesting nuances. *The Gospel of Thomas* has been studied with great interest since its first publication in the 1950s not least because of its textual proximity to the canonical Gospels. It contains 114 'sayings' of Jesus which follow very closely the parables of the sower, the grain of mustard seed, the pearl of great price, etc., yet always with a Gnostic inflection which accentuates knowledge of the self. *The Sophia of Jesus* is a unique account of the Goddess of Wisdom who figures most prominently in the deuterocanonical texts of the Catholic Bible (such

as *The Wisdom of Solomon* and *Sirach*). Here, the resurrected Christ appears as the female personification of Divine Wisdom. Other texts of interest in this volume: *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, *The Gospel of Philip*, and *The Gospel of Truth*. — M. S. Balasubramanian



**VEDANTA FOR ALL** by Swami Satprakashananda. Comp. and ed. by Ray Ellis, pp.277, 2001, Pub: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, Rs 26.00.

*Vedanta For All* is a collection of talks given by the author to his students in St. Louis, USA. Swami Satprakashananda was a senior monk of the Ramakrishna order and a respected scholar. The talks cover a wide range of subjects including morality, good and evil, divine law and divine grace. One can almost hear the swami speak. The weight of erudition is carried lightly and major concepts are explained in a graceful manner. The chapter on *maya* is a case in point. The swami elucidates complex subjects with an ease and clarity, which can only come from a deep study.



**THE UNIVERSE, GOD AND SELF-REALIZATION** by Swami Satprakashananda, pp.310, 2004, Pub: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. Rs75.00.

*The Universe, God and Self-Realization* is a detailed study of these three concepts from the viewpoint of Vedanta. Swami Satprakashananda has several scholarly books to his name, including *Methods of Knowledge: According to Advaita Vedanta*. In the present volume he elaborates in thorough Vedantic detail the fundamental teachings of Vedanta, its applicability to our lives, the material and efficient causes of the world, the concept of Isvara, the process of creation, what is reality, direct and indirect knowledge, Brahman and the four yogas.

This book is for those who are conversant with Vedanta as it requires a certain degree of concentration to appreciate the subtlety and complexity of the ideas presented by this skilful and very knowledgeable lover of Vedanta. The effort required will be amply rewarded.

— T.V. Ramamurthy

SACRED MUSIC: ITS ORIGINS, POWERS AND FUTURE by Alain Daniélou. Pub: Indica Books, D 40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi, 221 001, 2003, Rs 250, pp. 224. [indicabooks@satyam.net.in](mailto:indicabooks@satyam.net.in)

Alain Daniélou (1907-1994) whose Hindu name was *Shiva Sharan* ('protected by Shiva') lived in India for many years. He was a Sanskrit scholar and also fluent in Hindi and Tamil. He wrote many books about India, the best known of which is probably the classic *The Myths and Gods of India* [New York 1991], first published as *Hindu Polytheism* in 1964.

He was also a musicologist and a proficient *veena* player. Early on, the poet Tagore appointed him Director of Music at Shantiniketan. He was passionately dedicated to research into Indian classical music and he played a major part in the growth of Western interest in it.

He was such a brilliant, erudite polymath (a painter as well) that any new publication of his work is very much to be welcomed. This book, being a collection of articles dating from 1950 to 1974, inevitably lacks some coherence but compensates by diversity of interest. Fifteen of the twenty-four articles are previously unpublished.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter of the book is entitled *Modal Music and Harmonic Music*. A later chapter, *Music, an International Language?* continues this absorbing theme. The author identifies three kinds of music: harmonic, modal and cyclic. Cyclic music is Chinese and outside his scope.

Western music is fundamentally harmonic, being structured by chord progressions; only about two dozen chords are used. M. Daniélou claims that it has come into direct conflict with Indian music. Indian classical music, of very ancient origin, is modal; it establishes a fixed root note (the tonic) and the music is based on its intervals or, strictly speaking, its sound ratios. There are also certain other secondary tones known as dominant notes.

A mode is called a *raga* ('state of mind') which is defined by the tonic plus a set of notes, usually varying from five to twelve, which form its scale or gamut. Indian music is essentially meditative.

According to the author modal music is more flexible, complex and powerful than harmonic music which it might well be; I am not qualified to judge. He feels called upon to proclaim it to be superior as he considers it to be under attack by 'harmonic aggression', an aspect of a still existing Western cultural imperialism. 'To harmonise a raga is to destroy it.' But who wants to do so?

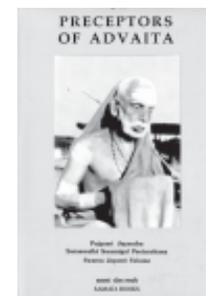
Is it really fruitful to compare incompatible forms of music in such a polemical way? Surely both have their virtues. Nowadays Indian classical music is well known and loved in the West if, not surprisingly, not so well understood. Whoever considers it to be inferior cannot be taken seriously. Also, where harmonisation is concerned one should strongly distinguish between Indian classical and popular music. I cannot possibly say whether Indian popular taste has changed.

There is much discussion of intervals throughout the book and M. Daniélou favours an octave of fifty-two intervals. An electronic musical instrument called the Semantic has been produced tuned according to his theory, which I would love to hear played.

The author is extremely critical of what is in his view the limiting compromise of so-called 'equal temperament' used in Western music, going so far as to say that it leads to a severe loss of emotive power, let alone any possible magical effects. He makes a persuasive case but try telling that to a Wagnerian! He also feels that Western classical music has become too dry, abstract and intellectual. This is a damaging opinion that I strongly disagree with.

I found this an original, stimulating and provocative book spoilt slightly by a somewhat defensive, dogmatic tone. It is a fascinating read, full of compelling facts and unique insights that are more suited to the specialist, but is well worth reading even by someone with as limited a technical knowledge of music as mine and who must admit to having forgotten the meaning of the rather Miltonic word 'lucubration' which M. Daniélou likes.

— Patrick Roberts



PRECEPTORS OF ADVAITA - Pujya Sri Jayendra Sarasvati Swamigal Peetarohana Swarna Jayanti, pp.570, Samata Books, 10 Congress Building, 573, Mount Road, Chennai 600 006, Rs. 350.

This book, edited by T.M.P. Mahadevan, was originally published to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of the ascension of Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Swamigal to the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha.

It has been reissued by Samata Books on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Peetarohanam of his successor Sri Jayendra Sarasvati Swamigal. This volume covers 60 preceptors of Advaita as well as articles on Advaitic institutions. There are said to be two lineages of

teachers in the Advaitic tradition: the family lineage (*vamsaparampara*) comprising of seven teachers from Narayana to Suka, passed down from father to son (Narayana, Brahma, Vasista, Sakti, Parasara, Vyasa, Suka) and the teacher lineage (*sisyaparampara*) which begins with Gaudapada, familiarly known as the preceptor who first systematised Advaita philosophy and then on to his disciple Govinda, to Sankara and through Sankara's disciples down to modern day successors of the lineage. Two major traditions developed after Sankara: the Bhamati and the Vivarana. All post-Sankara advaitins were influenced by one of these two traditions and the present work gives wonderful summaries of both their lives and thought. Besides the 60 articles on preceptors, there are also articles on Kamaksi, Kamakoti, and Kamakotipitha as well as a brief life-sketch of the Sage of Kanchi. Readers will find this a very useful resource.



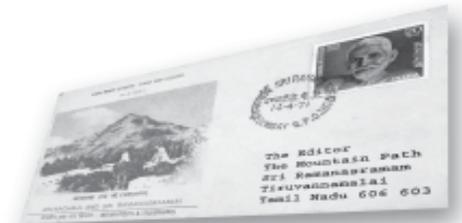
AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO SANSKRIT FOR SPIRITUAL SEEKERS by Dennis Waite. Black & White: New Delhi. 2005. pp.210  
[info@sundeeptbooks.com](mailto:info@sundeeptbooks.com) &  
[www.blackwhitebooks.com](http://www.blackwhitebooks.com); +91-11-25718903,  
 SB-Rs295,US\$18;HB-Rs.395.US\$24; freeairmail.

This lovely book provides two levels of Sanskrit instruction. It is a wonderful guide to all those individuals who would like to know the basic Sanskrit religious vocabulary and how to read, write, and pronounce Sanskrit terms. The book introduces the transliterated Sanskrit alphabet and also, it teaches the Devanagari alphabet. The second level also teaches the main rules for combining Sanskrit letters and words – which is often a headache for the beginner. Many examples are provided from the Hindu scriptures to illustrate these two levels of teaching. There is also a comprehensive glossary of the most commonly encountered spiritual terms. This useful book will appeal to all serious spiritual seekers interested in the Hindu scriptures and Sanskrit terminology. Its aim is to teach the reader how to look up Sanskrit words in a dictionary and to write and pronounce them correctly. I am sure that all beginners and even more advanced seekers of Hindu wisdom will find this a wonderful guide.

— John Grimes



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



### Miraculous Recovery

Mrs V.Ramana Sundari, daughter of the late Griddalur Subba Rao writes: I would like to express my humble gratitude at His feet and share the experience of Bhagavan's grace on my late husband.

As children we used to visit the ashram in our holidays. In 1944, at my 14<sup>th</sup> year I was married to Dr.V. Pralad. Our marriage was performed with Sri Bhagavan's consent. In 1946-7, my husband became very sick and was admitted in King George Hospital, Visakhapatnam. One day an injection was given to him, and it produced adverse effects and he started sinking into a coma. His other doctor friends panicked and ran to inform the senior doctors.

At that time I, along with my husband's uncle, were climbing the stairs to his room and we saw a sanyasi clad in orange robes with a stick and kamandalu climbing down the stairs. We were oblivious of the danger which faced my husband. When we entered the room my husband was recovering. His friends who were also doctors and were with him in the room, told us that as he was sinking, a sanyasi entered the room and passed his hands on my husband's entire body from head to toe and he told my husband that "you will be alright".

Immediately the impending danger was over and my husband soon recovered with rapid speed and was eventually discharged.

All his doctor friends feel that because of my husband they were blessed to see Sri Bhagavan in human form.

Except for Bhagavan, who can save a man sinking due to a drug reaction? Except for Bhagavan who has the power to revive a person from the claws of death? Except for Bhagavan who has the power to say, "Hence forth you will be alright"?

Such is the silent grace of our Master. And even though those who experience it though they may not know it because it is very silent, it is nevertheless as powerful as his silent teaching.

May Bhagavan shower his grace on all of us, with pranams at his lotus feet.  
— V. Ramana Sundari, Hyderabad

### Veda Parayana

Namaste! I am an ardent devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and a regular subscriber to the Mountain Path. I am the grandson of Yajur Veda Ganapatin Pathiavadi Seshachala Sastrigal.

Your article on Vedaparayana (April 2005) has revealed more about the Mahima of Vedam and the greatness of the Vedic heritage. I wish to circulate via email your article to propagate the message of Sri Bhagavan and Sri Chandrasekhara Saraswathi and Vedaparayana to many persons as practically possible.  
— P.K. Seshadri, Chennai

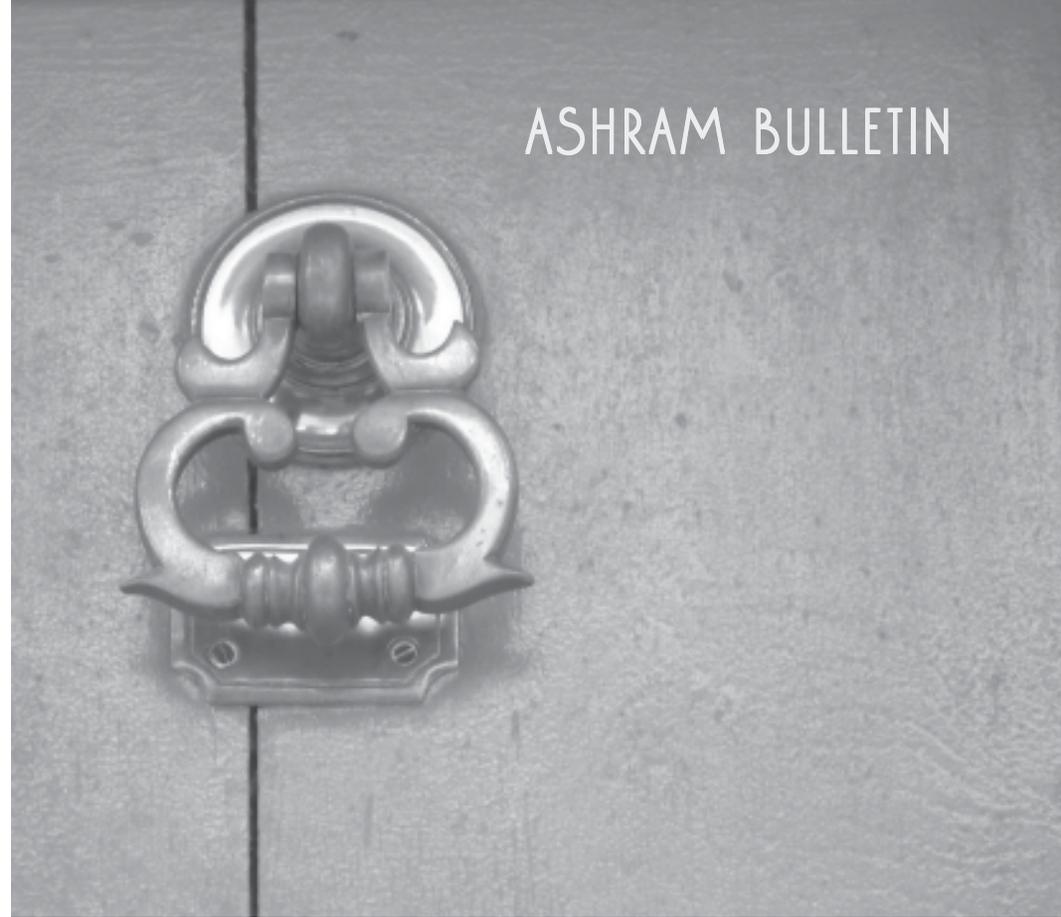
### Magazine Title

I was surprised and dismayed to see the front cover of the latest edition of *The Mountain Path*. It now seems to lack the definite article 'The' and is entitled merely 'Mountain Path.' Surely sir, a reputable publication such as yourselves must realize that you are committing a grammatical error and as the magazine is read in many countries around the world this fact will be noted far and wide. Please can we have the front cover of our much valued magazine without mistakes in future?

— Pratap Roy, London

*Thank you for your letter. You are right, we are aware of the mistake on the current cover of the Mountain Path. Recently we have been in communication with the Press Registrar of India in respect to our status as a magazine. It appears that when we applied for the title, The Mountain Path in 1964, our application was forwarded from Madras to Delhi as Mountain Path and this is how we are registered in the Ministry of Broadcasting. We have now been instructed to comply with the original title designated in their records. All protests have been to no avail. We are sorry about the current title but under the circumstances our hands are tied.*

*We had also received many complaints from readers about the lack of information concerning the subscription rates and the volume number details in the magazine. These particular points have been settled with the relevant authorities and we are now able once again to publish them.* — Editor



### Visitors in Record Numbers

In recent years Sri Ramanasramam has experienced unprecedented growth with the 2005-06 season having the greatest consistent number of visitors ever. On weekends this season, the Samadhi Hall has been regularly filled to capacity as has the New Dining Hall during meals. There has been a marked rise not only in the number of pilgrims from Tamil Nadu and neighbouring states, but also in visitors from abroad. Internationally, Tiruvannamalai has received extended treatment in foreign tourist guidebooks and has therefore received a higher ranking among European and North American travel agencies booking tours. This together with internet attention and broader availability and distribution of books on or about Sri Bhagavan has served to attract an ever-increasing number of foreign guests. On the domestic level, representatives and administrators of other holy sites in South India are reporting similar increases and attributing it to significant economic

growth among the South Indian middle class in recent years, which affords opportunity for travel that may not have been there even just ten years ago. Likewise increased media coverage of full moon days and the Deepam and other festivals has played a role in drawing more and more visitors from around South India. Simultaneously the *Bhagavan Sri Ramana Ratha Yatra* brought Bhagavan's name and teachings to the attention of scores of thousands and initiated the founding of numerous Ramana Kendras in Tamil Nadu such as at Salem, Rajapalayam, Nagercoil, Palani and Tiruchuli, among others.

### Tourism Development

Recognizing the surge in tourism to the Tiruvannamalai area, the Central and State governments allocated Rs. 459.45 lakhs (nearly 1 million US dollars) this year for tourism development in the area. Slotted projects include development of the central bus stand, laying of cement roads, installation of decorative lights on the Four Streets, formation of new parks (and renovation of existing ones), construction of benches and rest-houses for pilgrims, installation of street lamps, establishment of a museum, construction of check dams, fire-prevention measures on the Hill, renovation of statues and parks, the construction of a vehicle park near Easanyam, solid waste management and an underground drainage system and improvements to the roads leading to Arunachala Temple. There are also plans for construction of an auditorium and market complex on the bypass road at Gandhinagar projected at 1 crore rupees and funded by the World Bank-aided *Tamil Nadu Urban Development Project*. A number of these development plans are already underway.

### Jayanti Celebrations

December 18<sup>th</sup> saw the 126<sup>th</sup> Jayanti celebrations at Sri Ramanasramam and various Kendras around the state and elsewhere. Sri Ramanasramam was blessed with a memorable cultural programme this year complete with dance troupe. In Mylapore *Ramana Kendra Trust*, Chennai in association with *Tattvaloka* held celebrations for five days with discourses by distinguished speakers. *Sri Ramanalayam*, Vellore, held an all-day programme as did *Sundara Mandiram*, Tiruchuli, complete with Sri Bhagavan procession throughout the streets of the town of Sri Bhagavan's birth.



### Pongal Festival

Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup> was Bogi, Ardra darshan day, Poornami, and the last day of Margazhi. At the Ashram this confluence of holy events was celebrated with early morning Danurmasa puja, Vishnusahasranamam, Sri Nataraja puja and Sri Chakra puja in the evening. Saturday, January 14<sup>th</sup> was Punarvasu day as well as *Sankranti* (Pongal), the harvest festival and liturgically the first day of the sun's transit into the Northern Hemisphere. Mother's Shrine and the Ashram's main gate were colourfully decorated with the rice flour designs called *rangoli*. *Mattu Pongal*, the festival of cows, followed on Sunday, January 15<sup>th</sup> with special puja to Nandi in the Mother's Shrine and gopuja at the goshala. That evening thousands enjoyed the Tiruoodal festival near Arunachala Temple where the domestic dispute between Siva and Parvati was enacted. The following morning Arunachala Swami, the Arunachaleswarar processional deity, made his circumambulation of the Hill.

### Sri Vidya Homam

On Sunday Feb 5<sup>th</sup> the annual *Sri Vidya Havan* was conducted to reconsecrate and rededicate the Meru-Chakra installed by Sri Bhagavan in the inner sanctorum of Mother's Shrine. Ceremonies began opposite Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall at 8 am with *Kalastashtapana*. Homa and recitation



Sri Ramana Centre in East Tambaram

of various prayers such as *Lalita Sahasranamam* were performed from 12:30 until 4 pm ending with *poornahuthi* at 4:30 pm, a procession, breaking of coconuts, and deeparadhana at 5 pm. Sri Chakra puja was performed in the Mother's Shrine the following morning.

### **Mahasivaratri**

In the ancient past on this day, the fourteenth day of the dark-fortnight (*chaturdasi*) in the month of *Masi* (*Magha*, February-March), Lord Siva took form as Arunachala so that all could be blessed by his darshan. This year the festival was celebrated on Feb 26<sup>th</sup>. Devotees participated in pujas performed every couple of hours throughout the night in Bhagavan's Shrine. *Sri Rudram* was chanted continuously from midnight until 2 am and devotees went for girivalam in between.

### **Sri Ramana Maharshi Satsanga Vedi**

A new centre has been established, consecrated and dedicated to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi at A-4 Preethi Apartments 101/22, Thiruvalluvar Street, East Tambaram, Chennai 600 059. The dedication ceremony took place on Saturday morning, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005, beginning with Ganapathi homam and followed by chanting of Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*. Arrangements are in progress to conduct regular satsangs, study classes, *nitya* puja, parayana, and functions related to Bhagavan. A small library is also being established.

Sri A. Kumar Raja who is conducting the *Sri Ramana Study Circle* in West Tambaram will be the convenor for this *vedi*. For more information, contact him at: 044-22262282. ▲