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Ramana Ashtottaram

38. ओम् त्रिगुणातिगाय नमः

Om Trigunātigāya namaḥ

Prostration to one who has transcended the three gunas.

Having no ego, no 'I' sense, and being the pure, universal Awareness, Bhagavan is a *jivanmukta*, a liberated soul; a *sthitaprajna*, one who is established in the divine Consciousness and is unmoved by agitated emotion or thought; and a *gunatita*, one who has transcended the limitations of the gunas. His very nature and being is *nirvikara chidakasa*, the immutable sky of pure Awareness, transcending all particularities.

39. ओम् विरूपाक्ष गुहावासाय नमः

Om Virūpākṣa guhāvāsāya namaḥ

Prostration to the dweller in the Virupaksha cave.

Bhagavan lived at Virupaksha cave from 1900 to 1916, and it is where his inner light came to be widely recognised by seekers. Virupaksha is one of the names of Siva, the god with a third, transcendental eye. It is Siva in this aspect who embodies secret knowledge. Hence, the word also means the heart-cave and indicates the secret source of identity which resides in all souls (*jivas*).

Subtlest of the subtle, greatest of the great
The atman is hidden in the cave of the heart
Of all beings. ¹ ▲

¹ *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 111.20.

EDITORIAL

Stillness

In one of the amateur movies taken of Bhagavan there is a sequence which shows him in a characteristic position, half reclining on a couch in the Jubilee Hall giving darshan. It seems to have been taken during an important festival in the ashram such as Jayanti, his birthday, because there is an animated cluster of devotees standing at the head of the couch facing the camera. The camera is positioned directly in front of the couch at right angles to Bhagavan who is looking out into the distance beyond his feet without the slightest acknowledgement that he is anything but alone. Behind Bhagavan in profile, beyond the widely spaced bamboo screen, one can see in the distance, the steady flicker of light on the leaves of trees. It is not a hurried shot and the viewer has the leisure to catch all the details in the frame. The first impression is that it is a moving sequence because of the animation of some of the devotees, but then a doubt arises because Bhagavan is so still. When you scan the frame everything seems perfectly normal and yet one begins to wonder if the composition is actually a still photograph. Is this because Bhagavan appears as motionless as a rock? Then one's eye

roams the set scene. Yes, the devotees are there and one sees movement; yes, Bhagavan is there but is he breathing? It is a puzzle and then one notices in the background the play of light on the leaves. There is mobility as the dappled leaves wave in the breeze and yes, definitely it is a moving camera scene. The wonder arises: how can Bhagavan be so still? It doesn't seem normal. In fact, it isn't normal for what one has witnessed is a demonstration of that unique stillness so many experienced in his presence.

There were some who tried to communicate this awesome sight though they knew their words were pale, unsatisfactory descriptions because Bhagavan was there, yet he wasn't. He eluded capture like the wind vainly grasped by the hand. We are describing an 'activity' which is completely detached from its surroundings and has neither apparent cause nor effect. It was independent of the witness's expectations and influence. Bhagavan not only seemed alone, he was alone. We, in the many years after the fact of his appearance on this earth, still marvel at the powerful impact of his unique spiritual presence. How is it that people could sit for hours before this person who aside from giving wise words of instruction apparently did nothing?

What is this stillness which Bhagavan demonstrated and why do we gravitate towards someone who exemplified this startling quality?

For most of us stillness is a relative term. We may be physically still at night during sleep. We may be emotionally quiet as we listen sympathetically to another person. We may so completely concentrate on our work to the exclusion of all else that time seems to stop. But this is not the same dynamic as that of Bhagavan, because his stillness was not an absence of opposing forces, the neutralization of conflict or a concerted effort to remain still. It was not the ignoring of time and place by an absent-mindedness. It is an awareness which lives in the eternal present. Bhagavan did not identify with stillness — in fact, it is quite the contrary, stillness expressed itself as Bhagavan. We should not confuse this stillness with inactivity. It is the highest, most intense activity possible, a powerful force as opposed to a mere negative lack of action.

In Bhagavan's stillness we see the reconciliation of contradictory influences. There was equilibrium untouched by the inevitable conflicts created by circumstances or by the numerous strong personalities who surrounded him.

And why was Bhagavan still? It is because he wanted nothing, absolutely nothing. He was supremely content to be in the moment desiring nothing, expecting nothing. He lived in the serene, boundless sense of being. We encounter this mystery with a mixture of bewilderment, frustration, admiration, envy and finally as understanding dawns, awe. For we too, wish to be free from the tyranny of compulsion.

This kind of aloof behaviour was disconcerting for those who expected Bhagavan to react to circumstances. Quite often people would appeal to Bhagavan to favour their side of an argument. They would generally be disappointed as he would be unmoved not because he did not see, say the apparent injustice, but because he knew in the field of human activity the stream of manifestation is impersonal and if we identify with one strand or quality, life throws up a contradictory force that has its own *raison d'être*. When we are engrossed by this multiplicity and take sides we lose sight of the purpose of why we sit at his feet, invoke his name and follow his teaching.

We intuitively recognize someone who is not bound by the same laws as ourselves. There was a great peace emanating from Bhagavan and like the sun he radiated an energy which brought solace and understanding to those who were open to this powerful influence.

We see in Bhagavan someone who is free of the normal conventions. His walking stick, water-pot and *kaupina* (loin-cloth) were all he required. His daily life was infinitely rich in close attention to detail as can be seen in the care he took in the transcription of Tamil advaitic texts, and he strictly adhered to a routine convenient to both himself and all who came for the express purpose of being in his presence. A close devotee, Visvanatha Swami, once said that people may gain a false impression of Bhagavan if they read, say *Talks*. He said that Bhagavan frequently remained completely silent

for days. The daily schedule in the ashram was so fixed that Bhagavan automatically did what was necessary at the appropriate time without a word spoken. The two clocks in the Old Hall kept meticulous time and the calendar was scrupulously kept up to date. For someone who apparently lived in the timeless, Bhagavan was fully aware of time's movement and was not mesmerized by change.

We, on the other hand, find ourselves in the grip of continuous transformation through our desires and fears. Our minds are by nature active with thoughts. When we learn that we should still our mind we are apparently confronted with an impossible task for the stream of thoughts can be turbulent and endless.

How do we stop the thoughts which seem to have the same function as breathing? If we stopped thinking would we be a lump of flesh, an unconscious stupid mass? It is clear that thought is necessary for our body and persona to function. What is not so obvious is that thought is a tool at our disposal; it is not the commanding principle which decides what we do or do not. We are not asked to destroy a valuable tool which assists us to be conscious. The teaching of Ramana invites us to enquire into the root of who we think we are in the principle 'I am'. The method to do this is atma vichara. We discover by this process that who we thought we were is an illusion; that thoughts, though necessary to function in this world are limited and cannot reveal the truth. They point but the essence eludes their grasp.

As children many of us have experienced the uncomplicated delight of throwing a spinning top. The instrument is simple: a block of circular wood, a string wound round it and a spike at the bottom. We threw the top and held onto one end of the thread. The top unravels at a speed according to the initial thrust and we gleefully observe the wonder of the top spinning on the axis of its spike until through inertia, the block topples over.

The nature of thought is similar. Our sense of 'I' is the spike at the bottom of a block of thoughts that has solidified into an identity. According to how much attention we pay to the process (our time and energy), the block of our identity spins with thoughts until we

lose interest. For some, it is a lifetime; for others like Bhagavan, the impetus to play the game quickly faded.

Now adapt the same principle to our everyday lives: according to how much attention we give to a thought, it will spin on the axis of our identity.

Again, adapt the same principle to the dynamics of stillness. Are we the spinning wooden top or are we the spike which revolves on the spot? When we realize that all the thoughts we generate are dependent on a still centre for them to be active, the question arises; to whom do these thoughts occur? They happen to 'I'.

If we become lost in trying to remain focused on this 'I' which defies description then we can consider another way. When we think of Bhagavan or Arunachala, are we identified with our thought process which revolves round them in the effort to find understanding or entry; or are we at one with their stillness because we remain at rest with them, in them, and do not spawn ideas which differentiate us? Are we absorbed in the tranquility of stillness or are we identified with the ambiguity of movement? The choice is ours; the trick is to see that we need not move from the question. When we ask ourselves a question we do so from a point of serenity and certainty about our identity. We know we exist: this understanding is expressed by the quality of stillness. This stillness quells the racing mind and steers us towards all to which we aspire to be acquainted, a condition of living grace. We do not need to reach out for it. We can truthfully say it is already available; we spin on the spot; we move in the oneness. The recognition that this enduring moment is sufficient for our purpose, is called stillness. ▲



Effortless Meditation

Part One

SWAMI MADHURANANDA

Naturally the question arises when we meditate, 'How to remain still?'. The eagerness to enter into Stillness is a spontaneous desire and a positive one. Indeed it is in Stillness that there is a hope of entering into supreme freedom — freedom from life's negative emotions, its sense of insecurity and psychological dependencies.

We should bear in mind that if meditation is thought of as an act, then the term 'Effortless Meditation' is contradictory. If meditation is seen as a state of Being, then the word 'effortless' is superfluous. The word 'effortless' is used to differentiate this meditation from other forms of meditation where effort is involved. Throughout this article the term 'Effortless Meditation' is freely interchanged with 'Stillness', 'Beingness', and 'sense of existence', and is therefore not associated with the achieving of anything whatsoever.

This edited extract is from *Effortless Meditation* published by the author under the pen name 'Madhu' and available at the Ashram book-stall.

You may ask, what is Effortless Meditation? It is a state of pure spontaneous perception. It is a state of being, of non-doing, where one remains in a complete state of inner rest and ease and therefore does not deliberately direct the mind to any specific object, internal or external.

Effortless Meditation, as such, is quite simple though impossible to adequately express. Try as you may, there will always be limitations of language. So it would be better to attempt to understand it without too much analyzing. If you start dissecting language, your mind may tell you 'Something is missing! Something is missing!' or perhaps, 'It is too abstract'. So please try and read the following with openness and love because to understand Effortless Meditation is to receive a precious gift.

Pointers to Effortless Meditation

As soon as the question 'How to remain still?' arises, you are already in a state of effortlessness, because the question has come up naturally and unpremeditatedly while you are in a state of pure spontaneous perception, which is of the state of Stillness. The next question may be, 'Is meditation really that simple?'. As soon as that question spontaneously arises, you are again in the state of Stillness.

Next, there may be the doubt, 'Oh, this is all humbug, meditation cannot be this simple'. Again this sentence has come up spontaneously of its own accord, and so it too is the state of Stillness. Another thought-sentence may come, 'I don't want to involve myself in such utterly facile things; I have experimented with such things myriad times and they haven't helped me'. Again, if it is spontaneous, this describes the state of Stillness. So, as soon as the thought arises, if it expresses itself spontaneously as words, again, it is the state of Stillness.

Along with each thought-sentence, you may perceive some outside sound or sensation in the body, or you may see some object (if your eyes are open). If these perceptions arise without intention, then all these moments are simply moments of Stillness.

A reaction may come when you hear an intrusive, unexpected and unwanted sound. 'Oh, I am hearing a horrible sound'; however, as

soon as you perceive this sentence, you are in the Stillness itself, even though the words you experience are negative. If you are in the state of pure perception, without any conscious effort on your part, you will find that reactions in the form of emotional pain begin to subside. One is advised just to be in the state of natural and spontaneous word-flow, without any struggle. Along with this non-violent non-resistance, if we allow the perception of sense objects to occur simultaneously with neither acceptance nor rejection, we can slip into the Stillness of Effortless Meditation.

We should not confuse states of pure spontaneous perception with states of intentional trying to perceive words as letters. Trying to perceive words is not spontaneous, but involves effort. But if it happens naturally, that is all right as this is a lively, spontaneous occurrence rather than a dry, mechanical one. The same thing holds for sensory perceptions. Trying to perceive objects is not spontaneous perception. On the other hand, whatever is perceived without will or intention is spontaneous perception.

To say, 'Be Still', does not mean that you should not engage your mind in thinking when your work demands it. You must. What needs emphasizing is that you not engage your mind in mechanical thinking once you know this 'Stillness'.

Moments Conducive to Entering into Effortless Meditation

As beginners, we may simply allow ourselves the possibility of stumbling into this state of Stillness when we are calm or in a jubilant mood, or even when we are a bit sad or feeling helpless. This suggestion is only for beginners who may be facing a word that is subjectively loaded and overwhelming because of wrongly associated past habits. To avoid this mental situation, I often suggest to students that they see the words or stimuli which ignite the disturbed state as not the cause; they are mere sound vibrations (in the case of the words) or objective actions, in which we have invested personal negative overtones.

When one sits for meditation one should not expect too much. It is better to start with an attitude of experimentation and exploration.

In fact, one can experiment with meditation anywhere as it is quite a simple endeavour. However, since we are used to reacting or indulging with words, it is better to experiment with meditation while you sit quietly.

When you wake up in the morning, if you find that your mind is calm, know that you have come out of deep sleep, and not out of the normal turmoil of the dream state. In the moment of waking from deep sleep, there is greater possibility of slipping into the effortless state. In this subtle state you need not imagine that perception of objects be ignored. When sages say that Stillness can be experienced in the transition from deep sleep to the waking state, many have understood that to mean that they should not perceive anything. That is not possible. The very fact that you wake up shows that some perception has occurred, otherwise you would still be in deep sleep! You need not bother with trying to know whether you have awakened from deep sleep or from the dream state: this only stirs up the first impulse to thought. While still lying in bed after waking, just give attention to the thoughtless state of awareness.

Misunderstandings about Stillness

Many think they can remain still without any noticeable thought patterns at all. There are those who say: 'I may not be in the state of Stillness for a long time, but for a few minutes I did remain without thought'. In truth, they have just been in a state of extremely subtle thinking without being aware of it, and thereby are deceiving themselves when making such comments.

When you go to walk, you normally proceed without thinking, 'I should be walking, I should be walking'. Yet, the thought of walking is there, otherwise how could you get up to walk? These thoughts come into the fore only when something compels you to stop 'walking' in spite of your wish to continue to do so. Therefore, when people say they have ceased thinking, it is usually untrue. Actually the thinking that operates in those instances of supposed Stillness is much grosser than that which happens, say, in the example of walking. The 'thinking' necessary for walking is not consciously sustained, nor

does it create any conflict. In those deluded cases referred to above, conscious and deliberate thinking is happening in a subtle way while the mind is merely unconscious of it. It deludes itself when it says, 'I am not thinking'. If one tries to remain in that category of Stillness, one will inevitably generate considerable conflict.

If a person does remain without thinking for a split second, the breath will immediately and effortlessly stop; and body-consciousness evaporate. According to jnanis, if thought stops in its truest sense, in all its subtleties, even for a split second, the person will be enlightened! If this is the case then it is quite obvious that most people are not free from thinking in their moments of so-called Stillness. You can imagine the subtlety of thinking when Sri Ramana Maharshi says, "Thought is ever present, including in deep sleep".¹ There is nothing subtler than thought in the universe; it is the subtlest of the subtlest.

Some people assume Stillness is a state of absent-mindedness. This is never true. In the state we call absent-mindedness, thinking happens but without our conscious will or intention. So, it is far from the state of dynamic peace, which we are seeking. To be absent-minded is not being Still; our attention has simply been diverted and we are not aware of it. It is interesting to note that nobody can try to be absent-minded as the very act becomes a conscious effort!

We should also understand that true Stillness is not the state where you analyze emotions or disturbing situations, and yet remain affected inwardly with the force of such analysis. That state is a very gross form of thinking.

The Supreme Simplicity of Effortless Meditation

If none of the abovementioned states is the effortless state we seek, then we are faced with a very puzzling conundrum, and yes, it is often like this: *the simplest things are the most puzzling*. When I say, 'Don't focus on anything, just keep your mind off every kind of object or thinking', then this seems 'do-able'. At least in the beginning this seems achievable, though in actual practice it appears an impossible

¹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Sri Ramanasramam, 1989. Talk 307.

accomplishment. Were you to focus on some particular object that excludes everything else, it would at first appear easy. However, if you seriously try, it will be like following a mirage. Try looking at the face of your watch exclusively and you will see the dilemma. The watch face will elude your attention in numerous ways no matter how sincerely you try to maintain your concentration. On the other hand, Effortless Meditation, although it appears utterly impossible, it is in fact the easiest thing.² You may find that this meditation is astonishingly simple and therefore feel it leads nowhere and, because you are habituated to the complicated, give up. We take for granted the simplest things. But with persistence you will see that this simple thing, Effortless Meditation, is priceless in everyday life.

Where might we go wrong?

Suppose the thought comes to you, ‘How to remain Still?’ Well, if you enter into the effortless state, you will experience this thought as a pure unobstructed flow of words. Quite the reverse will happen if you start thinking about how to be Still. You will dwell upon the concept of Stillness as something separate from yourself. We can observe within our self that we do not experience thought as a spontaneous and pure flow of words, but that we want to make use of every thought to attain something. Once we get into the habit of making use of thought, then a reactive mechanism sets in where we can easily become lost in the endless concatenation of thoughts generated by the mind. Men of wisdom use thought and words merely for practical matters.

Generally we don’t experience thoughts as a pure word-flow like a river that flows towards the ocean in a natural and unhindered passage. Does a river make any effort? Does it stop and think, ‘I should move in this direction?’ It will be flowing gravitationally in the direction of the least resistance. It never stops and ponders its fate but effortlessly reaches the ocean which is its goal and becomes one with the depths.

² “Self knowledge is an easy thing, the easiest thing there is.” — *Atma Vidya: The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 133. Sri Ramanasramam, 2001.

Unlike the river, we always seem to stop, look back, brood and become lost in every divergent perception. There is no sense of freshness. We are lost either in the past or in the future. Once we start thinking about goals or achievements (which are uncalled for), we are then in the realm of effort, which is maya or ignorance.

Word-Flow: Mechanical or Spontaneous?

When we are in a true meditative state, we allow words and thoughts to spontaneously and naturally arise without any effort. Sri Ramana Maharshi says, “Silence is ever speaking; it is a perennial flow of language; it is interrupted by speaking”.³ The Maharshi also said regarding *japa* (recitation), “You are always repeating a mantra automatically. If you are not aware of the *ajapa* (unspoken chant), which is eternally going on, you should take to *japa*. *Japa* is made with effort.”⁴

When words come automatically and spontaneously, their nature will be distinctive. They will soothe and refresh. There will be sense of vigour and dynamism. On the other hand, if you mechanically repeat thoughts, you will find they bore and enervate you. You will be happily surprised to discover in Effortless Meditation that this natural word-flow is never boring. However, in the beginning, especially when you are restless or carried away by emotions, you will not be able to distinguish mechanically repeated words from those that occur spontaneously. Sometimes you may be assailed by doubts as to whether words are flowing naturally or are being repeated mechanically. Don’t try to decide what is right and wrong. If you don’t analyze but remain with that very doubt, it puts you in the state of Stillness. One should not be discouraged for with patience we will know in time.

One of the wonderful things you will notice, if you diligently pursue this meditation, is that though the words elicited by the mind may refer to the past, there will be a sense of liveliness about them. For example, words may come, “I should not have worried so much

³Talk 246. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Sri Ramanasramam, 1989.

⁴*Ibid.*, Talk 312.

about that incident which happened ten years ago!” Even though these words arise because of the thought of the past, if you perceive them as a spontaneous upsurge from within, they will be animated and alive. What makes you aware of what happened in the past are not the words, but something you try to do in the present moment. Words related to the past cannot deprive you of Effortless Meditation if you don't fight with them!

Labelling of words

It may happen that suddenly this effortless Stillness will bring thoughts and words with negative associations to which we react or to which we are allergic due to painful memories. In order to rescue ourselves from such painful states of mind we instinctively cut off the spontaneous flow of words and associations. Though we may suppose we have saved ourselves from unwanted suffering, we have also diverted ourselves from Effortless Meditation. In this context let us review the relationship between thoughts, words and consequent emotions.

What is thought? Thought is the act of conceptualization of that which initially appears to be nebulous and unknown. This first occurs in the extremely subtle realm where the thought is pure concept and has no defining form. From its minute and innocuous beginning, a thought expands into a recognizable, ostensibly independent object, however subtle. Thoughts then develop into concrete expressions, what we normally call 'ideas' or 'impulses', and these are related to objects in the external world.

Thoughts are manufactured and have no individual existence apart from the entity that originally created them. Thought is a thinking that happens in spite of us, but we can sense thought without words coming into the picture. A word is the verbal expression of thought, and comes after the original thought.

When we feel that a thought coming to us, we know in the deepest core of our being, much before the thought has formed into words, that this is a thought we are experiencing. For example, when the thought, 'I am feeling restless' shows up, I will know that I am having

this thought before it expresses itself in words. A powerful thought can create pleasurable or painful feelings instantly. We sense the nature of thoughts as good or bad or as neutral much before we know them through the faculty of words.

If we allow words to flow spontaneously, then whatever emotion comes along with the thought just fades away because we do not give it undue attention. In this way we deprive it of its energy (which is none other than our attention). On the other hand, if we have labelled the words as good or bad, then we will never allow those thoughts to express themselves as a spontaneous flow of words. This labelling and classification of words immediately puts us in the state of either indulging or fighting them, which in turn creates pleasure or pain. This is what is called reaction. This reaction will certainly lose its hold if we revert to the effortless meditative state.

Now you may say that it is impossible not to label words, therefore, this so-called Effortless Meditation is impossible. Though it is true that we are trained to label words since birth, once you start experimenting with this meditation, there will be many moments of peace despite the variety of words. Soon the clarity grows that words are not the factors which create mischief and their power to disturb will start to diminish. That in turn will lessen the tendency to react and stop the impersonal word-flow. The day will come when you will discover that you don't resist any loaded words at all, however dangerous or terrible they may at first appear.

You have started to enter into pure Effortless Meditation where there is no more resistance. ▲



Fame Versus Sadhana

Remembering Kunju Swami

V. V. RAGHAV

It was many years ago that I first embraced the spiritual life. Interested in what they could teach me of the meaning of life and beyond, I began to frequent various ashrams. This despite giving free reign to old vasanas — I thought people lived in ashrams to escape responsibilities in the world and were therefore prone to be anti-social and aloof from normal activities. By the Lord's grace however, I was prompted to frequent Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai and here I met Kunjuswami and, purchasing his *Reminiscences* in the ashram bookshop, I began to spend time with this swami. I was taken aback at how simple he was. Though he was in his eighties, he was completely unattended and I was able to talk freely with him, unlike with the senior swamis in other institutions.

In the *Reminiscences*, there were two chapters, which particularly caught my attention, 'Ambition to Learn Vedanta' and 'If One Remains Oneself, Everything Will Be Known'. These chapters were

autobiographical accounts that raised some questions in my mind. For instance, there was one story from the time of Sri Bhagavan, which concerned a trip Kunjuswami had made to Peraiyur to attend a temple *kumbabishekam*. While there, he had answered questions on philosophical matters concerning Vedantic teaching from an assembly of sadhus. It dawned on him during the meeting that if he was going to make a habit of fielding such questions, he had a responsibility to study Vedantic texts. Therefore, he made an agreement on the same day with a math swami at Peraiyur that he would regularly come back to the math and study with him. The narration continues:

After telling my friend that I would come to study with him as soon as I could, I returned to Sri Ramanasramam.

A few days after my return to the Ashram, I told Sri Bhagavan about the events that had taken place in Peraiyur.

I concluded: “When people from other maths who have studied Vedanta find out that I have come from Sri Ramanasramam, they start asking me philosophical questions. I feel that if I do not give fitting answers to their questions, it will reflect badly on our Ashram. Because of this, I asked Sri Krishnananda of Tirukhalar to give me lessons on Vedanta and he told me to come to Tirukhalar. He has agreed to teach me such lessons on Vedanta, and to complete them as early as possible. I am now considering going to Tirukhalar to learn Vedanta.”

Sri Bhagavan responded with a mocking smile, “Now you are going to study Vedanta, then it will be *Siddhanta*, then Sanskrit, and then polemics.”

He kept adding more and more subjects and I stood before him dumbfounded.

Seeing my depressed look Sri Bhagavan added, “It is enough if you study the One”.

Seeing that his answer had puzzled me, he added, with some compassion, “If you learn to remain within your Self as the Self that will amount to learning everything. What Vedanta lessons did I take? If you remain as the Self, the echo from the Heart

will be from experience. It will be in agreement with the scriptures. This is what is called ‘the divine voice’.”

On hearing Sri Bhagavan’s words, the desire to learn Vedanta in order to answer the questions of others left me for good. From that day onwards, if someone asked me questions relating to Vedanta, I was able through Sri Bhagavan’s grace, to find an appropriate answer from within.¹

The last sentence of this account was too big a pill for me to swallow. *In this he is surely bluffing*, I thought, as my old vasanas voiced their prejudices about maths and sadhus.

In the course of time, Sri Kunjuswami smoothly taught me the entire *Collected Works of Sri Bhagavan*. I had previously argued with another sadhu elsewhere, that in spite of my sincere efforts to understand Sri Bhagavan’s works, their language and deeper meaning eluded me. He finally sent me away telling me that Bhagavan would have to shower his grace on me.

As Kunjuswami had lived with Sri Bhagavan from the early 1920’s, I knew I was blessed to be in his *satsang*.

Thanks to the (Hindu) tradition taught me by my parents — that elders are to be respected — I took it upon myself to serve Sri Kunjuswami in a small way during my visits. I was regularly provided accommodation adjacent to his room in Major Chadwick’s cottage. During his talks with devotees, he often experienced dryness in the throat and I used to give him water and sugar candy to quench his thirst. I was blessed in return that he taught me to chant the Malayalam works of Sri Bhagavan such as *Upadesa Saram*, *Sat Dharsan* and *Gita Saram*.

One day he casually mentioned that a group would be visiting that evening after 9:30. He added, “Why they should come at that night hour, I don’t know. Anyway let them do what they want.”

The group centred on a respected devotee who happened to be the leading music director for the Chennai movie industry. He had

¹ From *The Power of the Presence*, Part Two. David Godman. p. 70-71.

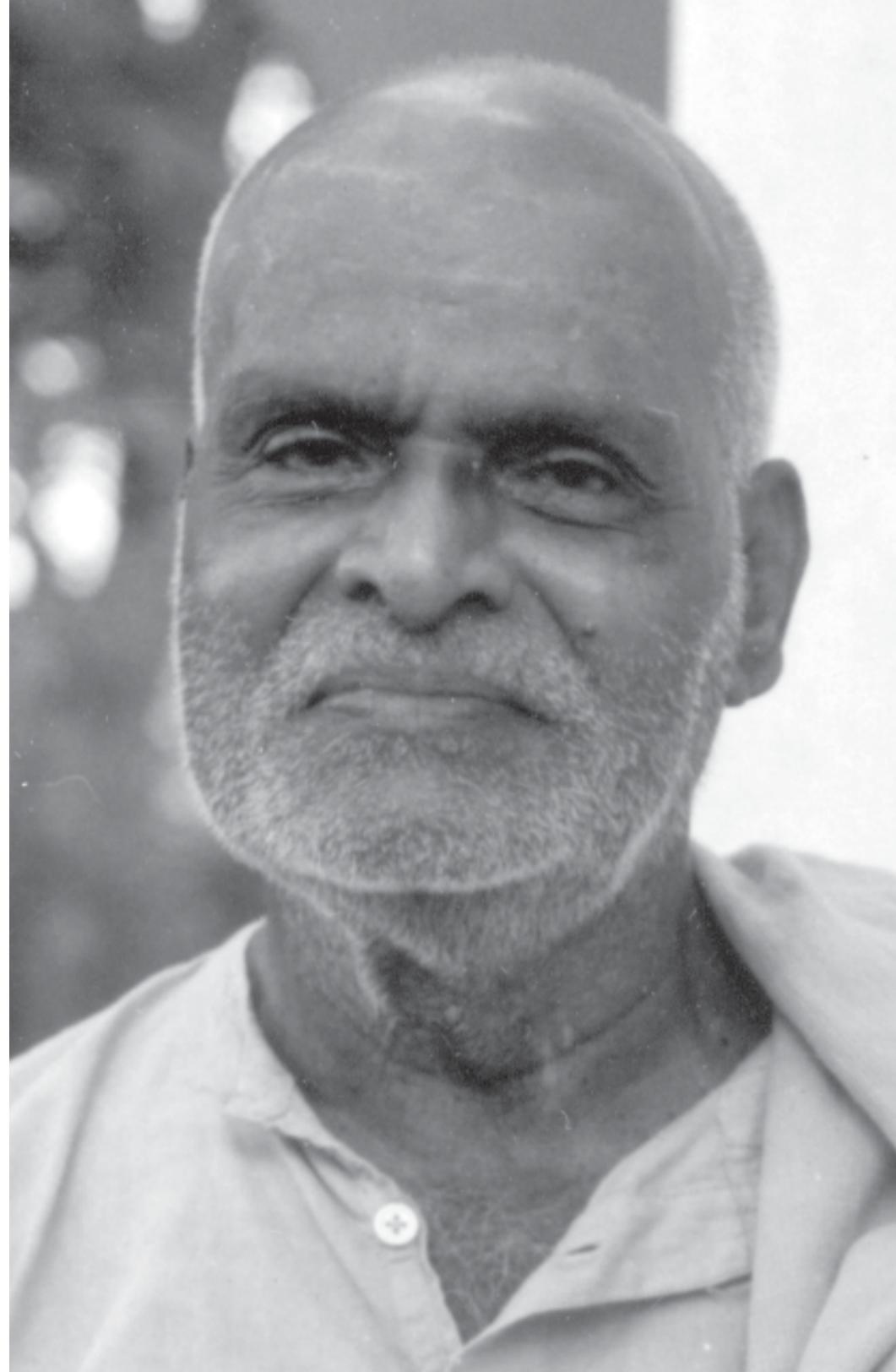
regularly visited the Ashram and Sri Kunjuswami for over a decade, and remains an ardent devotee of Bhagavan today. He said he would be bringing some guests but there was no mention about who the guests might be.

That evening after the appointed time had passed, I gave Kunjuswami his usual medicines and we both went to bed in our respective rooms. Around 11 p.m. I awoke to some bustle outside. When I opened my door, I saw some of the ashram authorities and the Chennai music director as well as a very well known film actor and his wife. They then entered Sri Kunjuswami's room and, naturally curious to hear what would ensue, I sat outside my room with ears pricked. The music director requested Kunjuswami to say something to the celebrity actor who was there for the first time. Kunjuswami, at this time already around 90 years old had been asleep at this late hour, but he began at once to lucidly tell the story of Mother Parvati's coming to Arunachala.

“To purify herself of sin, Mother Parvati requested Lord Siva to indicate the most auspicious place for her to carry out her *tapas*. The Lord suggested Kasi and she went there immediately. At the time, the local king in Kasi had opened choultries and was feeding the poor. Inevitably, out of her abundant motherly compassion, Tapasvini Parvati suspended her penance and joined in, feeding thousands of people each day. Eventually she acquired the name ‘Annapoorani’ and later, when the king and people found out who she was, thousands poured in to pay respects to her, thus inadvertently interrupting her penance. Recalling her original reason for coming to Earth, Mother Parvati prayed to Lord Siva to recommend an alternate site for her *tapas* for she had become ‘too famous’ in Kasi to continue her *tapasya* there.”

At this point, the listeners gathered in Kunjuswami's room engaged in a hearty laugh, saying, “How true, Swami! Instead of visiting you during the daytime, we had to disturb you in the dead of night for the same reason you have mentioned.” Kunjuswami responded, “Yes, name and fame are hindrances to *tapasya*.”

By this time I could sense Kunjuswami's mouth was getting dry and in need of the usual water and sugar candies. However, being a



visitor, I was hesitant to barge in. So I meekly awaited the famous visitor's departure. Then I went in, gave the required water and sugar candy, and took the opportunity to ask Kunjuswami, if he knew who the special guest had been. He said, "I don't know. Somebody came and asked me to say something, so I did". Imagine that, I thought. He said, "Something to somebody!" What humble words for these two famous film people.

Over the years, I had served as a translator for non-Tamilian devotees and had therefore heard Kunjuswami explain *Arunachala Purana* a number of times. However, on no previous occasion had he ever given the reason (becoming "too famous") for Mother Parvati's change of location. Neither in *Arunachala Mahatmyam* (Sanskrit) nor *Arunachala Puranam* (Tamil) is there mention of this detail. How did it then occur to this elderly devotee of Bhagavan to use such a suitable interpretation for that particular occasion? Did it not prove Sri Bhagavan's words: "If you learn to remain within your Self as the Self that will amount to learning everything." It did indeed prove Sri Kunjuswami's prophetic words from *Reminiscences*, "By Sri Bhagavan's grace, I get the required knowledge as and when the occasion arises." An assertion I had previously doubted. ▲

KEYWORD

Anubhava

Sanskrit.

Anu: that which follows; a consequence.

Bhava: an occurrence, event, happening.

Anubhava: Direct personal experience, following one's effort; immediate recognition of one's ultimate reality, arising from self-enquiry.

There are innumerable types of knowledge but for those who seek to understand who they are, the true nature of one's own reality, there is just one mode of knowledge which is of value and that is the immediate and undisputable realization that one's own consciousness (*pratyag atman*) is identical in essence with *Brahman*, the universal principle. This immediate knowledge is the result of direct and undiluted experience. This 'imploding' experience takes place in the field of the pure mind (*shuddha antahkarana*). It is the result of exercising a very subtle intellect in self-enquiry (*atma vichara*).¹ This intuitive experience is called *atma sakshatkara* or *aparoksha anubhuti* (a direct experience which reveals new and final knowledge — *anubhava janyam vignanam*).²

¹ *Katha Upanisad* 1.3.12.

² Bhagavan translated a text from the *Agamas* entitled *Atma Sakshatkara* which explains the importance of this direct, personal and comprehensive knowledge. See *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp.159-169. Sri Ramanasramam, 2001.

This unique type of experience (*atmanubhava*) cannot be split into the ubiquitous triad of experiencer-subject, experienced-object and the act of experience, which is normally present in every experience of the world. *Anubhava* is all one of a piece. It is simultaneous, homogenous and unmistakably certain. It does not require confirmation from a source other than one's own experience. That is, it is self-referential and is not dependent for validation from anything other than the experience itself. This experience of pure consciousness reveals it to be one's sole reality (*upadhi rahita chaitanyam*).

It is unique because the terms 'experience', 'knowledge' and 'consciousness' coalesce and become synonymous, erasing all differentiation. In Vedantic parlance, *chaitanyam*, *bodham*, *anubhavam*, *svrupam*, *aham* all point to the same thing. The experience erases the I-thought, this knower (*pramata*) and resolves the known (*prameya jagat*) into itself. We see a striking parallel in the novel *Alice in Wonderland*, a brilliant metaphysical allegory. The Cheshire cat slowly does a vanishing trick, leaving behind only its grin! Similarly, the *anubhava* of *aham sphurana* (the exhilarating ever-fresh sense of pure awareness) burns up the I-am-the-body-feeling (*dehatma buddhi*) without leaving any residue. It is eventually replaced by *achala sthithi*, 'full of peace that passeth understanding'.

We all have had rare glimpses of a higher reality where we see and understand there is more than the present bodily reality with which we are identified. The aim of Advaita is to permanently realize this experience and not succumb to the temptation of the false identification with the limited bodily consciousness.

Mula avidya (causal ignorance) can only be removed by immediate knowledge. Verbal or written testimony is a catalyst but not the answer because all relative knowledge is dependent on the triad of listener, the knowledge to be transmuted and the act of transmission. All such knowledge is limited, inter-related and mediate. It is dependent on thought (*vrutti rupakam*). If we are to believe the traditional scriptures and the sages down through the ages, we need to understand that we should prepare ourselves for this *anubhava* by meditation (*bhavana*) which can help transmute the limited, mediate knowledge gained from

verbal or written testimony into immediate insight (*anubhava*). Bhagavan gives us guidance which propels us beyond the plane of conceptual thinking into the plane of pure awareness (*sat bhava*)³, untouched by thought modifications (*vrittis*).

We read and listen to the scriptures such as the Upanisads and the teachings of Bhagavan in the trust that they will open our eyes to this inner experience. It is necessary to have faith in these teachings and to follow their directions.⁴ These teachings take us along the royal highway of reason (*yukti*) but where they transcend (and *not* contradict) reason, we must rely on our faith to accept and follow their advice. The ultimate experience cannot be reasoned or thought out. It is the reward of our faith and perseverance. The scriptures are valid only because they can guide one to self-realization.

Anubhava is the culmination of hearing the truth (*shravana*) and reflecting upon it (*manana*). It is the final goal of all the investigations by traditional scriptures into the true nature of reality. For one who has faith, understood and practised the necessary disciplines, the final integral experience frees one from all dependency on external authority for confirmation. We see in the rare case of Bhagavan that he became self-realized without the necessity of going through all the preliminaries. His realization was independent of the influence of external authority. In fact, he did not learn about the ancient quest for self-knowledge until he came to Tiruvannamalai and read the scriptures such as *Vivekachudamani*. His *anubhava* confirmed and revitalized all the scriptural revelations.

Can we describe the mechanism of *anubhava*? There are many descriptions of the actual experience but that is all they are: flat descriptions. At best, they glitter like imitation jewellery, at worst, they are a counterfeit currency because they can be misleading and result in delusory expectations.

Anubhava is too sublime to be captured in words. Can lightning ever be trapped in a bottle? As we have now understood, *anubhava* is

³ *Upadesa Sarah*, v.9.

⁴ *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch.4, v.39.

a term to indicate the unique immediacy of recognition of one's own reality. It is transformative and unalterable. Even if it is only a momentary glimpse, once it occurs a person is never the same. The experience is dynamic and far reaching in its effects.

With *anubhava*, the scriptural revelations acquire a higher dimension and come alive with new meaning. The taste of *anubhava* will irreversibly draw the seeker inward. It is a moment of great elation. If we are not fully mature, however, in the aftermath, there is a despondency because one understands that nothing else can compare with this feeling of total aliveness. We are no longer satisfied with words⁵ or physical satisfactions but yearn to be absorbed in the perpetual experience of it, *sahaja nishta*. One's primal identity is released from the link to the physical and mental bodies and an experiential clarity is born. *The direct knowledge that one is not the body is itself the clue.*

The everyday mind is not present at that moment of *anubhava* and hence is incapable of understanding the revolutionary nature of the experience.⁶ This unique gesture of consciousness is without foundation in the mind and has no place of origin in thought. Even though the possibility of *anubhava* is very much present and ever available, we cannot find it in any direction which our mind searches. It is not an entity which has a name or form. It happens in the now and is not dependent on cause and effect for its appearance, barring Grace. Nor can it be dismissed as a phantasmagoria when in the eternal quest right down the ages, there are those who have been absorbed in its radiance and lived to tell the tale.

“There is no greater mystery than this, *viz.*, ourselves being the Reality we seek to gain reality. We think that there is something hiding our Reality and that it must be destroyed before the Reality is gained. It is ridiculous. A day will dawn when you will yourself laugh at your past efforts. That which will be on the day you laugh is also here and now.”⁷ ▲

⁵ *Amrita Bindu Upanishad*, v.18.

⁶ *Ulladu Narpadu*, v.31.

⁷ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 146.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sharma's
Commentary

Verse Twelve

S. RAM MOHAN

12. True knowledge is that state in which there is neither knowledge nor ignorance. Knowledge of outside objects is only ignorance. How can it be knowledge? Because the Real Self shines as the sole Reality, without any other to know It, or to be known by It, that Self is right knowledge; it is not a void.

Commentary

The teaching that only the experience of the real Self is true knowledge and all else is ignorance has been clearly stated already in the concluding part of verse ten, the first of this series of four. The repetition of it here is for the purpose of confirming the importance of this insight. The substance of this teaching is that this dyad of knowledge and ignorance subsists only in this samsara, and are subject to the rule of the usurper, the ego. It is not so in the supreme state

where pure consciousness reigns, untainted by ignorance. In pure consciousness there are neither dyads nor triads. That is, there is no multiplicity or the consequent duality. The knowledge which is variegated is knowledge affected by the mind and is mixed with ignorance. That all this tainted and variegated knowledge is ignorance is stressed by the words, 'the knowledge of outside objects is only ignorance'.

Some, especially the Shaktas, pose the doubt: 'Let only ignorance be lost in the transcendental State. Why should knowledge also be lost?' What these thinkers describe as 'knowledge' has been declared by Bhavagan to be ignorance. The reason for the loss of both these categories of ignorance in that transcendental state is the perfect aloneness of the Self, and is known in the Vedantas as *kaivalya*, the state of non-duality. This reason is set forth by the Bhagavan in the later part of the verse, who says in that state, aside from the Self, there is neither anyone to know It, nor something for It to know. That transcendental self has no knowledge because in *kaivalya*, there is no object for *It* to know. Nor is there knowledge on the part of a knower to know It. The individual soul that started on the quest to know It has ceased to exist when the quest is fulfilled. Therefore in that state there is no triad: no knower, nor knowable object nor knowing.

Thus, in the transcendental Self there is neither a knower, nor a thing known. This meaning has been conveyed by the second sentence of the first benedictory verse. How then does the real Self shine? The answer is: It shines by virtue of Its own true nature as Consciousness, for Consciousness is self-shining. What this means is that the Self is not an inert, unconscious thing. It is not like the mind which is dependent on form to be aware of its own existence. It is not ignorance because it is not an inert, insentient thing. Thus the real Self is free from the two-fold defect of creation: the utter unconsciousness of inert things of the world and the relative unconsciousness of the mind, which is not conscious by its own right. However subtle thoughts may be, they are inert and dependent upon Consciousness for their existence.

This is the Vedantic teaching that the Self is not simply 'conscious', but is identical with Consciousness, so that that Consciousness will



never depart from It, as happens when the mind falls asleep and there is seemingly nothing when Consciousness is *identified* with the body-mind. That supreme Consciousness is the reality, the Brahman is *Prajnanam Brahma* (Consciousness is Brahman).¹

Consciousness-Reality alone exists, and the illusory world-appearance, of which It is the substratum, is lost. Those, that cannot, or will not know this truth, will say that this real Self is no better than nothingness, a void (*sunyata*). So that we may not become perplexed and confused by the meaningless, incoherent babblings of these Sunyavadis, Bhagavan in this verse emphatically denies this nothingness. He says, 'It is not a void'. How can *That* be a void, by which all this appears as existing, and by whose light of Consciousness all this shines?

Bhagavan posits that Self is not void because some believe that if the objects are denied reality, the Self itself should become a void. It is not so. Advaita states that while everything else may be denied, the self can not be denied. While the particular contents of awareness may be unreal or non-existent, the awareness itself can not be denied, because the Self itself is awareness. Saint Arunagirinathar in his *Kandar Anubhuti* mentions the same idea that the Self alone is the knower and it is not possible to physically communicate this experience to a second person. Thus, the Self is referred to as *sudha cinmatram* (pure unconditioned awareness) by Tayumanavar.

Those that look upon this transcendental Self as a nothingness usually believe that what is desirable and worthy of being striven for is the enjoyment of a variety of pleasures in those worlds called heavens. These people do not know the truth about pleasure and happiness. In the heavens there are enjoyments which are unequal, have other defects because they are subject to the triads. The peace of contentment, the essence of true and lasting happiness, is not to be had there. Where there is no contentment there is no real happiness. In the experience of the Self there is infinite contentment; and there are none of the defects that detract from the heavenly

¹ *Aitareya Upanishad*. III.1.3.

pleasures. The happiness of absorption in the Self is endless, whereas those that go to heaven must return to the earth after their virtue (*punya*) is exhausted, however long a time it may be.

Now will it be easy to understand the true significance of the expression 'Knowledge of the Self'? In the English rendering this expression is grossly inaccurate and misleading as it does not express the intended meaning. The expression in Sanskrit is more appropriate in this context. This is *atma-jnanam*, which can be interpreted according to the grammar of that language, in two ways: as 'knowledge of the Self as an object of knowledge' or 'knowledge which is itself the Self'. If the former meaning is considered for acceptance, it will imply that there is someone present in that State, other than the Self, to know the Self. Is this other the Self, or a non-Self? It cannot be the Self because there are no two Selves. It cannot be non-Self because there is no one else there. There is only the Self. So the second meaning, which is in harmony with the teaching of Advaita, is the right one. And it agrees perfectly with Bhagavan's teaching. What is loosely styled as 'Knowledge of the Self' is not any knowing at all, but only 'Being the Self'. This is reinforced in verses 23 and 33 of *Upadesa Saram*.

Let us briefly encapsulate what Bhagavan has said: objective knowledge cannot be true knowledge. Since the Self shines without there being anything else to know or to be known, *it itself* is knowledge; it is not nullity. True knowledge is not dependent upon a relative variable for its existence, that is, it cannot be qualified by anything other than itself. Thus, it should be 'self-luminous', it shines of its own accord.²

² "In the words of Anandabodha, the Self is self-luminous because it is not and can not be manifested by anything else. Men recede from objects that are hurtful and approach those that are helpful. The knowledge that a particular object is either helpful or hurtful is dependent on its determinant viz. the luminosity of the Self because it is a determinate light. And the luminosity of the Self is dependent on nothing else because while manifesting everything it is not manifested by any other thing." *Ramana Maharshi and His Philosophy of Existence* by Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, p.58, Sri Ramanasramam, 1999. See also his *The Philosophy of Advaita*, p.136, Ganesh & Co., Madras, 1957.



Remembering Sri Muruganar

T. R. KANAKAMMAL

In the ashram's early days, Nayana¹ used to give initiation on full moon days. Though a number of Bhagavan's devotees had taken initiation from him, Muruganar never did. One day prior to *poornami*, a senior devotee eager that Muruganar should also undertake initiation, devised a plan to persuade him to do so the following day. Approaching the poet, he began by casually saying, "Dear Sir, Bhagavan Ramana is *Surya*, the Sun, bright and effulgent, and in no way graspable. The Sun of Wisdom will burn his devotee up even at a slight touch." He then paused, and holding Muruganar's attention, continued, "Nayana, on the other hand, is the moon, a medium reflecting coolly and soothingly the Sun's luminous and otherwise overbearing brightness." After pausing again, smiling, he continued, "Is it not wiser to come to the brightness of the Sun through the mediation of the moon?"

¹Kavya Kanta Ganapathi Muni.

Muruganar sat quietly listening to the devotee's efforts at persuasion, not attempting to oppose him. However, when the latter paused once more, he interrupted quietly, "Let me bask in whatever the Sun of Wisdom chooses to bestow on me. Whatever Bhagavan gives directly, will more than suffice. Why go for reflected warmth when the Sun Himself chooses to provide me with what He deems best."

Divine Chastity

In 1950, Swami Rajeswarananda, a former monk of the Ramakrishna Order and editor of the *Call Divine*, invited Muruganar for a *pradakshina* of the Hill. Swami Rajeswarananda, a Kanouji Brahmin, was tall and hefty, of light complexion, and of a genial temperament, who, having lost the use of one leg in his youth due to polio, walked with the help of an assistant named Prabhu. While at the Ramakrishna Math in Madras, he picked up Tamil and learned to speak with sufficient fluency. He had no reservation about paying his respects to all mahatmas and men of spiritual eminence and repute.

In those days, along the *pradakshina* route there was a Swami called Kattu Siva, also known to some as Amavasya Swami, whose small ashram was about a kilometre inside from the *pradakshina* road where it turned off from the main Bangalore road. He lived in a cave and for many years came out only on *amavasya* days.

Since Swami Rajeswarananda was handicapped and could not cover the distance alone, it was necessary for him to do *pradakshina* by car. Muruganar accepted his invitation to accompany him and so off they went. When they got to the first turn, noticing the car was turning away from the *pradakshina* road, Muruganar asked, "Where are we going?"

Swami indicated the direction of the ashram of Kattu Siva Swami whom he wanted to visit on the way. At once, Muruganar expressed his unwillingness at this change of plan. Even after various appeals from Swami Rajeswarananda, Muruganar remained steadfast saying, "You go have *darshan*. I'll wait in the car."

But Swami Rajeswarananda however insisted they go together. As the driver, Prabhu, was about to drive on to the small ashram,

Muruganar said, "If you stop, I can simply get out and go my way. Otherwise I will have to jump!" Swami Rajeswarananda finally realized there was no persuading him and had his assistant turn around and retrace the distance back to the *pradakshina* route. None went for Kattu Siva's *darshan*.

A woman would be considered unchaste thinking of a man other than her husband. For Muruganar, to have the *darshan* of any guru or deity other than Bhagavan would, in his mind, be divine infidelity. He would say, "After beholding *Jnana Banu* ('the Sun of Wisdom'), my eyes have been blinded and can behold none other than him."

Seat Reservations in the Darshan Hall

In the *darshan* hall, people would often come with the idea of reserving their seats up at the front near Bhagavan. Sometimes though, such choice seats would be reserved for VIP's and dignitaries who attended *darshan*. This situation didn't concern Muruganar for he typically sat in some inconspicuous location at the back of the throng of devotees. He would sit quietly with his eyes fixed on Bhagavan and his mouth agape in the wonder of beholding his Master. At times Bhagavan would be going through letters or proof-reading some text and would look out and around the hall in search of Muruganar to confer with him concerning some Tamil textual matter. A devotee observing that Bhagavan often needed to consult with Muruganar, asked Muruganar why he didn't sit up front where he'd be conveniently situated for Bhagavan. Bhagavan came to Muruganar's rescue saying, "What to do? All the places up front get reserved in advance!"

Details and Consistency

Devaraja Mudaliar once took Sri Muruganar to task concerning scenes the poet depicted metaphorically in his verses. These could include comments Bhagavan had made to him or things they did together. He inquired naively, "When did all these things happen?"

Muruganar was taken aback and responded, "By simply looking into Bhagavan's eyes *so* many things happen! Is it necessary for Bhagavan to convey such things with spoken words? Will not Bhagavan's mere gaze do?" ▲



Bhagavan and Muruganar ca. 1949

The Beloved Son: Sri Muruganar

MONIKA ALDER

Because we think we are the body
We imagine that Heaven exists
Somewhere afar. The pure, bright world
Of Siva is not a place to go to.
Nowhere but in your heart alone
It is.¹

Though I had come from a Christian background and often heard the Biblical verse: 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' (Luke, 17, 21), still I had to come to India in order to experience the truth behind these words. Muruganar's poetry was the golden path that led me to the realization of this basic truth and his unconditional love and surrender to Ramana became the teaching that helped me find my own way to the Guru. Accepted as a devotee, Bhagavan granted me the greatest bliss of my life. I understood why I was born, what path I

¹ *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, Muruganar. v.197, p.37. 1996.

am now walking on and most importantly that I am cared for and loved. Ramana became the light on my path and shone in my heart.

What does one gain, you well may ask,
By giving up the wealth immense
Of worldly pleasure and seeking only
Mere Awareness?
The benefit of true Awareness
Is the unbroken prevalence
Of peace within the heart, the bliss
Of one's own natural being.²

I had the good fortune to be present once at the anniversary celebration of Muruganar's samadhi at Ramanasramam. In the following article I would like to honour and remember this great poet and unique devotee of Sri Bhagavan.

Muruganar stands before us as the shining example of single-minded love and devotion towards the Guru who granted him the realization of the True Self. After being blessed by the glance of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Muruganar surrendered himself completely to Him and the eternal peace of abiding in the Self stayed with him for ever. On his anniversary there is a celebration of his release from his physical form (*samadhi*) at his shrine adjacent to holy Arunachala. Devotees gather to remember this great poet devotee. We experienced the serene atmosphere under the umbrella of neem trees that cast a cool shade. Among those in attendance, many of whom had met Muruganar, there were two guests who sang with crystal clear voices during the puja a song of praise for Ramana's beloved Muruganar. The voice of the two little birds reminded us of the beauty of Sri Muruganar's poetry and the simplicity and purity of his personality.

One-pointed, simple, pure — these are adjectives that are not so common in our modern life. Those for whom these words awaken glimpses of the long forgotten truth are fortunate and can listen to the

² *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, Muruganar. v.77, p.15. 1996.

eternal message that comes through the pure channel of Muruganar. Like an innocent child, whose mind is as unpolluted as a sheet of white paper, he absorbed the wisdom of Ramana. And this is in addition to his endless love and devotion towards his adored Master. He radiated the light like a prism that turned into the wonderful colours of his poetry. In Tamil culture and spirituality there is a close and continuous connection between poetry and sacredness.

If we take the time to go through his thousands of verses, we will not only have a full outline of Sri Bhagavan's teaching, but we will gain strength and inspiration from this unrivaled poet-devotee who lived his life for Ramana, in Ramana and through Ramana.³

If towards the Lord you take
One single step, then with much more
Than a mother's love He takes
Nine steps towards you to accept you.
Such is the Guru's grace.⁴

The above verse describes the tenderness of the relationship between Ramana and Muruganar. Already at their first meeting in 1923 Bhagavan's grace overwhelmed him so strongly that he was unable to read out the verses he wrote in praise of the Master. Seeing the man, struggling with tears in his eyes, Bhagavan took the piece of paper and read out the verses himself. Such is the Guru's grace!

From this very first moment Muruganar surrendered to the True Self that appeared to him in the form of his beloved Guru Ramana.

³ Muruganar composed over thirty thousand verses. *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (The Garland of the Guru's Sayings) represents a comprehensive collection of Ramana's teachings. *Sri Ramana Anubuti* (Sri Ramana Experience) expresses in hundreds of ways the experience of steady abidance in the Self and the sacred love towards the Guru. *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* (Homage to the Presence of Sri Ramana) is the third main work. Besides his own poetry he played an important role in fine-tuning *Upadesa Saram* (Instructions in Thirty Verses), *Ulladu Narpadu* (Forty Verses on Reality) and *Atma Vidya* (Self-Knowledge).

⁴ *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, Muruganar. v.965, p.185. 1996.

O dancer, who with lovely, red
Lips ever smiling, ever dwell
In devotees' hearts and on Aruna Hill,
Venkata, you graciously
Drew me to you and gave me comfort.
Of whom, but you, my Master, Father,
Can I think henceforth?⁵

Muruganar regularly visited Ramanasramam between 1923 and 1926. On these occasions he sometimes found it impossible to leave Ramana's presence and though he got as far as the railway station he walked up and down the platform of the railway station until his train had left. Then he walked back to the ashram and with a childlike expression on his face he explained that he was not able to board the train. Because this occurred regularly, Ramana would send an attendant along at the time of departure in order to watch Muruganar get into the train.

After his mother passed away in 1926 Muruganar gave up his work as a Tamil teacher and settled down in Tiruvannamalai. He lived the rest of his life at the feet of holy Arunachala as a sadhu.⁶

Sri Bhagavan once said: "He alone truly knows me, who knows me as I know myself."

Muruganar could be a pure channel of the sacred message of the Guru because Ramana granted him the realization of his true nature, the Self. Muruganar introduces *The Garland of the Guru's Sayings* as follows:

In the non-dual state, wherein
Abiding Ramana made me his,
Where he and I together shared
A common being, I learnt the Truth

Supreme, transcendent, which I hope
Here to expound a little.⁷

The incident happened in the forest, where Ramana took Muruganar to pluck leaves for leaf-plates.

There, with great delight, he destroyed my mind's restlessness by bestowing his glance upon me. In the middle of the night he subdued my divided individual consciousness, granting me the experience of the undivided reality.⁸

Muruganar wrote hundreds of verses describing this event, most of which were published in *Sri Ramana Anubuti* (Sri Ramana Experience).

The knot, which locked my spirit to my physical body was sundered by the bright sword of my Master's glance and was no more.⁹

In Muruganar's poetry one finds one-pointed devotion and love towards the adored Guru. Throughout his whole life he never stopped expressing the way of bhakti in his poems.

The nature of his grace, conferred through the bliss of divine silence, was such that it established in me an unshakable devotion, which I experienced as a deep love for my Lord, wherein my bondage was ended, and my mind dissolved in the limitless expanse of the supreme Self.¹⁰

Ramana stated bhakti and jnana are like the two wings of a bird. In the state of pure consciousness the way of love and the way of knowledge cross each other and become one. Muruganar explained this in the following verses:

⁵ *Ayal Ninaiya Pattu*, Muruganar. v.585.

⁶ In the first few years of his stay in Tiruvannamalai he lived in Palakothu, a sadhu colony near the ashram. Later he moved to Dr.T.N. Krishnaswami's house opposite Ramanasramam. In the last few years of his life he was an inmate of the ashram.

⁷ *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, Muruganar. v.6, p.2. 1996.

⁸ *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, Muruganar. Keerti Tiruvahaval.

⁹ *Sri Ramana Anubuti*, Muruganar. v.9, p.3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, v.123, p.25.

Transporting me into the realm of pure bliss, the vision of the authentic Self expanded within my heart and I attained the state of grace whose essence is love. Then, in the state of holy silence, bliss and love merged together into realization of the one true reality, which is the experience of Lord Siva.¹¹

When ego ends, then one becomes
A devotee true. When ego ends,
One becomes a knower too.
When ego ends, one becomes Being supreme.
When ego ends, grace fills all space.¹²

Muruganar was often called by others as the shadow of Ramana. He was lost to the world and with a child's love he followed his beloved Father like a shadow. He could listen to his Master or simply watch him for hours.¹³

Seeking sanctuary I took shelter at his feet, and he, through his silent presence, bade me henceforth fear no more. From that day on, through that authentic union in which he became indelibly established in my heart, my heart has been filled with a childlike happiness and profound joy.¹⁴

In Ramana's presence he was lost. Once they worked together in the kitchen and Ramana was telling stories about their life on the hill. Muruganar was so overwhelmed by the stories that he was not able to do any work. Ramana remarked: "Fine! Fine! The way you cut vegetables is no better than the way you managed your house!"¹⁵

¹¹ *Sri Ramana Anubuti*, Muruganar. v.48, p.11.

¹² *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, Muruganar. v.161, p.31. 1996.

¹³ After Ramana's samadhi many people recorded seeing Muruganar in front of the house in which he lived, looking at the holy Arunachala with open mouth for hours without taking notice of the outside world.

¹⁴ *Sri Ramana Anubuti*, Muruganar. v.85, p.18.

¹⁵ Ramana referred hereby to the fact, when Muruganar moved to Tiruvannamalai permanently he left his wife and neither her tears nor Ramana's attempts to reunite them could make him return to her. He lived as a sadhu for the rest of his life.

Muruganar replied with the following verse, which made his Master laugh from his heart.¹⁶

Why are you, O Ramana
A naked beggar crying out
For alms and roaming here and there?
Why not seek the company
Of a nice young lady and so start
Straightway a decent household life?"¹⁷

Even in old age, when he could not hold a pen any more, wonderful verses still flowed from Muruganar day by day. He never stopped remembering his Father; he could talk for hours to devotees about Ramana.

His memory is kept alive thanks to the loving care of the next generation of devotees, who keep singing, publishing, and teaching his poems. Keeping his memory alive means preserving and cherishing the memory of Sri Bhagavan Ramana, as:

The light of lights that shines within
The deep heart's core,
All in one and one in all
True seer in whom all truth is seen.¹⁸

Ramana and Muruganar — Father and Son with a special relationship: full of love, care, humour and devotion. Devotion to the one and only — the Self. Because nothing else matters.

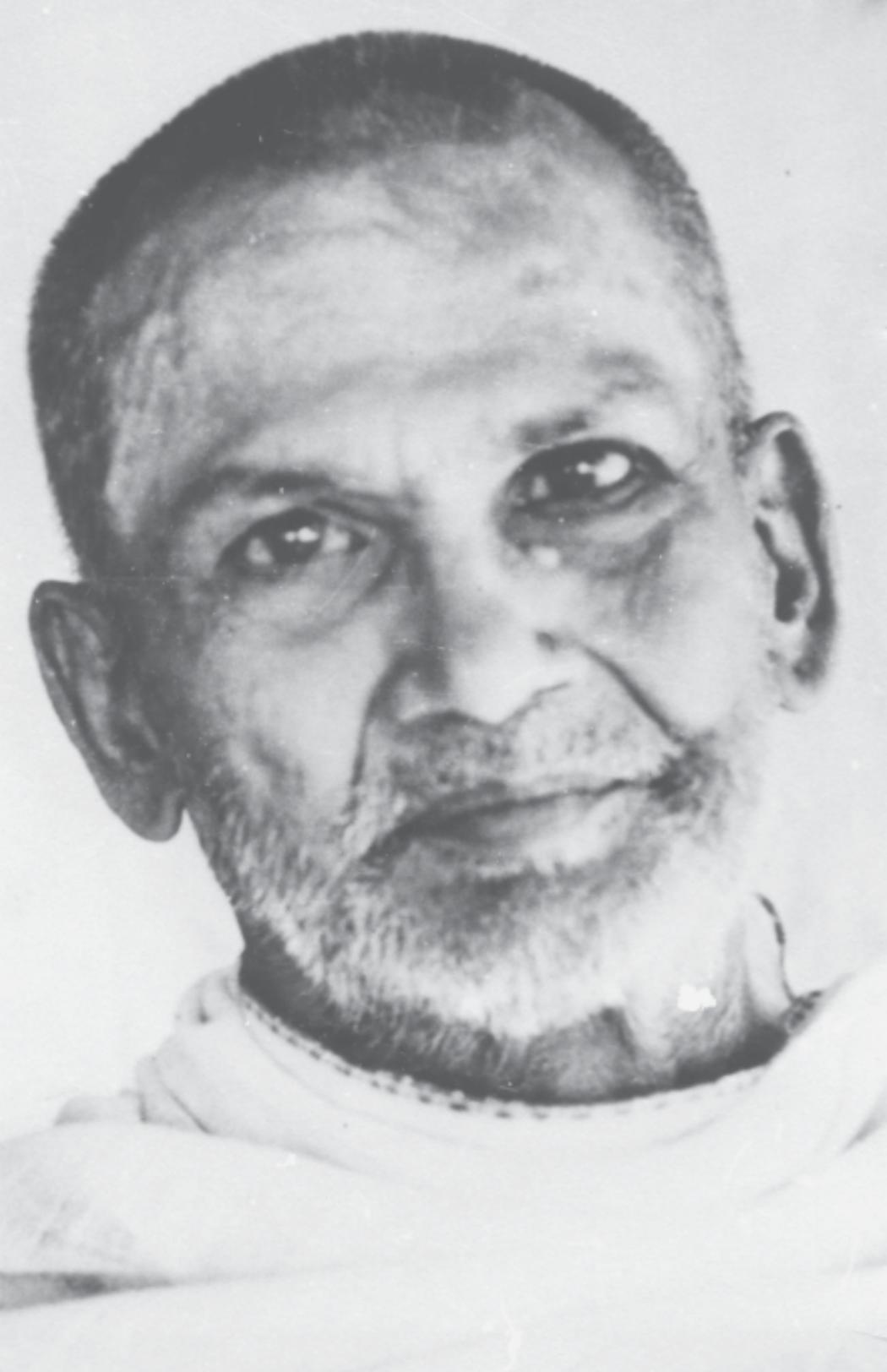
The moment I thought of your name, you caught and drew me to yourself. Who can know the greatness of your grace, Arunachala!¹⁹ ▲

¹⁶ *The Power of the Presence, Part Two*. David Godman. p.112-113.

¹⁷ *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, v.863.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, v.1, p.65.

¹⁹ *Marital Garland of Letters*, Sri Ramana Maharshi. v.70.



Sri Swami Muruganar

SWAMI RAMANANANDA

Sri Swami Muruganar is undoubtedly foremost among the known devotees of Sri Bhagavan. Studied from different aspects one acquires a high regard and admiration for him as he was the personification of simplicity, humility and unparalleled devotion. For him Sri Bhagavan was an all transcending, omnipotent, omnipresent state of universal being.

This humility is noticed particularly from his accepting whatever name by which he was addressed — Muruganar for example, or by some as simply Swami or Sir, it made no difference to him.

One day meeting him privately I asked if he would give me particularly a copy of what he considers as one of the best of the poems he has composed on Sri Bhagavan, so that I may repeat it as a mantra and prayer to Sri Bhagavan. For it would surely open up His grace to flow on me and make the mind one pointed and pure to further pursue the path of Self enquiry.

Swami just smiled, and then looking at me said the greatest prayer I can do to Sri Bhagavan is simply to repeat his name 'Om Sri Bhagavan'. He said that it is simple and straight and that this will take root in the Heart and the mind will be less driven by unwanted thoughts. Self-enquiry becomes easier with the study of Sri Bhagavan's teachings on the nature of Self-enquiry.

Here one sees that the poet in him induces no self pride in whatever he achieved through his poems. If one put the same request to a poet with pride, he would likely unroll the entire bundle of his product and suggest this or that poem as the best suited for the purpose. Thus our minds can get enmeshed in the repetition of many mantras which can lead nowhere to the experience of peace.

I was present on one occasion when another great writer of many Tamil books was collecting materials for a series of articles in a popular Tamil magazine about our sages and saints and in particular about the glory of Arunachala. That brought him to Sri Ramanasramam and after gathering from devotees their various experiences of Sri Bhagavan, at the end he came to Swami's room. The writer after making his request remained waiting along with many devotees in attendance. Swami, even after a long time gave no reply. The author made one more appeal just for a short statement to help him with his work. After another long wait, Swami said, "Sri Bhagavan"; that is all he uttered and tears rolled down his cheeks and he could say no more. For him Sri Bhagavan was an inner experience surpassing words. The author who was very much moved, took that very scene as an illustration of Sri Bhagavan's teachings and about the resultant humility of his devotees.

Swami never liked people praising him. If a visitor indulged in that beyond a few words he would withdraw politely from him and take a walk around Sri Bhagavan's shrine or the Ashram itself. So great and true was his self effacement in this regard. At the same time he could be found to be a man enjoying humour and the sound of his characteristic hearty laugh could be heard from far away when someone had narrated a humorous event or story. Sometimes people not even knowing Tamil, also joined in the laugh as Swami's laugh was so childlike and infectious!

His life and devotion to Sri Bhagavan was total. Just being with him, quietly watching him and meditating in his peaceful presence, one felt greatly uplifted and learned a lot as to what it really means to be a devotee of Sri Bhagavan. What a wonderful example!

He told me this when I expressed my doubts and all kinds of fears in me: "Have no fear or doubt; Sri Bhagavan who has called you to him, will always be with you. He would never abandon you to your old traits. Slowly and steadily, without fail, he would reveal himself as the Truth within you. All you need is to be patiently doing the sadhana with the best of your ability, without judging or evaluating the programme but with deep love and faith in Sri Bhagavan. In due course all will be well." This had a deep impact on me and what he said can be applied in general to most of the devotees in the initial stages.

He could be a tough person when it came to the serving of him in the way of giving medicines or coffee or any other small help rendered to him. Anything offered must be clean and executed then and there and no postponing to another time. Any expression of approval or displeasure on his part were equally subdued but quite effectively indicated. He used to say that deep attention to the proper carrying out of small tasks, develops the quality to do and face higher tasks be it in the world or in one's spiritual sadhana. This meticulous attention was noticed not only in this swami but in other elderly devotees of Sri Bhagavan such as Swami Viswanathan, Swami Natanananda, Sadhu Arunachala (Chadwick) among others. This quality has been handed down to almost all devotees of Sri Bhagavan by virtue of His own example.

Muruganar in whom was to be found all the best of the qualities, as an exemplary Sri Bhagavan devotee, was no doubt much appreciated and loved by Sri Bhagavan for he showered his benevolent grace consistently upon Swami who had surrendered fully to Sri Bhagavan.

In his poem *Padamalai* Swami asks, "Why are you worried and doubting your ability to pursue the sadhana? With unshakable faith in Sri Bhagavan just fully give yourself and all will be well for you forever!"

It means, gather together all your efforts and then give yourself to Him! ▲



Muruganar ca. 1935

Upadesa Tiruvahaval

Part One

SRI MURUGANAR

Sri Muruganar composed most of Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai, a work that praises Bhagavan in a series of long poems, in the late 1920s and early 1930s. 'Upadesa Tiruvahaval', the eighth poem of this sequence, is a single continuous verse of just under 200 lines in which Muruganar includes both the story of how he came to Bhagavan and many key teachings that Bhagavan gave him. 'Ahaval' is the Tamil metrical form in which the poem was written, so the title can be translated as 'The Holy Ahaval of Teachings'.

The translation and the annotations are the work of Robert Butler, T. V. Venkatasubramanian and David Godman. The line numbers of the original poem appear above the translation and editorial comments are in italics.

1-6

Nowhere upon this earth, composed of continents that the oceans surround, was there anyone possessed of such a dark and deadly understanding as mine. I took the first prize, not even knowing my [real] Self. My wicked mind was stuffed full of habits baser than those of an ignorant beast, and thus I remained.

7-15

A mahatma took birth to nurture and cultivate the dignity of man. He has earned deep respect by his adherence to the truth and brings joy to all humanity. It is as if divine love had manifested in human form. He lends strength equally to the motherland [in its search for freedom] and to the individual in his quest for liberation. Such is his greatness. Those who hear the fair name of Gandhi turn in his direction in transports of great joy, prostrate and worship him.

16-32

Under the leadership of this great and worthy soul, many, many good people suffered indescribable agony for the sake of the motherland. Yet, though I was aware of this, in my foolishness, I did not renounce all my comforts and volunteer to help their cause. I did not realise that, amongst all the many spiritual disciplines that are worthy of practice, truthfulness is that which most benefits the soul. I spoke contrary to the thoughts I harboured within my mind and thus frittered away my ordained life to no good end. I showed my love solely with words but never knew the joy of offering love through my deeds. I hoarded suffering as if it were wealth, piling it up in the boat [that is the body]. Then, as I lay drifting on the sorrowful ocean of bitter birth, you [Bhagavan] drew me to you and bound me to your golden feet with the rope of divine grace whose nature is to bestow itself entirely without desire or intention. You watched over me, banishing my slumbers in the differentiated world brought about by *maya*.

As these introductory lines indicate, prior to coming to Bhagavan, Muruganar was an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi. In the first poem that Muruganar presented to Bhagavan, composed on his way to Ramanasramam in 1923, he even asked why Bhagavan was not working for the country in the way that Gandhi was. Though his respect for Gandhi continued, once Muruganar came to Bhagavan, he took a vow that he would only write about Bhagavan and his teachings.

33-42

However many despicable and disgraceful things I did, you tolerated and forgave them all, consoling me with your love. Though my conduct was baser than that of a dog, you did not reject me with contempt but like an attentive mother you showed me love, and like a father you counselled me with terse and pithy teachings. Alas, is it possible for a fool such as I to grasp in his mind and accurately convey in words those teachings, one who, lacking discrimination, regards as permanent those things that are impermanent, and thus wanders in dread, like a ghost, amongst them?

43-48

My Lord, cur that I was, none of my entreaties went in vain as you composed at my request many verses in various metres, according to classical rules, with such ease, as if you were playing a game. Moreover, to fulfil my wish you also composed a song called *Atma Vidya Keerthanam* [*The Song of Self Knowledge*]. Praise be to you!

49-56

The company of *rishis* [in the Dharuka forest] had become blind, like owls in the daylight, in the presence of the non-dual sun of true knowledge. With their inner eye of grace obscured, they followed the path shown by the dark ego [declaring that there was no God other than karma]. It was then that you appeared before them, destroyed their arrogance, and taught them how to know reality. These instructions that you gave them then, you later reiterated to us your devotees in the form of a series of explanatory verses [*Upadesa Undiyar*]. Praise be to you!

57-62

Not stopping at that, when I further asked you, 'Please tell me how the bondage of birth and death may be severed for me, your devotee?', you gave to us the divine work *Ulladu Narpadu* that clearly reveals the means by which the bond of the false ego may be severed and reality shine as the Self.

63-66

'Desire itself is birth, and desire's extinction is liberation, where bliss supreme surges ever unabated!' Praise be to you who, as my Guru, came to rule my entire clan, and from whose mouth these words of grace flowered!

This is an idea that can be traced back to verse 361 of the Tirukkural, a work that Muruganar was particularly fond of: 'Desire, they say, is the seed that engenders unceasing birth to all jivas at all times.'

Muruganar himself expanded on this idea in lines 242-43 of 'Ramana Puranam', the first poem of Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai: '...desire became the seed that engendered the never-ending succession of births, bringing into existence the great and evil tree that is the illusion of birth [and death].'

67-68

Praise be to you who declared: 'Cling firmly to That which clings to nothing, so that a firm attachment [to That] ensues.'

This particular upadesa from Bhagavan was recorded in a more expanded form in Padamalai, p.78:

123 Hold onto the path of holding onto the one who has no attachments. By holding onto this path of holding on, you rid yourself of [those attachments] that hold you to the world.

124 By holding tightly to the one who has no attachments, your attachment to the non-Self will go away. When that [attachment to the non-Self] has gone, holding on tightly to the one who has no attachments will also cease, and all attachments will come to an end.

69-74

Praise be to you who merged me into consciousness' expanse with these golden words: 'Apart from you there is no world; those co-dependent entities, God and the *jiva*, both are not! Accordingly, you are yourself the undivided reality!'

Praise be to you who stated: 'The world, the *jiva* and God, whilst apparently existing, are simply thought forms, nothing more!'

Muruganar revised this poem after its first publication and the current version in the Tamil edition of Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai is not the final draft. In Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham, volume nine, p. 373, Muruganar wrote that lines seventy-five to ninety-eight of the published work should be replaced by the following lines. Since Muruganar asked that they be inserted at this point, we have numbered them 75a-101a to distinguish them from the lines that are printed in Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai.

75a-76a

'The place where *ullal* [thought] arises and subsides is *ullam* [the Heart].' Thus you gave out the meaning of *ullam*. Praise be to you!

These two lines and the lines that follow are an expansion on and an explanation of the first invocatory verse of Ulladu Narpadu. Since this verse is an extensive play on the Tamil syllable 'ul', which is the root form of a verb meaning 'to be', the original Tamil words that contain this syllable have been retained.

This is what Prof. K. Swaminathan wrote about this invocatory verse:

The first stanza, woven out of pure Tamil words, is an emphatic assertion of the oneness of being, awareness and the Heart. It dwells lovingly on the Tamil root ul common to being, thinking, heart and inner space, all associated with indivisible oneness and wholeness. The verb ul (to be) which admits of no past or future tense, is repeated eight times, the word ullam (the heart) thrice, ullu (to think) thrice, and unarvu (feeling) twice; thus the venba as a whole, through sound, suggestion and explicit statement, pulls the mind inward to the very heart of being-awareness.¹

¹ Ramana Maharshi, K. Swaminathan. p. 91.

77a-78a

You declared: ‘Since *ulladu* [reality] exists in *ullam* [the Heart] *ulladu* [reality] itself may be said to be *ullam* [the Heart].’ Praise be to you!

Ulladu, translated here as ‘reality’, is a combination of the syllables ‘ulla’ meaning ‘existing’ and ‘adu’ meaning ‘that’. A more literal translation would therefore be ‘that-which-exists’. Ulladu Narpadu (‘narpadu’ means ‘forty’) could therefore be literally translated as ‘Forty [on] That-which-exists’.

79a-80a

You also declared: ‘As the experience “*nam ullam*” [“we are”] exists [there], it can be termed *ullam* [the Heart].’

In addition to meaning ‘the Heart’, ullam is also the first person plural form of the verb ‘to be’ – ‘we are’. Muruganar has commented on this combination of meanings in an explanatory note he wrote on verse 966 of Guru Vachaka Kovai:

The one reality, Atma-swarupa, exists and shines in the Heart, one without a second. Appearing as if it is many, it shines as ‘I-I’ in every individual being, who seem to be many because of upadhis [limiting ideas and associations]. Therefore, the plural term ullam [meaning] ‘we are’ is appropriate. Because the Heart is the place for the existing and shining of the Atma-swarupa, in Tamil the Heart is known as ullam. The word ullam here gives both meanings simultaneously.²

Though, in modern Tamil, the ‘am’ suffix in ullam indicates the first person plural (‘we are’), in older Tamil ullam could also be taken to be the singular form, ‘am’ or ‘I am’. Thus ullam, serendipitously, can be taken to be both ‘I am’ and ‘the Heart’. Sadhu Om made this connection in his comment on verse 712 of Guru Vachaka Kovai: ‘Since the Tamil word “ullam”, which means “Heart”, also means “am” – the shining of the Reality, “I” – the Reality is called by the name “ullam”.’³

² Padamalai, p. 21.

³ Guru Vachaka Kovai, tr. Sadhu Om, p. 221.

81a-82a

You declared: ‘*Ullaporul* [that which exists], which gets the name ‘*ullam*’, is not a thought form.’ Praise be to you!

Here is a transliteration of the first benedictory verse, split into its component words, followed by an English translation. The ‘ul’ syllables have been highlighted in bold:

ulladu aladu **ulla** unarvu **ulladu** o
ullaporul **ullal** ara **ullatte** **ullataal** – **ullam** enum
ullaporul **ullal** evan **ullatte** **ullapadi**
ullade **ullal** unar

Could there be a being-consciousness existing apart from that which [eternally] is? Since that reality exists in the Heart, free of thought, who could meditate upon that reality, called the Heart? Know that to remain within the Heart, as it is, is truly to meditate [upon the Heart].

The ‘ul’ sounds listed here are pronounced with the tongue bent back, with the underside of its tip touching the top of the palate, not the back of the teeth. This gives the sound a strong nasal component. When the verse is chanted, the repeated nasal ‘ul’ sounds punctuate the verse as a leitmotiv, repeatedly emphasising its principal theme that being is both the fundamental nature of the Self and the means by which it can be experienced.

With its elegant play on the syllable ‘ul’ and its strict metrical form, the first invocatory verse is now widely regarded as being a literary tour de force. The following appreciative comments, recorded by Kunju Swami, come from a distinguished Tamil scholar:

Once, while going on a pilgrimage, I [Kunju Swami] visited various maths before ending up at Peraiyur Santhalinga Math. At that time Veerasubbia Swamigal was resting there because he was not well. When I went and had his darshan, he made kind enquiries about the welfare of Sri Bhagavan and the ashram in general. He also looked into the notebook I had with me. Seeing in it

the verses of Ulladu Narpadu written beautifully by Sri Bhagavan himself; he asked me to read them out to him. He appreciated the first benedictory verse so much, he asked me to read it three times.

*After the third reading he remarked, 'This is a very profound verse. Not only that, all the elegant features of prosody are in it. Until now I was under the impression that your swami was an adept only in "keeping still", but now I discover that he is also a superb writer of fine poetry. The venba is itself a difficult metre that few poets dare attempt. Bhagavan has composed all forty-two verses in this metre and used them to convey the most abstruse philosophical ideas. Crowning them all, though, is this first invocatory verse.'*⁴

83a-92a

You declared: 'Consciousness of reality and consciousness of the things around us do not exist apart from that reality.' Praise be to you!

'Therefore, the place where everything exists is the Heart.' This you declared. Praise be to you!

You declared: 'Since those who have [truly] seen see nothing other than their own Self, thinking [of something other than the Self] is inconsistent [with that state].' Praise be to you!

You declared: 'Unless one reaches the throne of the Heart, it is impossible to see the brilliant light of reality.' Praise be to you!

You declared, 'If one dives within and reaches the place of its arising, thought, which is of the nature of the individual self, will cease to be'. Praise be to you!

93a-100a

Therefore, individual selves, who have no other form than thought, can only imagine with the false mind the reality that is free from thought forms, but they cannot think of it as it really is. Just as reality dwells within the Heart, free from thought forms, when the individual self dwells, in the same way, within the Heart, free from thought forms, that is meditation on reality. Thus did you explain it to us. Praise be to you!



⁴ *The Power of the Presence*, Part One, David Godman, pp. 78-79.

Upasana

JONATHAN BADER

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

In the early Upanisads, upasana is the term most frequently employed to designate the process of meditation. Dhyana also occurs occasionally, but does not have the distinctive sense which it acquires in the later Upanisads, and, more especially in the *Yogasutra*. Derived from the verbal root *as*, 'to sit', upasana is literally 'sitting near'. Its particular significance is that of 'serving, honouring, worshipping'¹.

"Upasana means reaching by the mind the form of a deity or something else as delineated in scriptural passages relating to meditation,

¹ *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by M. Monier-Williams. By extension, 'expressing this attitude through meditation'. Sankara explains upasana on several occasions, but his most striking definition is found in *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad Bhasya* 1.3.9.

and concentrating the mind on it — uninterrupted by secular thoughts, until identity with that deity or thing is imagined in the same degree in which identity is (now) imagined (by us) with our body.”²

Sankara’s reference to the deity (*devata*) as an object of meditation shows that upasana involves an element of worship. This is further emphasised in *Brahmasutra Bhasya* 4.1.1: “Thus we say in ordinary life that a person ‘is devoted’ [*upaste*] to a teacher or king if he follows him with a mind set steadily on him.”³ Despite this analogy to ordinary experience, meditation is clearly not a secular practice. As Sankara indicates, the object of concentration is to be drawn exclusively from scripture.

The real aim of upasana is to effect a correspondence of subject (meditator) and object (of the meditation), ‘identity with that deity’. The notion of attaining identity and so reuniting the sacred and the mundane can be traced back to Vedic ritual sacrifice. The *Purusasukta*, for example, describes how creation results from the gods’ sacrificial offering of the primordial man. This divine sacrifice becomes the model for human behaviour, man’s creative undertakings are similarly to be initiated by means of sacrifice. In this way sacrifice is understood to be the very link between the gods and man. This correspondence between the divine and human realms is sought in order to satisfy man’s material needs as well as his deeper spiritual aspirations, for sacrifice is believed to provide prosperity and fecundity.

The Vedic rituals were transformed in such a way that sacrifice became the upasana of the Upanisads. In *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad Bhasya* 3.1.6, Sankara refers to an upasana which substitutes meditation for ritual action. He explains that meditation is a more effective means of obtaining the desired results. To begin with, any defect in the performance of the ritual, however minor, could

invalidate the whole procedure. He points to another problem in the substantial expenditure some of the sacrifices require. Few could afford the expense of the more elaborate rituals and are thus deprived of the boons they confer. There are perhaps other factors which contributed to the transformation of ritual. J. F. Staal suggests that ritual practice may have degenerated so that it could no longer effect the sacred identity.⁴ He argues that in the earliest Vedic sacrifice there was no distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ experience. The ritual process reflected the essential unity of what was later to be distinguished as body and mind. It was the development of self-consciousness which destroyed this unity and led to a gradual decline in the efficacy of the sacrifice. But meditation may have simply been an easier way.

The opening passages of the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* link ritual with upasana in the setting of a grand cosmic drama. The secret of creation is symbolically revealed as a great horse sacrifice (*asvamedha*). Prajapati, the creator, first appears on the scene as death, having devoured all that he had made manifest. Yet the creative urge arose in him anew. He made of himself the sacrificial offering. His body became gradually swollen (*asvat*) until there emerged a horse (*asva*). He then reflected upon the horse in the following manner:

“The head of the sacrificial horse is the dawn, its eye the sun, its vital force the air... Its back is heaven, its belly the sky, its hoof the earth, its sides the four quarters.”⁵

In the Upanisad, however, it is meditation alone which effects the sacred identity. Prajapati discovers the identity of the creator and his creation and so shows the way to immortality through meditation: “He who knows thus conquers further death. Death cannot overtake him, it becomes his self and he becomes one with these deities.”⁶

² Translated by M. Hiriyanna, ‘The Training of the Vedantin’, in *Popular Essays in Indian Philosophy*, p. 7. Mysore, 1952.

³ *The Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana with the commentary by Shankara*. tr. George Thibaut (2 vols.; reprinted, New York, 1962), vol.II, p. 332.

⁴ *Advaita and Neo-Platonism*. Madras, 1961, p. 70 ff.

⁵ *The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad with the Commentary of Sankaracarya*, tr. Swami Madhavananda (5th ed.; Mayavati, 1975), p. 6.

⁶ *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 1.2.7, in Madhavananda, op. cit., p. 25.

Throughout the Indian tradition there is clear expression of the belief that the realms of thought and matter are interrelated. It is said that mental activity, especially meditation, has the power to effect change on the physical plane. Sankara reinforces this notion with a maxim he cites on several occasions: “Howsoever one meditates on him, that indeed he becomes.”⁷ The idea is that as one attains identity with a particular object, one inherits or assumes those properties which characterise the object. The same concept underlies the notion of the sacred word.

The spoken word had a mysterious, supernatural power; it contained within itself the essence of the thing denoted. To “know the name of anything was to control the thing. The word means wisdom, knowledge; and knowledge ... was magic power.”⁸

Indeed the sacred word is often the basis of upasana in the Upanisads. Numerous illustrations are found in the *Chandogya Upanisad*, a veritable treasury of meditations, the second chapter of which is almost entirely devoted to a description of various upasanas developed from the chants of the *Sama Veda*. The upasanas comprise layer upon layer of identifications. Through this series of identifications, the meditator acquires the power inherent in the object of the meditation.

Sankara acknowledges the acquisition of power as one of three traditionally designated goals of upasana.⁹ A second goal is the averting of danger. The third, and highest, attainment is promised as the culmination of a meditation on the sun: “He obtains the victory of the sun, indeed a victory higher than the victory of the sun ... which leads beyond death.”¹⁰

⁷ *Tam yatha yathopasate tad eva bhavati*. Sankara quotes the phrase in *Brahmasutra Bhasya* 1.1.11; 3.4.52; 4.3.15; *Chandogya Upanisad Bhasya* 1.1.7; and *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad Bhasya* 1.3.16. He refers to it as *sruti* but its source is unidentified.

⁸ Franklin Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy* (London, 1965), pp. 23-24.

⁹ *Brahmasutra Bhasya* 3.2.21.

¹⁰ *Chandogya Upanisad* 2.10.6, *The Principal Upanisads*, tr. S. Radhakrishnan, p.367 HarperCollins Publishers India, 2003.

In the Vedic tradition the correct manner of pronunciation (*siksa*) is in itself an important basis for the comprehension of the sacred word. In *Taittiriya Upanisad* 1.3., two facets of pronunciation are discussed. The first involves simply a process of recitation, and only receives brief mention. The second is an extensive elaboration of an esoteric interpretation of pronunciation, developed through meditation on the conjunction of syllables. The proper relationship of the syllables is the subject of a variety of upasanas, the first of which is a meditation on the world (*loka*). The earth is taken to represent the initial syllable while the second syllable corresponds to heaven. The space between is represented by ether (*akasa*), and the link that joins the syllables is air (*vayu*). The student is guided to recognise the distinctive qualities of each syllable, and also the intervening space. Indeed, he himself participates in the process of conjunction. For it is the power of the air, or wind, generated by his own pronunciation of the syllables, that actually serves to link them.¹¹

In this way the syllables are understood to be far more than mere building blocks for words. Their interrelationship becomes a microcosm which mirrors a cosmic pattern. This awareness leads the student to the comprehension of such esoteric utterances (*vyahrti*) as *bhur bhuvah suvah*, which he chants thrice daily at the commencement of his diurnal rites (*samdhya*): “*Bhuh* is this world, *bhuvah* the atmosphere, *svah* is the yonder world ... he who knows this knows Brahman.”¹²

Since Brahman is so closely associated with the power of the word, it is not surprising to find that the pre-eminent symbol used in meditation on Brahman is the sacred syllable Om: “The word which all the Vedas rehearse, and which all austerities proclaim.... That syllable, truly, indeed, is Brahman, that syllable indeed is the supreme. Knowing

¹¹ See *Eight Upanishads with the Commentary of Shankaracarya*, tr. Swami Gambhirananda (2 vols. Mayavati, 1977-78), vol. I, p. 236n.

¹² *Taittiriya Upanisad* 1.5.1 ff., tr. S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit., pp. 532-533.

¹³ *Katha Upanisad* 2.15-17, in *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, tr. Robert Ernest Hume (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1977), p. 349. See also *Chandogya Upanisad* 1.1, *Taittiriya Upanisad* 1.8 and *Mandukya Upanisad* 1.

that syllable, truly, indeed, whatever one desires is his. That is the best support. That is the supreme support.”¹³

Om is the ultimate support of meditation;¹⁴ it is the bow which directs the arrow of the Self to Brahman, the mark;¹⁵ it is the fire stick which, when rubbed by the practice of meditation, reveals the hidden divinity.¹⁶ But despite the prominence of the sacred syllable Om in upasana, there is little procedural detail supplied in the accounts of these well known meditations.

Fortunately another important upasana is elaborated somewhat more fully. The meditation on Brahman as symbolized by the term *satya*, ‘real’ or ‘true’, involves the establishment of an identity by means of an esoteric understanding of the word. The upasana is introduced with the assertion that the Self is immortal (*amita*), that it is Brahman. The next identification is that of Brahman and *satyam*.¹⁷

Sankara stresses that upasana is characterised by a uniform flow of thoughts, *tulya pratyaya-santatir*.¹⁸ Clearly, a good deal of discipline is required if the current of thought is to be maintained. But the accounts of upasana in the ten Upanisads on which Sankara has commented have little advice to offer the meditator on just how the practice is to proceed. They focus instead upon the object of the meditation, elaborating in great detail the ritual and symbolic themes representing ‘that deity’ with whom identity is sought. ▲

¹⁴ *Prasna Upanisad* 5.2.

¹⁵ *Mundaka Upanisad* 2.2.4.

¹⁶ *Svetasvatara Upanisad* 1.14.

¹⁷ *Chandogya Upanisad* 8.3.5, tr. Hume, op. cit., p. 265. Another version of this meditation is described in *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad* 5.5.1.

¹⁸ *Taittiriya Upanisad Bhasya* 1.2.3.

BHAGAVAN'S HANDWRITING

Introduction

Bhagavan regularly made meticulous copies of poems, songs and other material presented to him, and these were kept in a special book. Quite often he gave a copy to the original donor as *prasadam*, a blessing or gift.

The first two pages replicate an introduction to Muruganar's poems in *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. The seven verses are composed by great Tamil poets: Mahamahopadyaya U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, regarded as a genius in contemporary Tamil verse, Tiruppadiripuliyur Srimad Sivashanmuga Meijnana Desika Sivacharyaswami, Vadivelu Chettiyar and Chendamizh Kavi Ramachandra Iyer. The gist of the first verse by Swaminatha Iyer is:

In abundant grace Arunachalam lives in the Ramana Mahamuni who shines like the Sun in the hearts of all, removing all unhappiness caused by darkness. Rich in meaning and cast in fine poetical metre, Kanna Murugan of Mugavai (Ramanadapuram) composed this *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* for the benefit of all.

The substance of the fourth verse from Vadivelu Chettiyar is:

Muruganar who solely fixes his attention on Sri Ramana who ever abides in *sahaja nishtha*, studied rare Tamil scriptures of liberation in order to compose with great devotion before Ramana's holy feet this *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. This labour of love is knowledge-scripture bestowed for the benefit of devotees in attaining the state which is not apart from themselves.

The third example copied by Bhagavan is an excerpt in praise of Muruganar from an English publication.

சிறப்புப்பாயிரம்.

மஹாமஹோபாத்யாயர்

உ.வே-ஸ்வாமிநாதய்யரவர்க னியற்றிய

எழுசீர்க்கழிநெடிலடியாசிரியவிருத்தம்.

அருண்மலி யருணை வாழ்தரு ரமணா
 னந்தமா முனிவர னகஞ்சா
 ரிருண்மலி துயரம் போக்கிடுங் கதிரோ
 னினையடிக் கன்புமீ தூர்ந்து
 தெருண்மலி சுவையுஞ் செவ்விய நடையுஞ்
 சேர்தரு சந்நிதி முறையைப்
 பொருண்மலி முகவை வாழ்கண்ண முருகன்
 புகன்றனன் யாருமின் புறவே.

திருப்பாதிசிப்புலியூர்-ஸ்ரீமத்ஞானியார் மடாலயம்,

சிவஷண்முக மெய்க்ஞானசிவாசாரிய ஸ்வாமிகளருளிய

நேரிசை வெண்பா.

அண்ணு மலைவாழ வாண்டிறைஞர னப்பெரியோ
 ணுண்ணும் பரஞான மூட்டுவோன்-கண்ணுஞ்
 சீரமண மேலோனைச் சேர்சந் நிதிமுறையைப்
 பாரறிஞ ரேற்கப் பகர்ந்து. (க)

சீர்முகவைக் கண்ண முருகனார் சேர்ந்தநல
 மார்சொல்வ ரிந்த வவனியினி-லோர்தலிலா
 வென்று மழியாத வின்பம் பெறுகவே
 யென்றுள நாளெல்லா மே. (உ)

ஆசிரியர், கோ-வடிவேலுசெட்டியாரவர்க னியற்றிய

அனுசீர்க்கழிநெடிலடியாசிரியவிருத்தம்.

தன்னிலையின் மானது சகசநிட்டை புரிமண
 சாமி மீது

பன்னரிய நூலாய்ந்த முருகனார் பார்ப்பானைப்
 பார்க்குஞ் சீலர்

நன்னயமா ரினியசொலால் ரமணசந் நிதிமுறையென்
 ஞான நூலை

யன்னியமி னிலைமக்க ளமைந்துய்ய வருளினா
 ரன்பான் மாதோ.

திருவண்ணாமலை, முனிசிபல் கஹஸ்கடல், தமிழ்ப்பண்டிதர்,

செந்தமிழ்க்கவி-ராமச்சந்திர அய்யரருளிய

நேரிசை வெண்பா.

புலன்வென்ற மிக்கோரும் புக்கடைய வெண்ணா
 வலனின்ற மெய்க்ஞான வள்ளல்-தலநின்ற
 முத்தன் ரமண முனிக்கன்ப னாமுருக
 வுத்தமன்சொன் னூலை யுரை. (க)

மூவ ரருளோ முதுவா சகப்பொருளோ
 தேவர் புகலுஞ் செழுந்திருவோ-பாவலருக்
 கின்னமுதோ வைப்போ வெழிலா ரிரமணன்
 முன்சந் நிதிநன் முறை. (உ)

புன்குரம்பைப் போர்வையுடற் பொய்ம்மைநிலை நன்கணர்ந்து
 மன்றவற் கன்பிழைத்து மாற்றினா-னிற்பநுகர்
 மூப்பார் மொழியு முகவை முருகப்போர்
 மாப்பார் வழுத்து மறை.

"Grains of Gold"

by

R. Prnivasa Desikan, M.A.

and

B. L. Ranganathan, M.A.

(Page 48)

“Even amidst the din and roar of life, amidst the sick and hurried aims of humanity, there has risen amongst us a poet by name Mugarai Murganar. He is one of the disciples of Sri Ramana Ma, harshi in whose praise he has woven a garland of songs. In it he has run through the whole gamut of all kinds of mystical experiences. The transcendent intuition and gorgeous imagination of the poet have made him produce a rare work of art, of which any nation cannot but be proud.”

Letters to Friends

Part Three

SADHU OM

Supreme Silence

Among Sri Bhagavan's teachings the following can be pointed out as highly important:

“Some having a thousand bags of doubts, who even after visiting a *sadhu* (sage) a hundred times do not get peace. And there are some ripe souls, who having fallen a prey to the gracious glance of a *sadhu*, even in one visit only, get perfect peace.”

The hidden meaning of these golden saying:-

There are many aspects in spiritual practices, such as temple worship, japa, dhyana, satsang, hearing and learning of spiritual teachings, service to the great one's etc. There is no doubt that each one of these will give its fruit in its own time. But there is a means which will give the fruit of all these together at a time and that is, 'Seeing a Sage'. This fact is well emphasized by Adi Sankara and in the first five verses in *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandam* compiled by Sri Bhagavan.

To be able to be in the presence of a real *sadhu* is a rare thing. Among the few who get this rare privilege, many do not know how to make use of it rightly. *Through supreme silence only do sages bless us.* Those who are not able to understand that Supreme Silence spoil this rare opportunity through questioning, yet even such people, by visiting great ones will surely get their ego rooted out even though this may be delayed on the same way as the fire though not burning the green tree at once will dry it first and then burn it.

Magnet

When the magnetic bar is broken, two new bars each with their own north and south poles are generated. The previous centre in the single bar then shifts to a new place, a centre, in the two new bars. What is more, now there are two new bars or lines of thought, the power of attraction is doubled. By trying to reject sex by maintaining forced celibacy, we have actually strengthened it

Prayer

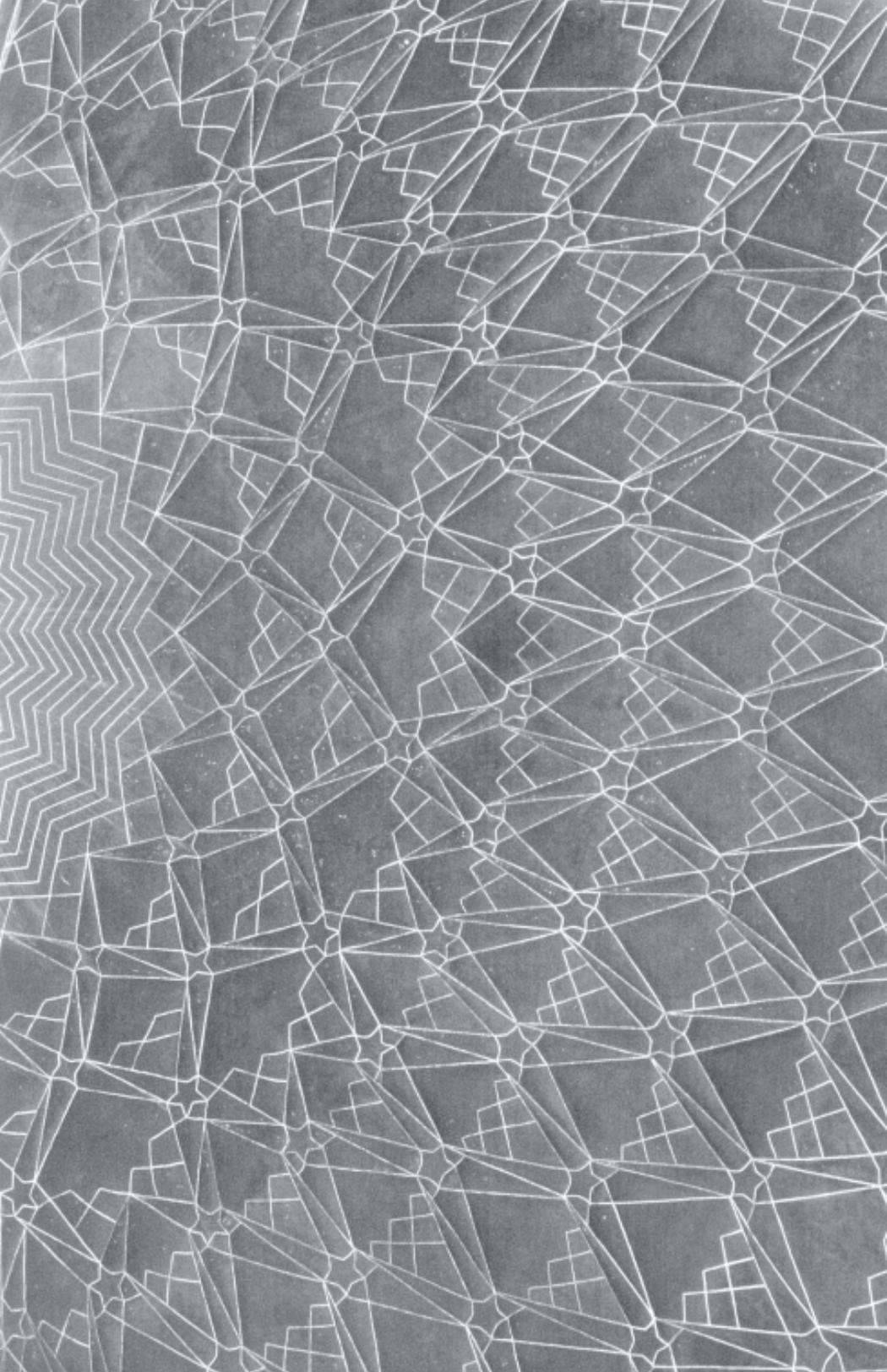
Whether one follows bhakti marga or jnana marga, love is the essential ingredient — one loves God, the other loves to know Self. Those who say, I don't want bhakti marga (emotional spirituality), I want jnana marga (scientific spirituality) do not know what they are talking about. If they want to know Self, that wanting is bhakti. As for other paths such as yoga, Vipassana techniques of Buddhism etc., in which they only meditate on the body or to stop thoughts, they are not at all path for Self-knowledge. Chit (jnana) and Ananda (bhakti) are the only paths to Sat (Self)! Longing prayer, japa with love and meditation on God with love — these will help one towards attending to and thus knowing Self. But if love is absent, no path will take one to Self.

Prayer need not be formulated in words — the feeling of longing is the important point in prayer! Those sages and saints such as Bhagavan and Muruganar whose prayers have come in the form of verses, have written those verses for the benefit of others (though of course they were not aware of this when the words welled up from within them), to show us what we should long for and what our attitude of prayer

should be; if Bhagavan had not written *Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai* we could never have learnt so many different modes of prayer.

Sri Ramakrishna tells the story of three men who saw a wall and a ladder. One climbed the ladder, saw what was on the other side and jumped over. The second climbed saw what was on the otherside, called the third one and jumped over. The third one climbed, saw what was on the other side, climbed back down and told others about it. Seeing what is on the otherside is *atma darshan*, i.e., jnana. The different behaviour of these three jnanis is only on the outlook of others — they are all one and the same in jnana; their different behaviours are only according to the *prarabdha* (destiny) of the body, as the doer is dead.

The first man is a *brahma varishta* — he is drowned in samadhi and remains always unaware of the body and surroundings. The second is a *brahma variyan* — he will give only clues as for example Seshadri Swami, Tinnai Swami. They do not care to get involved with the people and world, but if they are pressed, they will give clues. The third is a *brahma vit* or *brahma varan* — the great gurus such as Bhagavan, Sri Ramakrishna, Sankara, fall into this class. ▲



Internet Resources

Part Four

DENNIS WAITE

This article is from an appendix to the book Back to the Truth: 5000 Years of Advaita by Dennis Waite, scheduled for publication by O Books in 2007.

6. Upanishads

There are many sites specifically relating to the scriptures — shruti, smRRiti, brahmasUtra-s and prakaraNa grantha. Some of these concentrate on just one element, especially those on the Bhagavad Gita in the next section but others are more eclectic.

The following are particularly useful for Upanisads.

Celextel's Online Spiritual Library has translations of more Upanisads than I have found elsewhere (76 of them the last time I looked!), including many that I have not even heard of before. There are also translations of the gIta, brahmasUtra, pa~nchadashI and a number of works by Sankara. <http://www.celextel.org/>

The **Sanderson Beck Foundation** has lots of background information to the Upanisads and translations of a number of them. <http://www.san.beck.org/EC7-Vedas.html>

You can download a PDF format file of 11 of the major Upanisads, translated by Swami Nikhilananda at <http://sanatan.intnet.mu/upanishads/upanishads.htm>. Recommended (but there is no Sanskrit text).

Max Muller translations may be downloaded at <http://www.sacredtexts.com/hin/upan/>

Vidya Vrikshah has word-by-word translations, together with the original Sanskrit for a number of the main Upanisads and other scriptures, as well as presentations on the main concepts of Vedanta and discussions of music and poetry. (Note that these will be found in the 'Presentations' section and you may need to download and install the fonts from the 'Software' section before you can see the script correctly.) <http://www.vidyavrikshah.org/>

The **Advaita Vedanta Library** has English translations of the principal and many of the minor Upanisads, together with other major texts such as Bhagavad Gita, aShTAvakra gIta, pa~nchadashI, brahmasUtra and the writings of Sankara. An excellent collection of valuable resources! <http://www.geocities.com/advaitavedant>

You can search eleven of the major Upanisads for key words (in English) at <http://atomicshakespeare.com/word/>

7. Bhagavad Gita

The **Gita Supersite** has various translations and commentaries available, including the English version of Sankara's commentary. <http://www.gitasupersite.iitk.ac.in/>

Swami Krishnananda's translation, with summaries of each chapter and extensive commentary may be downloaded at http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/gita_00.html

A modern translation by **Ramanand Prasad** may be downloaded at <http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/gita.htm>

The dvaita commentaries of **Swami Prabhupada** can be read at

<http://www.bhagavad-gita.us/netscape.html> and chanting of the complete Gita may be purchased on CDs.

The **International Gita Society** has a comprehensive site with study lessons, stories and other scriptures. <http://www.gita-society.com/>

<http://in.geocities.com/gitabykrishna/> contains much valuable information relating to the Gita, including a translation for every word of Sanskrit, complete text and meaning and a number of separate commentaries.

A suite of hyperlinked study notes may be downloaded from the UK Branch of the Chinmayananda Foundation. These contain the complete text of **Swami Chinmayananda's commentary** and also show the Devanagari script for each verse.

The package downloads as a zip file whose contents include an executable that sets up the files and installs the font. Excellent! <http://www.chinmayauk.org/Resources/Downloads.htm>

There is a general commentary on the Gita by **Nataraja Guru** at the German Advaita Vedanta site. http://www.advaitavedanta.de/contents_gitaintro.htm

Acharya has an on-line Gita and a Sanskrit word list containing all words in the Gita with a reference to the verse(s) in which they occur. <http://acharya.iitm.ac.in/online/gita.html>

8. Sanskrit Resources

Anyone who studies traditional Advaita is certain to encounter Sanskrit terms from time to time. Whether such a student wishes merely to look up the word in a dictionary or is more ambitious and would actually like to learn a little of the language, there are many suitable resources on the Internet.

The basics of the language and an introduction to ITRANS — the transliteration scheme that is most frequently used on the Internet and for communication via email are described at my own site: <http://www.advaita.org.uk/sanskrit/sanskrit.htm>.

There is also a glossary of the most frequently encountered spiritual terms in Advaita and an extract from my book *An Essential Guide to Sanskrit for Spiritual Seekers*.

<http://sanskrit.gde.to/> is one of the best sites for all Sanskrit-related information. Many documents may be downloaded in a variety of formats: PDF, PS, ITX, GIF, TXT, Sanskrit98, Sanskrit99, XDVNG. There are links to dictionaries and grammar-related tools and many exercises relating to conversational Sanskrit. Fonts etc. are available for download and links are provided to ITRANS and postscript tools.

Finally, there are links to many other academic and personal Sanskrit-related projects around the world. There are even news broadcasts in Sanskrit, in Real Audio format.

A regularly updated page of useful information and links is also maintained as **Sanskrit Studies Links and Information**. <http://sanskritlinks.blogspot.com/>

There is a similar site at <http://sanskrit.bhaarat.com/>. Unfortunately, this is not always accessible. Again there is a wide selection of tools, documents etc., and the site itself is professionally presented. (The 'Documents' section is a mirror of the previous site.) There is also a 'Forum' section.

Another huge list of links to sites in many languages may be found at <http://www.languages-on-the-web.com/links/link-sanscrit.htm>.

Sanskrita Bharati offers numerous publications to help in the learning of Sanskrit as well as some on-line audio. It has news about related events and details of how to help. <http://www.sanskritabharati.org/>

If you want to learn Sanskrit, the Argentinean site produced by Gabriel Pradiipaka & Andrés Muni at <http://www.sanskrit-sanscrito.com.ar> is simply excellent. It takes you from the basics of learning to write and pronounce the letters up to a very comprehensive set of instructions and examples for combining letters (vowel, visarga and consonant saMdhī). Scriptures are translated and there are audio files of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras that may be listened to alongside the other material. A tremendous amount of effort has clearly gone into this project and it shows. It is well presented and easy to read.

Sudhir Kaicker has provided a freely downloadable tutor (nearly 38MB when I downloaded it) at **Sanskrita Pradipika**. This is aimed at providing adults learning on their own with a 'leisurely introduction'.

It runs under Java run-time environment (so should be computer independent) in a small window that displays a small page of information at a time. It seems to do exactly what it claims. It is interactive to the extent that words may be constructed by typing at the keyboard. It can also sound out the letters but this facility is not included in the downloaded software to keep the size to a minimum. A CD can be mailed at the cost of the recipient. Later chapters explain saMdhī, declension and conjugation and sentence construction but not all of these are available yet. <http://www.sanskrit-lamp.org/>

There is also a very comprehensive set of on-line lessons produced by the **Systems Development Laboratory** at Chennai, India. Some of them may be downloaded for study off-line. There is also a free multilingual editor, for use in generating web pages containing Devanagari (and other) scripts. This is needed in order to be able to make full use of the lessons. <http://acharya.iitm.ac.in/sanskrit/lessons/lessons.html> Another good site is maintained by **Gerard Huet** at <http://sanskrit.inria.fr/>. Though the dictionary tools are aimed primarily at French speakers, most of the information is also in English. There is also an on-line tool whereby you can specify the stem of a noun (prAtipadika form), together with its gender and it will provide you with a tabular listing of all of the cases. There is also a 'sandhi analysis' utility that will attempt to break a sentence into words. There is an extensive page of categorized links at <http://sanskrit.inria.fr/portal.html>.

Wikipedia, a well-known Internet encyclopaedia, now has a good page of history, general information and links at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit>.

ITRANS is the transliteration scheme, developed by Avinash Chopde for communicating Sanskrit on the Internet. Full details of the scheme are given on his site at <http://www.aczoom.com/itrans/>. ITRANS itself is used with another tool called LaTeX. Since this is not at all straightforward, beginners or casual users are advised to use the **web-interface** at <http://www.aczoom.com/itrans/online/> (since its .ps and .pdf files are transportable for all platforms) or the special tool below.

For easy ITRANS representation of Sanskrit, I recommend the use of the excellent software package **Itranslator 99**, developed by the saMnyAsa-s of Omkarananda Ashram Himalayas, Rishikesh, India. This program, compatible with the latest versions of Windows, is downloadable free of charge. Words can be typed in ITRANS and converted into Devanagari and Roman diacritical forms. These can then be copied and pasted into any Windows package. There is also a Unicode version called 'Itranslator 2003', which will only run on systems supporting this system (e.g. Windows XP). <http://www.omkarananda-ashram.org/Sanskrit/Itranslt.html>

The ITRANS transliteration and Devanagari script for the alphabet may be viewed, and the correct pronunciation of each letter heard at the **Sarasvati** site <http://members.tripod.com/sarasvati/devanagari/alphabet.html>.

Charles Wikner's excellent **Sanskrit tutorial** may be downloaded in its entirety or viewed chapter by chapter at <http://www.danam.co.uk/Sanskrit/Sanskrit%20Introductory/Sanskrit%20Introductory.html>.

A downloadable pdf document and an mp3 file teach you basic pronunciation at the **Devasthanam** site. <http://www.sanskrit.org/Sanskrit/sanskrit.htm>

If you would like to hear some Sanskrit being chanted, there are a number of sites, which offer such facilities, e.g. <http://bhaarat.com/SANSKRIT/dale/Audio.html> provides the complete Isopanisad and a chapter from the Bhagavad Gita amongst other things and has links to other sites.

A list of recommended books, divided up into Introductory Grammar and Readers, Reference Grammars, Dictionaries Sanskrit-English and Dictionaries English-Sanskrit, is provided by the Columbia University **Inventory of Language Materials**. <http://www.realization.org/page/doc0/doc0078.htm>

The dictionary that is essential if you are seriously interested in pursuing the language is that by **Monier-Williams**. It can be purchased from Amazon.com (for a mere \$155) but if you are prepared to wait for it you could obtain it much more cheaply from India. The University of Cologne has done an incredible job of

digitising much of the Monier-Williams Sanskrit to English dictionary. This may be used on-line and you can also enter a search word in English to find all of the Sanskrit words that may translate to this. <http://webapps.uni-koeln.de/tamil/>. The dictionary may also be downloaded in its entirety (19Mb compressed to 7Mb) together with a superb utility for accessing the content. This facility has been provided by **Louis Bontes** at <http://members.rott.chello.nl/l.bontes/> A CD version of the dictionary can be purchased for \$1 from <http://www.thekrishnastore.com/Detail.bok?no=2295&bar=> (the dictionary itself is freeware and occupies 421MB). It consists of TIF images of all of the pages together with a simple search tool to locate the relevant page. ▲

Diary 2007

Ashram will bring out several Diaries for 2007. One is bilingual i.e., in English and Tamil combined and one in Telugu language. Price yet to be decided.

Calendar 2007

6 Sheets Calendar for 2007 with beautiful pictures of Bhagavan and Arunachala Hill is being brought out by Ashram. Price yet to be decided.

Sri Ramanasramam Publications Catalogue 2007

Provides inventory/ordering information for Ramanasramam books in English, tapes, audio CDs, VCDs, and DVDs, with pricing, product details and mailing and payment instructions.



HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

A Pilgimage to Arunachala

R. RAMASAMI

A couple of decades back in the middle years of my life, I spent time as a Rishikesh ashramite at the foot hills of the Himalayas where the Ganges flows quietly down. I knew nothing much about scriptures except old rishi stories and anecdotes of inspiration. No spiritual exercise guided my quest for the Self we variously call God, enlightenment, absolute consciousness or samadhi. In the self-absorbed way of children I took it for granted it would be provided at the Himalayan retreat.

What I prayed for was for my wishes to be fulfilled for that sublime journey designed to distinguish the enlightened man from a simple one. The glutton can be reduced to a skeleton if forced to an ascetic life, for that which is most selfish or dear to one's heart, needs to dry up to touch eternity. To sadhus who chose their abode on the banks of the Ganges it represented the river of life to them. It satisfied their

unquenchable thirst — the fulfillment of philosophical inquiry as extolled by the Upanisads.

My longing was to have contact with the holy men. There were too many gurus' week-end meditation courses or workshops in existence. The guru is not like confiding in a stranger on a train to whom we cannot open our heart because we know he may get down after a few stations. One can hardly bribe him to gain a quick religious understanding of mundane existence. The quality of life, particularly for a seeker, depends on the experiencer, not on any particular situation. It is a common religious belief among Hindus that the more often they take a dip in the Ganges, the more it takes away their impurities; their sins are minimized, till no more karmas stand in the way of liberation. For the while, it seemed satisfactory. My mind however was tuned to a wider spiritual concept, open to every possibility and opportunity. But what if my holy adventure took the form of a hunt for the elixir of life, that which gives a taste of it and makes you greedy for more?

Despite my devotion to Mother Gangaji, I wandered in wildernesses and deep into jungle retreats such as the one near Vashista Guha on the banks of the Ganges, and for a change visited a Tibetan Monastery in Dehradun. I dealt with my own anxieties by attempting to stay close with such great souls who love more their followers than their own lives. I conversed with the abbot in the Tibetan monastery seeking clarity on what tantra means and who qualifies for its practices. In the late eighties the tantric teacher Trungpa Chogyam met his death after a paralytic attack and it was the abbot who broke the news to me. I was shattered that the tantric master had so little mastery over his tragic fate that he failed to avert it. Was this, I thought, the law of karma, that to go forward, you must first step back, that it was as complicated and hard a task as the world makes it out to be? I sensed a truth in it and recalled what the great Ramana Maharshi taught about the death experience. An awakening began in the coils of my memory. Ramana Maharshi defined death with unerring accuracy.

The most significant teaching of spiritual life was long ago spoken by my English professor in Madurai as absolutely essential for inspiring

man into higher consciousness. At one point the professor was reading out an article from *Bhavan's Journal* dedicated to the living memories of great saints and sages with a focus on Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He pointed to a photo of the sage of Arunachala. I glimpsed a picture of him, his face radiating the beauty of inner life. By luck or coincidence it was much the same smiling face that had riveted my attention just a week ago when I passed a petty-shop displaying a few small photos and pictures for sale. I stared at this particular photo without knowing who it was but it filled my heart with joy; a moment to be cherished forever.

Acknowledging the picture's identity as that of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi I used to wonder whether anyone who came in touch with the vibrant radiation of Bhagavan's divinity also felt that way. That first impression has been so strong and convincing it transformed my worrying and fretting mind, rendering me free, optimistic and happy. At the same shop I noticed another photo, a picture of Sri Madurai Pandi Muni, a local deity, the sight of which was distinctly frightening. It was alien to the picture of the serene Ramana Maharshi sitting in the posture of Dakshinamurti, god of wisdom-knowledge and enlightenment. Sitting on a rock with a stick in his hand, his brilliant face slightly turned upwards at a majestic angle, his benevolent gaze filled with grace. I recognized in him a guide to lead us out of the morass of man's egoistic existence. He is pictured as Dakshinamurti Himself, the sage of Arunachala who will take us across the ocean of samsara.

My English Professor called my attention to the wonder that one as high-born as Bhagavan renounced everything in his quest for his father, Arunachala. He represented the power of inner truth, the one who touches our heart and works the miracle of inner happiness by his gaze. When I offered various bits of philosophical topics for discussion including the path of Self-knowledge, the professor discussed the concept of maya and illusion. I was thrilled and vicariously nourished in the anticipation of some similar experience.

At that time whenever I saw the picture of Bhagavan in spiritual majesty it held my mind completely still. His influence, wielded like

a scepter, cut deep grooves into my consciousness, which was something I have never experienced before. My whole being became focused on trying to find the right path and be free of the torments of life. That defining photograph still remains as my most valuable possession and promotes my understanding that God is what Is and that the highest form of worship is to be happy.

When I debated within myself on how to be in the world, yet not to be of it I found it difficult to come to terms with the concept. The professor pointed out that the transition from three-dimensional to four-dimensional consciousness is indeed exceedingly painful. The need for self-assertion from the earliest stages of life persists through midlife; the mind clinging to bigoted obstinacy and neurotic desires are a necessary part of one's life. The professor tracing the psychic roots of man's vulnerability to ego and self-delusion told me a joke:

A man visits a psychiatrist. "Doctor," he says, "I think I'm a frog." The psychiatrist asks, "How long has this been going on?" The man replies, "Since I was a tadpole."

I guessed the professor had chosen that joke about self-delusion as there was a message in it for me. Label it as maya or illusion, it is a creation of the human mind and is always a lie. When is it going to be corrected? A lifetime? The seeker makes a serious mistake if he idealizes his body as the Self. Ramana Maharshi shows that the method of Self-enquiry alone is the most effective antidote to all incomprehensible illusions about the nature of man and his existence in the world. His teachings reveal the only valid truth summed up in the words, Self-realization.

It was no small wonder that Arunachala the Holy Hill where Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi lived his teachings, which has illumined the way for so many others, became finally my destination. It was on one fine Maha Sivaratri day that my spiritual journey began nearly thirty years ago. Like the peasants awaiting the harvesting day I waited for a chance to slip out of the burden of samsara and surrender at the lotus feet of Bhagavan. My first visit to Tiruvannamalai was in 1969 and it set the stage for my wonderful entry, though I had to wait another twenty years to do my sadhana at Ramanasramam.

Like everyone longing to acquire the darshan of Arunachala, on the first day I came to this temple town, I too had great expectations. I had learned long since that if the recipient is an apt vessel for it, the Hill reflects one's self and reveals wonders. It is amazing to know from the Skanda Purana how it could contain the cosmos itself. Shining like a beacon light to the sincere aspirant, this small mountain holds under its sway the ego of every individual, attracting like the magnet the iron ore.

When I first set my eyes on the holy hill of Arunachala it did not look green and fresh despite its plentiful religious promise. I was deluded by its appearance. I rated the mountain just like any other wild place filled with boulders and shrub jungle. It was indeed an illusion. The great mountain appears to wear a mask and puzzles the people steeped in worldly life.

As I was to learn, the devotee tends to total identification with the holy mountain. Just to directly gaze at it is sufficient to burn off defects and blend an individual with the Supreme Self. The mountain which offers no pretty panoramic views of beauty nor wears majestic looks holds a message for the sensitive receiver who seeks after mystic revelation. This beautiful hill has had spun on it an imposing legend dating back to prehistoric puranic age.

The Sivaratri night that I happened to spend in the Virupaksha Cave during my first visit still flashes on the mental screen. It was no effort for me to focus the mind on Bhagavan while fully awake that night and I hold that experience in memory even after a lapse of thirty years. Like a song on tape-recorder that would rewind, my memory would carry me all the way to that auspicious day of Siva Puja which accrued to me a mighty Sivapunya, a Siva blessing.

I made several attempts to stay at Arunachala and I was reminded of a Chinese saying, 'If you are going to stand, well stand; if you are going to sit, well sit; but don't wobble.' So I got on my way, determined to try, even like Robert Bruce who learnt his lessons of success from a spider.

I had had the darshan of the mountain inwardly inspired by the example of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and I found it impossible

to turn my head from its captivity. I needed however to learn to take more care and interest in such direct and perfect experiences of Truth than those the week-end training camps in spirituality dished out which engaged me at Rishikesh.

Eventually, the propitious moment finally arrived after receiving that intense shock administered by the Tibetan abbot. I remembered Ramana's death experience and the saving grace of Arunachala. With strength of purpose, I made my way south again and finally found refuge at Ramanasramam.

Living in Ramanasramam there is an atmosphere of honest, religious activities and finally I made it for what is sadhana, if not clinging to the lotus feet of Bhagavan.

Three decades and a half have rolled past since I came to settle in Ramanasramam. The serene peace of the ashram holds me captive, invisible chains imprisoned me but there is no way to escape Arunachala for those whose thoughts are on the mountain, Almighty Arunachala makes His presence felt, no doubt. Paul Brunton put it nicely and aptly thus: "That peculiar glamour which invested the hill proved too magnetic for me. And then at long last, I had returned. Arunachala, the irresistible, had reconquered me."¹ It echoes Maharshi's words resonantly, "The Hill, enchanter of lives, entices one for having only once thought of it, makes him susceptible and eager for itself, and as quiescent as itself; lastly preys on his soul made sweet by self-surrender."²

What I began as a pilgrimage with full intent could not have been more aptly culminated than in Arunachala. ▲

¹ P. Brunton, *A Message from Arunachala*. p.12. Rider & Co., London. 1969.

² *Ibid.* p.19.

Sonasaila Maalai

Song Garland to the Red Mountain

A Selection

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

Sivaprakasa Swamigal was an accomplished 17th century Virasaiva poet and scholar. Brief details of his life were given in the *Advent 2005 Mountain Path*, which featured translations from his Tamil version of *Prabhulinga Leelai*, itself a translation from the Kannada. Sivaprakasa wrote numerous works, one of the earliest being *Sonasailamaalai* — a song garland of 100 verses to the Red Mountain, Arunachala, which he is said to have composed in a single *pradakshina* of the mountain. He possessed a vivid and daring poetic imagination that echoes the Sangam era, the golden age of Tamil literature. It was a gift which earned him during his lifetime the *sirappu peyar* (honorary title) of *Treasure House of the Imagination*.

Each verse falls into two parts, the first, a plea for Lord Siva's grace in the face of the author's self-avowed unworthiness, and second, a daring image in which the nature and attributes of Lord Siva are compared and contrasted with those of the Mountain, which is Lord Siva's earthly-manifested form. Much emphasis is placed throughout

upon the fact that, unlike the Siva of the temple cult, Arunachala is available to all without restrictions of any kind. It was an attribute which appealed deeply to Sivaprakasa, who, as a Virasaiva would have rejected the elitism of the temples and their cult. Sivaprakasa's erudition is apparent throughout the text with numerous references to the Puranic literature, the lives of the 63 Saiva Saints, and the flora and fauna, legends and even the folklore (see v.76) of Arunachala itself. In particular, the various mountains that feature in the Puranic canon, Mount Meru, (the fabulous mountain at the centre of the earth), Mount Mandara, (which the devas and asuras used to churn the Ocean of Milk), Mount Pothiyam, (the abode of the sage Agastya, the father of Tamil), the Eastern and Western Mountains, behind which the sun is said to rise and set, and even Mount Kailash, (the very home of Lord Siva), are found lacking when compared to the majesty of *Sonasaila*, the Red Mountain. How could any mountain in the physical realm, however glorious, begin to compare with one that, as the very embodiment of Lord Siva, which stands beyond time and space in the non-dual realm of the Self? Each verse is driven home with a stirring refrain that never lets us forget that, *Arunachala* and *Siva*, eternally, are one: *Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

7

The Asuras in their cities, and Kama too,
about whose flowery darts
winged insects buzz and sing,
once knew your white smile as you laughed,
and the gaze that from your forehead flashed.
Shall not this wretch's dark delusion
come to know these too?

Too subtle even for thought to reach,
you are men say, but you,
this reputation to allay,
adopt this mighty physical form,
and stand for all the world to see.
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

Note: Lord Siva destroyed the three cities of the Asuras with a smile and burned up Kama with a glance from his third eye, when Kama attempted to make him enamoured of Parvati. If you are so keen to destroy evil, the poet cries, why then do you not destroy the evil of the *anava malam* (the illusion that one possesses a separate self or ego) that afflicts me so?

11

Upon the flowery earth,
that the ocean's fair gown girds about,
quite fittingly you grant your grace
to those who deem the body false.
But to me, who take the body to be true,
will you not deign to grant it too?

Not wishing to dwell within a shrine,
hid from view, and visited
with proper observance of time,
you grant your presence abundantly,
standing fast, for all the world to see.
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

14

This mortal frame, that's bound to die,
like a bubble that through water flies,
is truly real, thus did I think.
Whirled through births,
in bliss's enduring ocean
I knew not how to sink.
Will there ever be salvation
for one so ignorant as me?

With their tusks, the wild pigs root
upon your mountain slopes,
as if the Boar of former times
digging down, still sought today
your beauteous foot.
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

Note: As one might expect, there are numerous references in these verses to the legend in which, to humble the pride of Visnu and Brahma, Lord Siva appeared as a column of flame, of which neither could reach the head or foot. Here the poet imagines that the boars that root on the slopes of Arunachala are actually Lord Visnu, still intent on burrowing down in search of the Lord's feet. See v.42 for another, entirely different, approach to this theme.

15

Holding you within my thoughts
who are compassion's noble form,
the Letters Five upon my lips,
both hands above my head conjoined,
grant that I may daily make
pradakshina of you!

The moon that rises o'er that sacred peak
to adorn your holy locks you keep,
and black of mountain caves
for [the poison at] your throat you take,
shining forth as *Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

17

Will there ever come a day
that freed from body,
senses and the faculties of mind,
with the veil of *anavam's*
dark illusion rent,
I see you without seeing,
within myself,
I, a flower, and you the scent?

Flayer of elephant and lion
you came [from Kailash's Mount],
and now upon your slopes
great herds of these you raise

too numerous to count
their burning hatred to assuage,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

Notes: The faculties of mind (*karanam*) are the intellectual faculties of which there are four: *manam*(mind); *putti*(intellect), *cittam*(will), volition, and *ahamkaram*(egoity).

Siva wears a tiger skin which belonged to the tiger that the rishis in the forest conjured up to destroy him; and also a blanket of elephant skin which belonged to the Asura Gaya who attacked him in the form of an elephant. Seeing him come from Kailash dressed in this way, the tigers and elephants of Arunachala might understandably be somewhat aggrieved.

19

Grant me now your holy grace
to remove that poverty of mind
whereby I idly waste my time
in praising those whose deeds are base,
like Murugan who roaming goes
from peak to peak
or Kama with his deadly bow.

Whilst great Mount Meru
cannot even bear to think
how he upon some former day
below the shoulder
of the Lord did, bending, shrink
and daily bows his head in shame,
waxing great, do you arise,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

Notes: The reference here appears to be to the pre-Vedic Murugan, who is the Lord of the *kurinci* (the hilly tracts) in the pre-Vedic Tamil culture, before he was adopted into the Hindu pantheon as the son of Siva. Murugan and Kama are here used to represent those who are drawn towards worldly pursuits by youth and beauty.

When Siva used Mount Meru as a bow to destroy the aerial cities of the Asuras, its topmost summit would naturally have been drawn down to the level of his shoulder. Verse 7 refers to a variant version of the story in which Lord Siva does not even use his bow, but destroys the cities with a laugh.

26

At that wedding feast I could not be,
in the marriage pavillion
of the Lord of Sikazhi, over whom
his deeds had power none.
That time [alas] is now long gone.
So now to you I direct my plea:
to grant your holy feet in grace
and all my suffering efface.

Unlike great Mount Pothiyam,
home of Tamil rich and sweet,
you do not melt to music's tones,
but only to the daughter
[of the Himalayas'] pleasing speech,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

Notes: Sikazhi is the birth-place of Tirujnanasambandar, the 7th century author of the first three books of the Tamil Holy Scriptures, the *Tirumurai*. All those who witnessed his wedding are said to have merged with the light and attained *mukti*. The poet complains in plaintive terms that this happy fate is not available to him in this later age.

Mount Pothiyam is a mountain in the Pandya country, abode of the sage Agastya. Agastya is said to have learned the Tamil language from Siva himself and then settled on Mount Pothiyam, where he wrote a Tamil grammar and taught it to 12 pupils, thus founding the language and causing it to prosper. Parvati is, of course, the daughter of the Himalaya mountains which are personified as Himavat (see also v.89).

38

Whether my body endures
for aeon upon aeon of time
or in an eye's blink
fails and dies,
'tis well with me,
as long as I may stay, a devotee,
at the lotus flowers of your feet.

As it climbs on high, the rising Sun
recalls the infant Murugan,
clambering up [his father's breast]
with jewels bright
and pointed spear
babbling child's talk, sweet and dear.
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

42

If you will only take the black
defilement of your devotee,
and place it at your throat with that
the mighty Gods churned from the sea,
behold, your beauty by that blackness
magnified will grow, and even brighter be!

The bright effulgence that spreads
from the jewel upon Adisesan's head
up through the shaft
that great and noble Boar carved out
recalls to us how young Murugan
sprang, a tiny spark, from our Lord's brow.
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

Note: The serpent Adisesan is said to support the world on his head. Visnu, when he burrowed down in the form of a boar, would need to travel that far and further if he was to reach the Lord's foot, thus allowing the spark from the jewels on the serpent's heads to travel up through

the shaft thus created. Adisesan, or Ananta, is said to have 1,000 jewels upon his 1,000 heads, which illuminate all the regions.

43

Will that day come that in delight
my eyes shall come to see
the beauty of your holy face,
your shoulders four like stony mounts,
the coiled locks
like lightning flashing out,
your eyes where grace abounds,
and your two holy feet?

The streams that tumble down your sides,
like music sweet of heavenly choirs
upon your slopes resound,
as if, in love, your very form
melted to that delightful sound.
Fair Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

55

Except for those who daily
work to earn the body's food
only that it may offer *puja*
and perform holy service to You
and to the sapphire Maid,
will the vanquishing of Death
be easy to attain?

Your glory's such that when Visnu
many *yojanas* away,
bows down before Mount Kailash
his homage there to pay,
it's as if a heap of pure white rice
were being offered up by him to You.
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

Note: Traditionally the colour of Mount Kailash is silver. When Visnu bows down before it, it is as if a heap of pure white rice, prepared from the finest paddy, were being offered up as *naivedyam* to Siva-Arunachala, so small is Mount Kailash in comparison. A *yojana* is a measure of distance, variously defined as being between 4 and 13 miles.

76

Those who like young Murugan
with sharp and bloody spear,
delight the jewelled maiden's eye,
will wither like the tender bud
that flowers, soon to fade and die.
This I've seen, and yet do I
still glory in this sinful life.

Their anklets snared, a bridegroom
and his powdered bride around you go,
and only at the time of parting,
will that shy pair the trick
that's played upon them know.
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

Note: In earlier times, it was customary for a bride and groom, a few days after their marriage, to perform *pradakshina* of Arunachala, closely accompanied by both sets of relatives, who, in the press of bodies, would contrive to tie together their anklets without them realizing it. At the end of the *pradakshina*, when the two sets of relatives departed for their various homes, the young couple would find to their embarrassment that they were unable to go their separate ways, symbolically affirming their marriage to each other.

89

Your holy feet, like rubies set in finest gold,
upon the virtuous their grace bestow.
What a wonder then that these bright jewels
should thus be set within the iron of my soul!

Unlike other mountains that by seas
are enduringly contained, within yourself
you hold the ocean vast of grace
that [Himavat], the mountain gave.
Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

93

May you grant to me
a mind to think, a tongue to praise,
and eyes to behold you endlessly,
and last of all by your grace
at your holy feet a place.

To those who climb them, other mounts
will show the world entire laid out.
With such as these you disagree,
since for those who thus approach you,
it is their Self alone you make them see.
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!

100

You it is that grant your grace
To those who praise you,
that they may gain learning
and the noble ornament of fame,
noble wealth, and children,
that like a fine jewel adorn
the householder and his mate,
and finally liberation's high estate.

Through your great, supernal grace
you show yourself to all the world
that those who from the righteous path
have strayed, forgetting you, may see
and hold you in their thoughts,
Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!



Ramesh Balsekar and Advaita

CHRISTOPHER QUILKEY

Readers first knew about Ramesh Balsekar when his book on Nisargadatta Maharaj, *Pointers*, was published in the early 1980's. It introduced a fresh articulate voice. At the last count there are twenty-nine titles to his credit on Advaita Vedanta or related topics. Among the earlier books written by him were commentaries on Jnanadeva's *Amritbhava* and the Advaitic classic, *Ashtavakra Gita*. He then began to write directly from his own experience of Consciousness. His recent books are mostly edited talks from his many satsanghs. With such a large corpus I have concentrated on two of his books.¹

Ramesh Balsekar and H.W.L.Poonja are at the epicentre of the new wave of neo-advaita groups in Western countries. They have exerted considerable influence on the way a traditional Indian school of philosophy is perceived by many seekers in the West who are disenchanted with the orthodox view, with its so-called historical,

¹ *A Duet of One. The Ashtavakra Gita Dialogue*. Advaita Press, Los Angeles. 1989, pp.221, US\$13.95; and *Peace and Harmony in Daily Living*. Yogi Impressions, 61 Anjali, Minoo Desai Road, Colaba, Mumbai 5. 2005, pp.289, Rs250.

cultural and religious baggage. Though Ramesh was a sishya of Nisargadatta Maharaj, he reveres Sri Ramana.

The first point which strikes a reader is how articulate Ramesh is when explaining the traditional teachings for a modern audience. The language is contemporary but the message is ancient. The question remains as to how authentic are the lessons and insights. I have not personally met Ramesh which in one sense puts me at a disadvantage because if possible, it is important to meet the teacher and imbibe the atmosphere around him or her. I have been told by people I respect that they feel a great peace around Ramesh and though his words are important it is but half the story. Those who attend his satsanghs say they have been changed for the better in a subtle but dramatic way. In his photos there is a disarming gentleness, patience and compassion.

The first book under scrutiny is his written commentary on the *Ashtavakra Gita*. It is a profound work dealing exclusively with the perception of the Supreme Self. This ancient text demands a considerable understanding to begin with. It is uncompromising: You are not the physical body but pure Consciousness. Remaining in the state of pure Consciousness is liberation. However, even this state is a concept because the supposed individual did not exist in the first place in the undifferentiated Consciousness so who is there to be liberated? You are already That. Consciousness is the phenomenon both within and without. The guru can point the way but cannot give liberation from the limited identification of a separate body; it is for the student (*sishya*) to 'see'. It is not the result of an action. It happens at the right moment when pure Consciousness reveals itself, not to the individual but the Consciousness posing as the individual.

Ramesh presents an intelligent and cogent commentary on the Gita which forcefully stimulates the receptive reader. The litmus test for such a book is whether it provokes an expansion of understanding and contains a sense of depth. Ramesh succeeds on both counts. There are many books on the market declaring much the same thing but lack the clarity and natural authority of this incisive commentary.

The second book under review marks a change of pace and perspective. From what I can gather it is a series of edited answers to

questions on various subjects. Like many of Ramesh's books it is professionally edited. The tone is conversational and the range of ideas wide and varied. He discusses quantum physics, advaita, daily living, free will and determination, to name just a few. The text is fluid, stimulating and quite informative. There is not the intensity of the first book but what it lacks in sharpness it gains in richness of ideas. The one recurrent theme in this and Ramesh's recent talks is that there is nothing one can do to attain self-realization. It either happens or it doesn't. There is no such thing as free will. It is all up to Consciousness. This concept can be liberating or depressing. Ramesh says that this realization is liberating. If Consciousness is all there is, then we are all Consciousness itself. Not a part of it nor apart from it. We are Consciousness. On the level of phenomena, it is Consciousness which happens and 'decides' what happens, not the so-called individual. In other words, everything is predestined. It is a powerful argument and Ramesh is consistent and forceful in its advocacy.

According to Ramesh, once we accept the reality of non-doership, we must acknowledge that we cannot really do anything. But then, while we are waiting for the full understanding to happen, there is one thing we can do which could deepen the intellectual understanding of non-doership. This is a simple practice of investigation involving taking a single action and tracing it back to the point where we finally see that, "It so happened that something was seen, heard, smelled," etc, that prompted my action. And 'I' did not bring about that prompt.

In respect to spiritual sadhana, Ramesh's view is that Consciousness initiates the seeking. He often asks visitors about the origins of their search, and then questions them as to whether they chose to start the seeking. "Or, did the seeking happen, long ago, perhaps when you were very young"? Similarly, he says, "If you like to meditate, then by all means meditate. But don't force yourself to do this". Just as Consciousness initiates the spiritual sadhana, it also causes the individual to do what is needed to bring about the full understanding.

Ramesh's favourite quote recently has been "Events happen deeds are done, but there is no doer of any deed". When questioners ask Ramesh about the concept of nothing happening, he insists that things

do happen, but that the questioner is not the doer of any action. Another related question is, “Then why do anything?”. To this Ramesh replies, “Try to lie in bed all day and see what happens. Your nature will compel you to act.” He uses the metaphor that Life is a movie, scripted by consciousness, in which consciousness plays the role of every character and the movie is witnessed by consciousness. The logical extension of this is that “The film is already in the can”.

There are positive similarities with the theory of advaita in Ramesh’s concepts yet they differ on several points. It should be clear that the following critique makes a distinction between what Ramesh ideally teaches by *concepts*, however much he disclaims them and the implications for those who listen. We should also keep in mind that anyone with sufficient reading and experience can spout advaita, the question is do they truly understand? The criterion for any authentic advaitic teacher is the seamless unity of mind, speech and body.

It may be semantics, but what does one mean by ‘understanding’? True understanding transcends the ability of the conditioned mind to know the answer. It is a totality of being which cannot be grasped by narrow thought. It requires discrimination, detachment, dedicated effort and grace. Ramesh’s contention is that enlightenment cannot be achieved by someone on the grounds of non-doership. That it is a ‘happening’ is all very well but it is meaningless for one who is identified with their body-mind. Many seekers may be duped if they *think* that ‘enlightenment’ is a simple exam or a sleight of intellect and if they mentally have the answers then they ‘know’.

Second, one has to be careful and not mix disciplines or systems of thought. It is easy to use discoveries from modern quantum physics to illustrate the advaitic teaching. To actually *understand* this discipline in physics requires rigorous mathematical training, and someone who *thinks* that he understands because he is conversant with the concepts, is deluded. Ramesh asserts that one can only point to the truth as it is beyond words. The question is, then, whether the examples he uses are simply pointers, or is he mixing disciplinary perspectives?

To explain advaita by citations from other philosophical or scientific systems is incorrect and disingenuous. There is the hazard

in any cross-over of terms that specific meaning and implication are blurred and misrepresented. Great care is required not to confuse levels of understanding. It is inadmissible to employ absolute terms (*paramarthika*) when dealing with the mundane (*vyavaharika*).

The Vedantic dictum *Tat Tvam Asi*, “You are That” is hollow and false unless the recipient, already educated and skilled, can straight away understand the implications of the statement in the total context of the required discipline. The error is the confusion of the individual with the universal order of reality; in other words, the misidentification of the *jiva* (limited individual) with the *paramatma* (supreme self).

Third, Bhagavan quite clearly states that effort is required on our part. He said that if we take one step towards him, he will take nine steps towards us. He illustrated the paradox of the non-existent ego seeking itself in the story of the thief who turns into a policeman to find the thief.

Fourth, to say that the future is already written and therefore one has nothing to do but float like a leaf on the stream is denying one’s humanity, the ability to think, reason and seek. There is the temptation to hedonism. Unless we know the future, we still have to live our lives towards it. Presumably when one attains the state of supreme Consciousness then actions are unnecessary and irrelevant. But until we reach that state they are all we have; action and thought.

There is the danger of taking Advaita Vedanta out of context, that is to say, to use it to excuse any action in everyday living by saying it was predestined is a way of giving licence to self-indulgence and is not compatible with a spiritual quest. Advaita is not a philosophy; it is an ‘experience’ encompassing body, mind and soul. To truly understand requires a pure mind which can only be acquired by sustained effort of meditation, ethical behaviour and devotion. There are no magical short cuts. The one apparently random factor is grace.

Lastly, in general we are faced with the question at each encounter with a guru who gives spiritual advice as to whether they are genuine, for in this age the criteria are blurred unless a teacher belongs to a lineage that has its well-defined rules of ethics. In the case of Ramesh or Poonjaji or any other claimant we are left relying on our own discrimination,

which is at best erratic and subjective. The one reliable gauge is the feeling of peace. If that quality is present we are on the right track.

When reviewing prominent teachers there is a thin line dividing what the author has written and what has been said about the teacher. We should be aware that the teacher and the teaching can be different. It is when someone claims to be the summation of the teaching that the problem arises. If we keep this in mind we won't be disappointed when say, a teacher's personal failings are exposed. Very few teachers are exempt from the strong temptation exerted by power, sex and money.

If we are to believe someone, can their personal life be at variance with what they teach even if it is valid? Does what they say and what they actually are make any difference to our understanding? That is debatable, but the impact of the teaching is in proportion to the wisdom of the teacher. We need to be very careful because due to instant communication nowadays, we can more easily perceive a gap between a teacher's personal actions and what they advise others to do. The days of innocence are over. Unfortunately, there are few whose ethical integrity is unimpeachable. We can learn from everyone, the question is to what extent. It is a painful process of trial and error. In India there is the attitude toward *sannyas*: always respect the robes but not necessarily the wearer. Respect the teaching but be discriminating in regard to the teacher.

This is a predicament which confronts all on the spiritual path. If the teacher claims no special dispensation we are free to accept what is beneficial and leave the rest. If indeed all is Consciousness and all are equally enlightened, there is no difference of standard. All are judged by the same measure; there are no exceptions.

In reviewing these books and their, at times, controversial content, I am aware that there is an opening for criticism. However, today there are some apparently legitimate and also so many obviously bogus teachers who invoke the name of Ramana, the magazine is obliged to offer some comment that may in part clarify the confusion for devotees. We recommend that all who subscribe to this magazine should read and practise the teachings as presented by Bhagavan, but if they should read other literature, to accept what is in accordance with Bhagavan and leave the rest. ▲

BOOK REVIEWS



THE TRANSCENDENT UNITY OF RELIGIONS
by Frithjof Schuon. 2005. Indica Books, D 40/18
Godowlia, Varanasi-221 001 (U.P.), pp. 173, Rs225.

Upon reading an earlier edition of this text, T. S. Eliot wrote, "I have met with no more impressive work, in the study of Oriental and Occidental Religion, than *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*."

Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) was the author of more than twenty books. A student of Rene Guenon and widely regarded as one of the twentieth century's most important representatives of the *philosophia perennis*, he is a central figure in the field of comparative religion.

The Transcendent Unity of Religions is among Schuon's earliest works and has endured the test of time, proving itself a classic. Though slightly technical and nuanced, it is original in the most literal sense: not preoccupying itself with current themes and concerns of contemporary comparative religion, it risks creatively crossing into uncharted territory. It does not orient itself philosophically, but in Schuon's words, 'metaphysically', which, in his view, is centred in the Intellect or 'uncreated' divine knowledge, the only site at which true inter-religious commonalities can be perceived. With respect to religion, Schuon makes a distinction between its exoteric and esoteric dimensions. Religion, he says, "translates metaphysical or universal truths into dogmatic language." This is the exoteric dimension, where truths are expressed in cultural-specific forms: symbols, names, words and concepts. This together with

the historical and cultural packaging is what distinguishes one religion from another, (even to the point that “they may [even] appear contradictory”). The esoteric is the “internal dimension, that is, the infinite Truth that dominates all forms”, i.e., religion’s universal aspect. The exoteric is overt, visible, audible and engages the practitioner in faith practices. The esoteric is hidden, veiled, and not immediately available to the senses but is recognized only through the Intellect (or intuition). It is at this level where the ‘transcendent unity’ occurs.

— M.S. Balasubramanian



DEVI: THE DEVI BHAGAVATAM RETOLD by Ramesh Menon. 2005, Rupa & Co., New Delhi. pp.514. Rs.595.

The Devi Bhagavatam was reputedly written in sixth century Bengal. It is quite a long work of 18,000 slokas, and the only historical text available is in Bengali with some Hindi commentaries. It is a compendium of familiar myths about Devi as well as little known legends that refer to pre-Vedic religion of the Goddess. It is a Shakta Purana that extols the greatness of Devi in all her beneficent and terrifying aspects. The Bhagavatam shows Devi as Adiparashakti. She is Durga, Kali, Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Parvati. All the principal stories of her greatness are included, and her magnificent, invincible stature is repeatedly established through all the tales in this revered scripture.

Is an unusual collection of stories where Vysya, Narada, Narayana, Harischandra, Brahma, Siva appear while Devi makes known her various, glorious aspects. There are excerpts from the Mahabharata, Devi Mahatmyam and the Puranas. The mix indicates that it was composed to reignite the fervour of devotion among the general population. There are stories within stories within stories and Mr. Menon has successfully kept the logic and story line straight enough for the reader to follow easily the thread without sacrificing the complexity and richness of the myths.

Swami Vijnanananda, a direct disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, made the first English translation in 1921 and this abridged translation is based on it. With great sensitivity, Mr. Menon has created in this amalgam of stories, a freshness of tone with his modern, wide and poetic vocabulary. It is neither sanctimonious nor cliché ridden. It is alive with

a warm and tender sense of bhakti. For the more conservative minded they may find the translation has taken too many liberties with the traditional bhavas towards Devi and made her perhaps, ‘too human’ for comfort but this translation does inspire and does tell a good story. We see in this book the genius of Hinduism, which can renew itself for each generation with ancient stories made over once more into something new, sparkling and alive with curiosity. — Peter Pichelman



OVERCOMING ANGER by Swami Budhananda. 2005. <www.sriramakrishnamath.org> Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. pp.130, Rs 20.

We are all beset by this hindrance which can wreck our equanimity. More so now in our modern world where the demands on our time and energy have increased to a degree we find untenable at times.

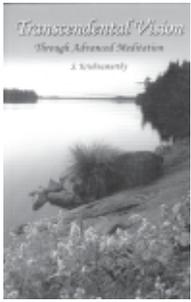
The quote from the Bhagavad Gita II, 62-63, on the back cover is sufficiently important to cite here: “In one who dwells longingly on sense objects, an inclination towards them is generated. This inclination develops into desire, and desire begets anger. Anger generates delusion, and delusion results in loss of memory. Loss of memory brings about the destruction of discriminative intelligence, and the loss of discriminative intelligence spells ruin to a man.”

Swami Turiyananda who apparently was the mentor of the author says that anger is ‘concentrated desire’. When our desire is thwarted we burst into a rage. Desire arises from rajas. The problem is how to channel the power of rajas in a positive way to create sattva? It means “separating the energy source from its destructive aspect”.

The swami presents us with a brief survey of how various traditions teach the aspirant to overcome anger: Sri Krishna’s teachings, the yoga way, the path shown by the Buddha and the Christian methods. There are also practical guides which assist us not to be swallowed up by these powerful impulses which can blight our lives. If we are indulgent with this weakness it will ruin our composure and poison our lives.

Though it is a modest volume in size there is much wisdom to be gained from this cogent and useful text. In particular, Swami Vivekananda’s commentary on Raja Yoga about the mechanics of thought waves was valuable. — T.V. Ramamurthy

TRANSCENDENTAL VISION by S. Krishnamurthy. 2004 Pub: 90 VI Main, V Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore 560041. pp. 183. No price given.



This book reveals that author has had considerable experience in meditation. It develops the topic in a methodical and straightforward presentation shorn of hyperbole and cliché. There are no footnotes to artificially bolster the argument and the text throughout is confident and assured. The author's knowledge of meditation, both theoretical and practical is quite evident. I was pleasantly surprised how comprehensive and detailed were the discussions.

The emphasis is on the practical nature of meditation and the way in which to still the mind. There is much wisdom to be found in the pages of this modest book and I would recommend it to any who are starting on the path and need straight-forward guidance by one who has travelled the path.

— Amrit Ray

ABHINAVAGUPTA'S COMMENTARY OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA (GITARTHA SAMGRAHA). Trans. with Introduction and Notes by Boris Marjanovic. 2002. Indica Press. Varanasi. pp.368, Rs.375.



Abhinavagupta was a giant among giants in the fields of Philosophy, Aesthetics, Poety, Tantra, and Spirituality. His commentary on the Bhagavad Gita is important because it was on the Kashmiri version of the Gita which differs from other versions in that it contains fifteen additional verses and also contains many verses which partially differ from verses found in other recensions. As well, he elucidates the verses' meanings in the context of Kashmir Saiva philosophy.

Abhinavagupta states that he wrote this commentary in order to reveal the esoteric, deeper secret inner meanings contained in the Gita. This book will be of great interest to scholars of Kashmir Saivism as well as to anyone interested in the practice of the secret yoga of the Gita.

— John Grimes



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Dramatic Change in Life

I have read four issues of the *Mountain Path*, since I visited Ramana Ashram in December 2005. I used to read each article three times: they compromise a classic, could it not be possible to issue it monthly?

After having so many thoughts, I am writing of my experiences, affected by having being exposed to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings. There is not a single word of exaggeration in my narration of events. It is based on truth although to some it may seem like a fairy tale.

In about October 2004, I was elevated as a High Court Judge. Prior to my elevation, I had some health problems, including acidity, migraine, high blood pressure with frequent colds and viral fever.

After becoming a judge, these ailments increased, despite treatment due to the pressure and tension of work. Within a month, things became so serious that I was admitted into the Bombay Hospital, Indore. I was examined extensively at the Hospital where its doctors advised me that in my present working circumstances, it is not possible to completely cure my ailments and I must take the medicines life long for blood pressure, headache, acidity and allergy.

Within three months, I was fed up with every one of the medicines. Perhaps as a sort of protest, then I started practising pranayama and some yoga exercises especially surya namaskar.

From a local bookstore of spiritual books, I purchased Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*. I completed reading the book within seven days. Thereafter I reread the chapters of the book about Bhagavan many

times and as many times, wept. I was impressed very much by the following answers given by Bhagavan Maharshi to Paul Brunton's questions. To quote:-

"The life of action need not be renounced. If you meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea. The same line which you have taken in meditation will be expressed in your activities."

Paul Brunton also commented to the Maharshi, "This path is full of difficulties, I am so conscious of my own weakness."

The Maharshi answered, "This is the surest way to handicap oneself. This is burdening of one's mind with the fear of failure and thought of one's failing. That fear is not true. The greatest error of a man is to think that he is weak by nature, evil by nature. Every man is divine and strong in his real nature. What are weak and evil are his habits, his desires and thoughts but not himself."

After this, my life changed. I started practising meditation as told by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, one and a half hour in the morning plus pranayama and some yogic asanas. I have noticed many changes, initially there were difficulties but they were gradually removed. I experienced currents and some clouds of energy encircling my head.

After about three months, I saw two legs below the knee in my meditation, which at that time, I could not recognize. Two days thereafter my secretary, who had read Maharshi literature gave me a magazine published from the Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore. In it, there was a photograph of the Maharshi in his young days at Virupaksha cave, sitting on a rock. I immediately recognized the images of the lotus feet of Bhagavan seen during my meditation. Thereafter, I purchased more books about Bhagavan and studied them. I also started meditation in the evening for an hour.

Within four months my ailments, headache, acidity and allergy were controlled completely so that I stopped taking nearly all medicines. My doctors were surprised telling me that it was impossible. At present, I am taking only one medicine, for blood pressure. I am used to working twelve hours continuously but have had no headache or migraine for the past six months. In December, I visited Ramanashram. There I saw Virupaksha Cave, Bhagavan's Samadhi and other places. In the evening at

around eight o'clock at Circuit House at Tiruvannamalai in my meditation, I saw a bright silver white light for two seconds at which my whole body became unconscious: I cannot otherwise describe the brightness of the light.

At present, I am practising meditation as told by Bhagavan (self-enquiry), two hours in the morning, pranayama and some asanas for one hour in the evening. I have photographs of Bhagavan at my chamber, office and bedroom. During meditation, I experienced that some charged energy encircled me like a wave; this occurred in normal time too, sometimes I having been lost completely and become like a balloon having its central point at the right side of the heart. By keeping open eyes in focused attention, I used to see white particles full of white rays. I woke up around three o'clock one morning and experienced some energy encircling my body. I saw the bearded white shining face of Bhagavan and thereafter some white lightning up to four to three seconds such as I had seen at Tiruvannamalai.

Now I am a person full of joy and energy. All my ailments except blood pressure have been cured. This is a blessing; a miracle which has happened in my life by the mercy of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

— J.S.K. Hangele, Indore

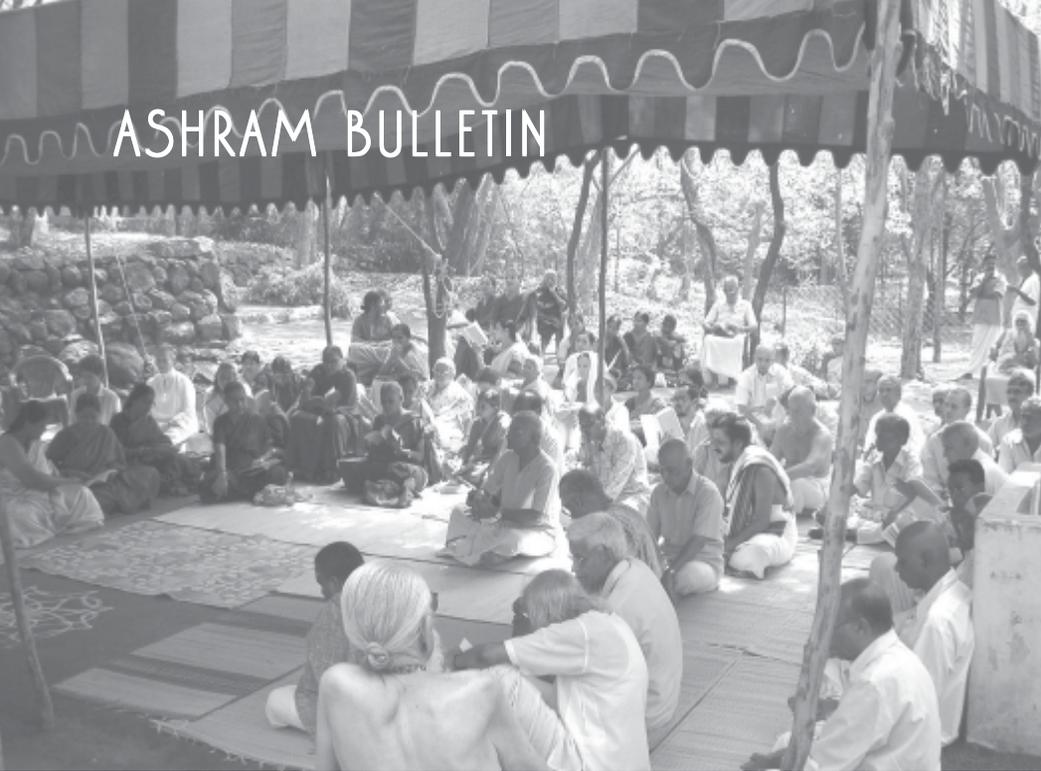
The Study of the Scriptures and Renunciation

I would like to take up two points in the article by Swami Madhurananda in the Advent 2006 *Mountain Path*.

The study of the scripture is an important stepping stone for seekers if they are to grasp the fundamentals of Vedanta and learn how to proceed correctly. Once we have a basic and comprehensive knowledge we can practise dhyana with confidence. Bhagavan often referred to *sastras*, in particular the Tamil advaitic works, in response to questions.

If one reads the various books written on Bhagavan, it shows he did not encourage the act of renunciation when a request was made by a hesitant devotee who wanted Bhagavan's advice and approval. However, it should be remembered that if a sadhak is mature, a strong, insistent call can come from within to renounce the world and concentrate exclusively on atma-vichara. When this definitive call happens one can take the step knowing Bhagavan's Grace is present.

— M.T. Bhayasam, Kolkata



Jayanthi Centenary Celebrations of Sri Janaky Matha, Thanjavur

On the 12th August the centenary celebrations of Sri Janaky Matha were conducted at her shrine at 15 Ganapthy Nagar, West Street, Thanjavur. Srimati Janaky Matha was closely associated with Bhagavan and regularly visited the ashram during Bhagavan's lifetime. She was recognised as a saint in her lifetime and was well known in Thanjavur for her charity work and acceptance of all irrespective of caste or creed. She was a loving guide to many who sought solace and direction in their lives. Attaining Mahasamadhi in 1969, a temple was constructed and a Siva lingam installed. A small ashram functions today in her honour and engages in prayer and meditation as well as social work such as poor feeding. The ashram president and other devotees attended the function.



Muruganar and Kunjuswami Samadhi Days

Monday, August 7 (*Pradosham*) brought the annual remembrance of Sri Kunjuswami's Samadhi (in 1992). Devotees and friends of this beloved devotee of Bhagavan came from far and near to gather for puja at his shrine at the rear of the Ashram. Chanting of *Aksharamanamalai* began around 8 am and until the final arati at 11 am. Sri Muruganar's Samadhi day was celebrated on August 23rd with the chanting of his *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*.

110th Anniversary of Sri Bhagavan's Advent to Arunachala

On the morning of *Navami*, a Tuesday, 110 years ago, Bhagavan stepped into Arunachala Kshetram and from that day on never left Arunachala's Holy Feet. That was the 1st of September, 1896, a day that marked the beginning of an epoch. This year the Advent celebrations brought the traditional morning Mahanyasa puja and a special abhishekam at the big temple around 8 am. On Sunday, 3rd September, Ramana Kendra, Chennai celebrated the event with lectures on the *Gita* by Acharyan Gagan Chaithanya of Chinmaya Mission. Prize winners of the Interschool Competition in Elocution and Bhajan were participating.

Mountain of Medicine and Greening Efforts

Near the Ashram at the foot of the mountain situated on five acres of land adjacent to the eco-park (land previously used as a municipal dumping ground), a public playground for children is nearing completion. *Mountain of Medicine* has been involved in re-planting and watering the avenue trees around the giri pradakshina road, and is reforesting twelve acres of municipal land at the Samudra Lake. This and other greening organizations have been instrumental in the dramatic decrease in fires on the Hill in recent years. In 2004 less than 25% of the Hill burned. In 2005 less than 15%, and so far this year less than 3%.

Other Projects

Funds are being made available to address Tiruvannamalai's dog overpopulation problem. A number of strategies are under review. Funds (10 lakhs) and plans for a museum near the Ashram are being finalised. The pradakshina road is undergoing monthly clean-ups thanks to the *Asta Lingam Paribalana Trust*. (Excerpts on urban renewal and hill greening adapted from *Arunachala Grace* newsletter. For more info, see <http://www.arunachalagrace.blogspot.com>.)

Obituary

Dr. V. Gauri Shankar

Dr. V. Gauri Shankar, Executive President Ramana Kendra, Delhi, attained the lotus feet of Bhagavan Ramana in the early hours of 13th August. Brought to Bhagavan by his father as a young boy, he remained a devotee the rest of his life. When asked by Bhagavan what he wanted, the youngster replied in all innocence that he wanted to score high marks in his examinations. Bhagavan gave a chuckle and kept quiet. Since that time, however, he always stood at the top of his class and went on to obtain a doctorate in international law. When the Paramacharya of Kanchi requested him to practise in the Supreme Court in Delhi 'to help deserving cases', he did so and went on to become a highly respected official in the *Revenue Audit Dept* as well as at the *Economic Administrative Reforms Commission* and was seen by many as the foremost authority in taxation matters. He retired as Additional Secretary in the *Ministry of Finance* and for more than twenty years, rendered yeoman service to the Kendra and in propagating Bhagavan's teachings in the nation's capital.



Smt. N. Vedambal

Smt. N. Vedambal, mother of Sri N. Somasundaram, manager of Sri Ramana Mandiram, Madurai, reached Bhagavan Ramana's abode on Tuesday August 22nd, 2006, at the age of 80. For more than 60 years Smt. N. Vedambal, known as Mathaji, was a staunch devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. A devoted singer, Mathaji dedicated herself to staying near Sri Ramana Mandiram and never wished to go anywhere else including the nearby Sri Meenakshi Temple. Mathaji was known for her hospitality, always extending a warm welcome to all of Bhagavan's devotees, foreign or local, who came to visit her.

