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Ramana Ashtottaram

44. ओम् गम्भीराय नमः

Om gambhīrāya namaḥ

Prostration to the one whose majesty is deep as it is high.

Gambhirah means majestic; deep and high; of vast vertical dimension. *Jnana gambhīrya* is the stillness at the depth of the ocean even though the surface may be ruffled by waves; it is the firmness of a huge mountain unmoved by the winds that blow around. Bhagavan's profundity cannot be gauged by the ordinary mind.

45. ओम् परमाचार्याय नमः

Om paramācāryāya namaḥ

Prostration to the supreme teacher.

Bhagavan was a manifestation of Dakshinamurti, the aspect of Siva as the supreme teacher of supreme reality. He was a *jnana guru*, teacher of teachers.

46. ओम् सुप्रसन्नाय नमः

Om suprasannāya namaḥ

Prostration to the one whose presence is pure grace.

Siva's grace takes form as the *Sadguru*. Bhagavan was born to embody this grace; he was the visible manifestation of Siva. ▲

EDITORIAL

Surrender

Some years after Sri Ramana arrived at Arunachala, his mother and his elder brother came with the specific intention of asking him to return with them to the family home at Madurai. Despite their pleas, Bhagavan was unmoved and declined to answer as he was not speaking at that time. Eventually he did reply in writing on a slip of paper:

“The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their destiny (*prarabdhakarma*). Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.”¹

Bhagavan had surrendered to a higher power he called Arunachala, which transcended personal considerations. He was not being

¹ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* by Arthur Osborne, Chapter Five.

intentionally cruel nor was he in denial. He neither rejected nor acceded to his mother's request. Her plea was beside the point. He simply saw further and deeper that the forces at work in this world contained a higher purpose for him.

Later in life, Bhagavan was often asked what alternative method was available for those who found self-enquiry too difficult. He would reply that aside from self-enquiry there is surrender. When we reflect on Sri Ramana's life we realise that he exemplified both paths to enlightenment. On the fateful day that transformed his life in Madurai in 1896, driven by the fear of death, he plunged deep within and discovered the sense of his own intrinsic being. He realised that his so-called separate individuality was a phantom. Freed of implicit demands as a member of a family, he remembered the call of Arunachala and surrendered to this divine power. The attraction to Arunachala had originally been ignited by an uncle who had visited there several years earlier. The young Venkataraman was awestruck at the very name of Arunachala and when the time came, like a mythic hero he stepped out of the familiar patterns and went "in quest of his Father."²

There are critical times in our lives when we apparently have definitive choices, we are faced with decisions which will irrevocably affect the way we live. However we should always bear in mind that our only real choice is whether to identify with these choices or not; that is why Bhagavan advised us to pay heed to each moment of our lives; nothing is too small that we can dismiss it outright without appropriate consideration. If we see events and people in their proper perspective then we can surrender to the moment and do what is apt.

In our relationship with Bhagavan it would be a mistake to think that surrender is a passive posture in which we wait helpless and supine for something to happen to us — in this case, hopefully, the guru's grace. Surrender is not a feeble, vulnerable attitude of object submission,

² "I have set out in quest of my Father in accordance with his command. It is on a virtuous enterprise that this has embarked, therefore let none grieve over this act and let no money be spent in search of this." *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* by Arthur Osborne, Chapter Three.

nor is it a magic ticket which renders us free of any responsibility to make an effort. Right surrender is just as intense and subtle as self-enquiry. It requires us to be open and alert to the workings of the guru's grace. It calls for trust that what happens is for the best even in the midst of seeming disaster and discord, for life is a mirror which shows us at each moment who we think we are. It is a reflection of our thoughts and deeds.

These two approaches advised by Bhagavan, self-enquiry and surrender, are actually two sides of the same coin. Both are based on the premise that we have a definite centre of consciousness we call 'I'. We have the choice of either questioning the fundamental assumptions we have about this identity by asking 'Who am I?', or, by assuming that we are who we seem, willingly offering this image up like a *yagna*, a sacrifice in order to achieve the same clarity. The Sanskrit word for surrender is *saranagati* which literally means 'to offer oneself up'.³ By letting go of notions we have consciously or more often unconsciously adopted, we are released from the cycle of cause and effect. We consciously flow with the tide of events without resistance or without demanding that things be altered according to our wishes. We accept the reality which occurs before our eyes and trust that what happens is for the best no matter how unlikely that may seem. When we are alert in the moment life is an endless series of opportunities to learn.⁴

For some people the term surrender has a passive, negative connotation of defeat and weakness. This is not the intention when we discuss the activity of surrender. Acceptance is another legitimate expression. Our minds by nature produce thoughts and our heart, emotions. This is their nature and to stop thought and emotion makes us zombies. When we surrender to a situation or recognise and accept

³ *Sarana* mean protection and *agati* means approaching (for). Thus it means approaching for protection or seeking refuge. The implication is that one does not depend on one's own strength but seeks or offers up one's trust in a higher power.

⁴ "There is a tide in the affairs of men,/ Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;/ Omitted, all the voyages of their life/Is bound in shallows and in miseries./ On such a full sea are we now afloat,/And we must take the current when it serves,/ Or lose our venture." Act IV, Scene III. *Julius Caesar* by W. Shakespeare.

a thought, we are not overwhelmed and swept away by the power of it; we do not deny it but see that because situations and thoughts come and go, they are inherently unstable and contain no lasting substance; we only empower them when we identify with our thoughts rather than observing and remembering our sense of being which has no name or form.

In our lives we should use thought much like a tool but more often we are engulfed by our thoughts. The attitude of calm acceptance is a position of strength and courage. When we surrender to the moment and accept or recognise things as they are without reacting, we are untouched; we achieve detachment (*vairagya*).

It is not easy to establish this state. In the same way that we use a thorn to remove a thorn, we can methodically use the mind through self-enquiry to cleanse itself of useless and disturbing thoughts. We surrender confident in the knowledge that it is what is best for us.

When surrender or acceptance occurs there are two ways of reacting; either we can consciously reject further involvement for we see no purpose in it, or we assent and allow what is to happen unfold without resistance.

Our attitude to challenges can take many guises. According to the habits of mind which we have adopted, we see life either as an opportunity to learn and grow or as a world of disappointment because it rarely lives up to our expectations.

We can consciously cultivate an attitude which will assist us to overcome our deficiencies and ignorance. Surrender in these circumstances means commitment to what we think and feel is important and in our case, it is the relationship to the guru or the truth. There is a difference between the impersonal (*nirguna*) aspect of Brahman and the personal (*saguna*) aspect of a deity or guru. Mahatma Gandhi was the example of one wholly committed to the *nirguna* aspect, the impersonal Truth which overrode all personal considerations. Mirabhai is an example of one who personalised the truth in the form of Giridhar, Lord Krishna. She spoke to him; she played with him and ultimately was absorbed into him. Bhagavan encapsulated both aspects in his devotion and one-pointed attention to this sovereign force, Arunachala.

We see in Bhagavan's heartfelt song, 'The Marital Garland of Letters', the intense longing of the heart for that which was both friend and mentor. For us too, Arunachala is a mysterious magnet which draws us and we can in a positive act of surrender succumb to its spell with love. We see in Bhagavan's outpourings that Arunachala is not an unfeeling pile of rocks, any more than a guru is merely a body, but rather a living entity whose compassion can cleanse the impurities of the devotee who is open and receptive.

All our thoughts and feelings are legitimate tools towards understanding. It is a question of realising that our attitude determines whether we can transcend the pair of opposites. It is important to focus the mind to the exclusion of all impermanent, distracting thoughts which eat up one's time and energy. By nature the mind wavers and if we carefully scrutinise the thoughts which are churned out, we see a see-saw as we veer from one extreme to another. Our purpose is to remain engaged and be attentive to the passing moment without identifying with it. We then see that thoughts come in pairs: attraction, repulsion; love, hatred; activity, indolence; humility, contempt. When we concentrate on them we realise that they are parts of a whole. Until we recognise and pay heed to their significance we cannot be free of their binding power. If we can we see that they do not detract but rather enhance the richness of our understanding, then instead of enemies they become our friends.

Arunachala and Sri Ramana are one steady star; the fixed pole by which we travel. When we surrender to the journey they guide us not by interference but by identification, for we too are part of the whole. When we let go and surrender to the moment there is no difference between us for "we are caught in the trap of Thy Grace."⁵ ▲

⁵The Marital Garland of Letters (*Arunachala-Aksharamanamalai*), verse 102.



Self-Enquiry and Work

MUKESH ESWARAN AND VINAYAK ESWARAN

Sri Ramana Maharshi recommended self-enquiry (vichara) and surrender as the two approaches to Self-realization. Surrender is emphasised as an important avenue not only in Hinduism but also in Christianity and, indeed, in most of the major spiritual traditions. The use of self-enquiry, on the other hand, is more restricted. Nevertheless, this powerful method has been a staple of a few other traditions, particularly Zen Buddhism.¹ Vichara is an intellectual activity: it necessarily engages the mind even though the goal is to go beyond mind. For most people, however, work is a very important part of life and in this they have to apply their minds. Earning a living

¹ How Sri Ramana's vichara practice works is explained in, *e.g.*, David Godman's book, *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*. The use of self-enquiry in Zen Buddhism can be found in, *e.g.*, Philip Kapleau's *Three Pillars of Zen*.

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occupies at least eight hours of each weekday and often most of one's activities on these days revolve around work. Should one necessarily abandon vichara during these working hours? Or is there a way in which work can be integrated with self-enquiry? This essay deals with these questions. After first briefly reviewing the core principle of self-enquiry, this article suggests how work may be assimilated with vichara. In short, the method involves combining vichara and surrender — the two methods prescribed by Sri Ramana.

According to enlightened sages, one's true self is God (the Self) and God is pure awareness or consciousness, 'I am' or That-Which-Is. Sri Ramana identified the best definition of God as the quote from the Bible, "*I AM THAT I AM*" (which, incidentally, is the only sentence in the Bible that is fully capitalized). The ego, which has no independent existence, is responsible for the mistaken identification of one's being with the body and mind. Vichara is a technique for Self-realization which emphasizes the consciousness ('I am') aspect of the ego. As Sri Ramana has said, just like the scent of his master (when adhered to resolutely) leads a dog to him, this consciousness aspect of the ego (when adhered to resolutely) leads one to the Self.

If the ego has no independent existence, how does it survive? It survives by identifying with objects: mainly thoughts and concepts — thoughts associated with occurrences of the past, expectations of the future, likes, dislikes, ambitions, desires, envy, pride, greed, etc., and concepts regarding oneself and about status, reputation, honour, attainment, good, bad, etc. Thus egoistic life is essentially life in a conceptual world, and one's image of oneself is the most primitive of these concepts. Although it fancies itself the subject, in reality the ego is itself an object that can be perceived like other objects by awareness.

An important peculiarity of the ego is that it is able to identify with and feed on objects only when it is not being scrutinized, that is, when attention is directed to other objects. The Achilles heel of the ego is that it weakens when it is investigated — since it is then unable to attach itself to objects. Self-enquiry exploits this cardinal weakness of the ego in order to destroy it. The idea behind vichara is to keep one's attention riveted on the apparent subject, namely, the ego (or "I-thought"), so

that it is unable to identify with objects. As is well-known, the technique proposed by Sri Ramana consists in constantly enquiring "Who am I?" or persistently holding on to the 'I-thought'.

In self-enquiry, any and every experience can be used to point one back to the I-thought. For example, if one hears a sound, one could ask, "Who hears that?"; if one feels fear, one could ask, "Who feels afraid?", and so on. One has to become, as they recommend in Zen Buddhist practice, a 'profound mass of doubt and questioning', asking "Who is walking, talking, eating, etc.?", "Who is meditating?", "Who is seeking Realization?". The notion that there is *someone* seeking enlightenment has to be demolished because that notion only strengthens the ego.

Because the ego has no independent existence, like a thief it can operate only when it is unnoticed. The constant scrutiny which vichara subjects the ego to is akin to a searchlight being shone on a thief. When this scrutiny is sustained for a sufficiently long period, it finally results in the dissolution of the ego. All thoughts—including the thought "Who am I?"— are destroyed in the end, leaving pure consciousness as the eternal and indestructible Subject. The goal of sadhana is to become aware of the ultimate Subject (the Self). Vichara is said to be a direct path to Realization, since it never invokes any object at any stage of the sadhana whereas most other yogas invariably do.

Since most people need to work in order to subsist, an important practical question facing aspirants is: How can the practice of vichara be incorporated into an active life? How is one to practise self-enquiry when one is working?

This can be done through a synthesis of vichara and karma yoga. To see how this may be accomplished, we must first note that dwelling in the present moment differs from dwelling on the past or on the future. Going into the past or the future is always conceptual (it always involves thinking), *but being present is not conceptual*. Thus attention devoted strictly to the present prevents separation from the 'I am' consciousness. In contrast, pondering over the past or the future invariably introduces a separation *because that is a conceptual exercise*

which connects the past, present, and future through the ego, which is the presumed experiencer of all three. Continuous adherence to the present moment, therefore, undermines the ego since the ego requires continuous conceptualization to survive.

The above observation enables one to incorporate work into the practice of self enquiry. At each moment one asks oneself, “*What is my task of the present moment?*”² Then, without forethought or afterthought, one goes about performing this task that has presented itself as the thing to be done.

Bondage from work stems from the assumption that one is the doer of actions, as the *Bhagavad Gita* forcibly points out, for if we (the ego) assume doership the ego also has to suffer the consequences of those actions. To avoid such bondage one has to perform the work *unselfconsciously*, without fixating on either its fruits (i.e., the future) or on the circumstances (i.e., the past) that necessitated the work, or on feelings of attraction and repulsion towards the work, or on distractions that may arise during its performance.

It must be noted that the work of the present moment is usually very mundane, like peeling potatoes, writing a letter, polishing one’s shoes, or taking a bus. This is as it should be, since almost all the activities in one’s life are very ordinary. This task is *not* to be determined by asking oneself questions like “What should an ideal aspirant or an enlightened person be doing at the present moment?”. It would be futile to attempt answering this question because the mind would only suggest an answer based on some preconceived mental notions about what is ideal — notions which have no relationship to *That-Which-Is*, namely, Reality.³

²This practice has been advocated by the great Christian mystic Jean Pierre Caussade of the 17th and 18th Centuries and is masterfully laid out in his classic work, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*.

³This goes counter to the practice that is currently popular in some circles in the West, where one is urged to ask: “What would Jesus do in this situation?”. Whatever benefit asking this question may offer to those wishing to lead an ethical life, this route is not conducive to the pursuit of enlightenment. Since people generally have no idea what Jesus would do, they invariably will take up some suggestion of their own subconscious mind and attribute it to Christ.

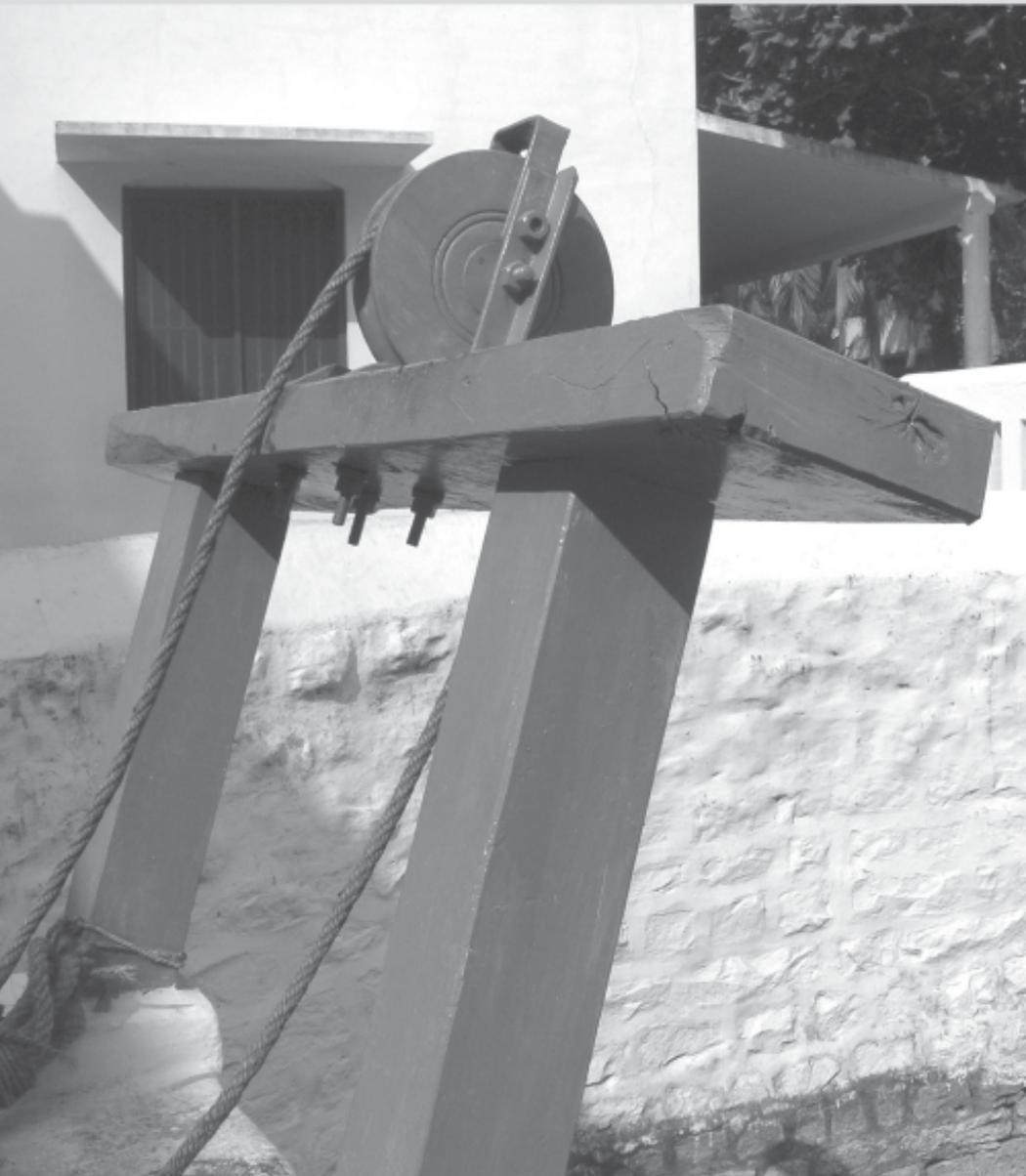
Rather, what is required is the smooth and unselfconscious execution of the action that presents itself as the thing to be done; it is this that minimizes the scope for the mind to conceptualize.

Performing work as the practice of the task of the present moment has several attractive features. First, it prevents conceptualization since it refers only to the present moment and avoids all thoughts about the past or the future. Second, with practice it enables one to engage in spiritual activity throughout even the busiest of days, even in the busiest of professions. Most importantly, it encourages openness and surrender since the activity of the present moment is determined without preconceptions, expectations, or preferences and is simply identified as what has manifested itself in the present moment as the thing to be done. In a wider sense, this surrender is all the more profound since it enables us to perform all the work that confronts us and allows us the recourse to say, “I have done my best; the rest is up to Him.” This is precisely the kind of action that Sri Krishna recommends to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, saying, “Yoga is skill in action.”

Sri Ramana said, “Karma yoga is that yoga in which the person does not arrogate to himself the function of being the actor. All actions go on automatically....So karma yoga is ‘kartritva buddhi rahita karma’—action without the sense of doership.”⁴ Thus the practice of the activity of the present moment also has to be done automatically, and without a sense of doership — which is an attitude that comes only with practice.

Adhering to the task of the present moment encourages surrender. Indeed, it is surrender in action. Sri Ramana advocated surrender as the other means of attaining enlightenment, equal in power to vichara itself. This sadhana combines the techniques of jnana and karma yogas in a way that it can be used by people who are constantly busy in the activities of their profession and means of livelihood. ▲

⁴ Quoted in David Godman, *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, Chapter 13.



‘Na’ iti, ‘Na’ iti: The Power of Now

I. S. MADUGULA

Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a master o’er a Slave
A Presence which is not to be put by;¹

Everything around us, according to the poet, reminds us of our divine origin, whether we are creationists or evolutionists. For the latter, there was the ever-present Energy leading up to the Big Bang. The *Presence* just cannot be ignored. “The earth and every common sight” is “Appareled in celestial light.”²

¹ Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of *Early Childhood*, VIII, by William Wordsworth (1770-1850).

² *Ibid.*, I, 4.

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Neti, Neti

Generally and somewhat approximately translated as 'Not this, not this,' the concept of *neti* is far-reaching and overarching in Upanishadic philosophy.³ Indeed, it is the very essence of that philosophy and the core of its teaching. Whatsoever is perceived by the senses and grasped by the mind and intellect is suffused by the Self which, simultaneously, is greater than the totality of the sensory input. The Self is the knower of all knowers. No one or nothing can know It. But the individual self can attempt to find its kinship — in fact, identity — with It by jettisoning all the detritus acquired through an assortment of 'limiting adjuncts' along the path of life. The uncontrolled mind is a major culprit in the obscuring of the Self. Sankara says that one should comprehend the identity of the individual self and the Universal Self by rejecting the limitations such as the body, mind, space, time, etc.⁴ This brief essay aims to discuss that process of liberation of the individual from the shackles of fortuitous circumstance that define the so-called 'human condition'.

Let's start first by checking Bhagavan's take on the concept of *neti*:

The Vedas are eloquent in '*neti*' — '*neti*' (not this — not this) and then remain silent. Their silence is the Real State. This is the meaning of exposition by silence. When the source of the 'I'-thought is reached it vanishes and what remains over is the Self.⁵

There is no wrong identification of the Self with the body, senses, etc. You proceed to discard these, and this is *neti*. This can be done only by holding to the one which cannot be discarded. That is *iti* alone.⁶

When a devotee claims that '*neti, neti*' is merely a negative approach to the Self and not a positive guide, Bhagavan explains:

"A man wants to know what he is. He sees animals and objects around him. He is told: 'You are not a cow, not a horse, not a tree, not

this, not that, and so on.' If again he asks saying, 'You have not said what I am,' the answer will be, 'It is not said you are not a man.' He must find out for himself that he is a man. So you must find out for yourself what you are.

"You are told, 'You are not this body, nor the mind, nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor anything you can think of; find out what truly you are.' Silence denotes that the questioner is himself the Self that is to be found."⁷

Analyze *This (idam)*⁸

In Vedantic terminology, *idam* refers to all that is seen, ranging from one's body all the way to the created universe. It is the world as we know it, with all its diversity. It can also refer to the mind insofar as it is of the nature of matter. Given this conglomeration of disparate elements, it is totally different from the Spirit, which is unified. Its consciousness, where it exists, is derivative. *Idam* by definition is inert, insensitive, and unilluminated. However, because of reflected illumination, it appears to be conscious and lively. Logically, anything that admits of multiplicity and variety cannot be permanent or self-sufficient. In it there is room for emotion, attachment, fear, and death. *Idam* is born, suffers, and dies. It is the seen as opposed to the seer. In Sankara's succinct formulation:⁹

The object is the seen and the eye is the seer. The eye is the seen and the mind is its seer. The mind with all its properties is the seen and the Self witnesses that mind.

That is, the Self witnesses the mind that sees the eye that sees the object. Thus what all constitutes *idam* can be said to exist not by itself but because of information inherently supplied by the Self. The Self is the knower of all there is to know that goes by the rubric *idam*. It is very important to keep this in mind when discussing the phenomenal world and its spurious existence.

³ *Brhadaranyaka*, 2.3.6, 3.9.26, 4.2.4, 4.4.22 & 4.5.15.

⁴ Sankara, *Atmabodha*, 30.

⁵ Talk 130. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Talk 366.

⁷ Talk 620. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

⁸ No reference to the 1999 movie.

⁹ See Sankara, *Drg-drsya-viveka*, 1.

Analyze *That (tat)*¹⁰

That is what *Thou art*, according to the scripture but, before the equation is realized, one needs to experience at the gut level (in *buddhi*, that is¹¹) that *That* is the Ultimate, the Real, the Changeless — *Brahman*. It's the Universal Soul, subsuming the individual soul, *jiva*. *That* is what remains at the end of the *neti* process of elimination of *idam* or *This*. Since nature abhors a vacuum, the consciousness previously squandered on *idam* will now reflect *That*. Put another way, one can say that, after the total rejection of *idam*, *That* emerges in all its glory as the perennial substratum. Until one becomes capable of remaining forever in the effulgence of *That*, *idam* keeps exerting its pernicious influence on the *jiva* and tries to drag him down the murky waters of desire and *samsara*. However, once the rays of Immortality have quickened one's being, there is no turning back. In the midst of worldly existence, hope springs eternal and bliss fills the very crevices of the psyche. It is this kind of unforgettable happiness that Wordsworth refers to in the last stanza:¹²

O Joy! That in our embers/Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers/What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction:

...I raise

.....

The song of thanks and praise
For those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections.

Note that the poet speaks of a past time and its vague recollection in the present. It appears that he is not able to transform the past

memory into a current, living experience. To that extent, he is not living in the Now, which is the source of his dissatisfaction. His present is not the eternal present, which is beyond space and time, where there is neither memory nor recollection. It simply is, but this 'is' is not relative to a past or a future. It is entirely tenseless. It is only a *Now* of that kind that can bless us with total freedom and deliver us from the tyranny of memory. Memory is the inability of the mind to relinquish impressions of past experience¹³ and, as such, its nature is the very antithesis of Pure Consciousness that characterizes the Now.

And Now

Having analyzed *idam* and *tat* (speaking only from a tentative point of view for, by definition, *tat* is unanalyzable), we have to conclude that, when the mind is wiped out from the picture, consciousness is "refined, converted, and realigned from 'the coarse to the fine.' A new type of seeing becomes prominent, and perception, awareness, and experience conform more adequately and fully to the various levels of reality and truth in the universe."¹⁴ Furthermore, there will be a "new and vivid awareness of being in the present moment."¹⁵ We are now looking at Immortality face to face, the kind that the poet experienced as a child and vividly remembers as an adult.

Bhagavan's exposition of consciousness is authoritative, the state having been experienced at firsthand:¹⁶

It is wrong to suppose that awareness has passing phases. The Self is always aware. When the Self identifies itself as the seer it sees objects. The creation of the subject and the object is the creation of the world. Subjects and objects are creations in Pure Consciousness. You see pictures moving on the screen in a cinema show. When you are intent on the pictures you are not aware of the screen. But the pictures cannot be seen without the screen behind. The world stands for the pictures and Consciousness stands for the screen. The Consciousness is pure. It

¹³ *Yogasutra*, I, 11.

¹⁴ *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 'Consciousness, States of.' p. 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁶ Talk 453. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

¹⁰ No reference to the 2002 movie.

¹¹ *Atmabodha*, 17.

¹² *Immortality*, IX.

is the same as the Self which is eternal and unchanging. Get rid of the subject and the object and Pure Consciousness will alone remain.

Wordsworth laments that the “heaven that lies about us in our infancy” is relentlessly obfuscated by the prison house of the world into which “the growing Boy” enters, though he is still attended “by the vision splendid” on his way. Then¹⁷

At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of the common day.

That is, *idam* surreptitiously creeps into the territory of *tat*, or so it appears. But there is hope. The poet continues:¹⁸

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!

So the memory of the glimpses of immortality thankfully persists, egging us on to relive those experiences over and over again.

That’s where *Now* comes into the picture. We can relive that memory, and continue to live in the once-experienced bliss. *Now*, as we noted, is not just the present tense as opposed to the past and the future. Spacewise, it is infinite. Timewise, it is eternal.

In *Now* there is no feeling, because the mind has been frozen in time, or has merged into its origins. The experience of *idam* will be seen for what it is: an illusion. There is no seeing or hearing, for the senses disappear along with the mind. No speech, either, for that, too, has merged in the mind.¹⁹

The negation of *idam* can be a two-fold process: *idam* is only a mental projection and a shadow, but that shadow can be substantiated

¹⁷ *Intimations*, V, 18-19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, IX, 1-4.1.

¹⁹ *Brahmasutra*, IV, ii, 1.

by looking upon it as the play of Brahman, as an affirmation of the Eternal Presence.²⁰

Now is a single moment that is eternal in duration, or Eternity in an Instant, if you will. Devoid of action. Devoid of fear, because no other exists. Peaceful. Blissful. Utterly without emotion, because there is no mind.²¹ Deathless. Motionless.

To sum up: the world is negated so that its substratum can be affirmed. What you see is an aberration of your mind. *Neti* makes you focus on what’s behind the images by seeing right through them. Neither you nor they exist in the *Now*, but only the light of knowledge and the illumination of understanding.

That’s the Instant Immortal, the realization of the intimations adumbrated in Wordsworth’s ode. It is Immortality itself. The power of *Now* is the power of Pure Consciousness. No love or hate, attachment or detachment, desire or desirelessness. Happiness pursues *you*, and you are drowned in it. *Idam* then becomes totally irrelevant.

This is not laboratory science that one reproduces. Yet, incredible as it may seem, we all have experienced this *Now* — or at least peeked at it — at one time or another and have tasted the bliss unbeknownst to us. The trick is to make a habit of it and abide in it at all times. It is the “presence” which “cannot be put by.” ▲

²⁰ Sankara, *Aparokshanubhuti*, 122.

²¹ *Atmabodha*, 33.



Reminiscences of an Old Devotee

N. RAMACHANDRA RAO
TRANSLATED BY S. K. SWAMY

This is an extract from Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi in Kannada 1966, third edition. The author was a teacher at Oorigam, Karnataka. He was also an Ayurvedic doctor and there are a number of references to him in some ashram publications.¹ He wrote the first biography of Bhagavan in Kannada.

I learned of Bhagavan's greatness in 1918. Immediately I went to Tiruvannamalai and had his darshan at Skandasramam. Bhagavan was sitting on a raised platform and he graciously enquired my name and where I was coming from, then later I was served meals in the ashram. His darshan, loving talk, food offered with affection and above

¹ *Day By Day* by Devaraj Mudaliar, pp.83, 99 & 300-01 and *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma, pp.12, 401 & 415-16.

all this, his Grace, — it is difficult to explain what powers of loving intimacy all these had. Like iron filings attracted to a magnet, I was drawn to him and anxious to become worthy of his benign Grace. As and when I could get leave, I used to come and live in Ramanasramam and serve him in whatever capacity I could until his Mahasamadhi. Here I would like to impart many interesting anecdotes that happened during more than 30 years of my association with Bhagavan.

A few months after the first visit, I took my wife with me to have his darshan. He bid us sit on a raised podium and served us food with his own hands. Can there be a match to the love of a great soul? Even now it is fresh in my memory, as his love was like that of a mother.

Once when my wife had fallen ill, she was unable to take any food; and even though doctors concluded it to be tuberculosis, when Bhagavan appeared in her dreams and blessed her, she was cured of her illness miraculously to everybody's amazement! She is to this day a great devotee of Sri Bhagavan!

On the day we were served food, we had an intense desire to perform *Padapuja* to Bhagavan, but it was contrary to ashram rules which did not permit it. But Bhagavan, who was compassionate, saw to it that everybody went out of the ashram and enabled us to fulfil our desire!

Again when we had holidays during the Navarathri festival, we both proceeded to Tiruvannamalai to have his darshan. Then we prepared ragi gruel and served it to Bhagavan. As per a *Bhagavad Gita* verse,¹ Bhagavan lovingly accepted it. Bhagavan who would take luxurious food brought by so many rich devotees accepted even the ragi gruel with love from poor people like us. How can there be such discrimination as rich and poor for Bhagavan? Is he not equal to all? This time also he blessed us by accepting *Padapuja* from us.

When I went to Tiruvannamalai in 1932 Bhagavan was staying in a small thatched shed near the Mother's Samadhi. When I went

¹“Whoever offers me a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water with devotion, that I accept when it is offered devotedly by the pure of heart.” 9.26.

there to have his darshan, just as before, I took with me a flower garland, some sweets, camphor etc. When I was getting ready to offer these, Bhagavan did not accept them, but sternly told me, “If you want me to take these eatables, place this garland on the photo nearby or if you wish that I should wear this flower garland take back your eatables and go.” Hearing this I was nonplussed. Finally I placed the flower garland on the photo and waved the camphor before it. Only then Bhagavan took the eatables. It appeared as though it was a warning, since the crowd of devotees at the ashram was increasing, such a display of ritual worship was unwarranted.

In those days, Bhagavan and also inmates of the ashram would get up at 4 a.m. and would cut vegetables and keep them ready for the day's cooking. While thus engaged Bhagavan would narrate the events of his life. Many a time he would go to the kitchen and grind idli-batter and chutney for breakfast. He would bring the chutney he had prepared and give each of us a little to taste and ask us to tell him how it was. Oh, how beloved was he to his devotees!

I feel it would not be wrong to say that it was because of my medical profession, I had the privilege of touching and serving his feet. After breakfast and also meals, Bhagavan used to go for a walk barefoot on the hill. On such occasion thorns and sharp stones would prick his feet and cause wounds. Soon after his returning to the ashram, I would apply ointment I had with me to his feet although he would be unwilling. As a result of this I got the title of ‘doctor’ from Bhagavan.

Once Sri Shamanna, Financial Controller of Mysore State had come by bus to have Bhagavan's darshan.² He was unwell and vomiting several times and was extremely exhausted in the ashram. The same evening I also had come from Bangalore and reached the ashram. No sooner did Bhagavan see me than he ordered me, “Shamanna has come. It seems he is unwell. Go and see him.” Immediately I hastened to where Shamanna was. After giving necessary treatment I came back

² See Talk 307 dated 27.2.1936 & Talk 363 dated 20.1937 for the last three questions about Sri Shamanna. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

and reported to Bhagavan. It is clear from this how much concern and kindness Bhagavan had towards his devotees.

Bhagavan had as much love for dumb animals and birds as he had for humans. Once the Maharshi saw a dog suffering from scabies all over its body. Immediately he called the veterinary doctor Ananthanarayana Rao who was in the ashram and got the dog treated. By this kind act of his he exemplified the saying of the *Bhagavad Gita* by actually practising it.³

In 1929, I was in Mysore. One day suddenly the idea of my approaching death came over me. I did not have any illness in my body. I was carrying out my daily activities as usual. Still, day by day the fear of death was increasing. Besides this, one night a lizard fell on my head. From this my apprehension of going to die reached a climax and I was almost certain that my life would pass away that night. I did not inform anyone in the house. I just spread a mat on the ground and lay down praying and expecting death any moment. Sleep came. Then I had a dream. In that dream it appeared as though I was wandering in a forest. Suddenly there came three or four thieves with big swords in their hands chasing me in order to kill me. When I started running panic-stricken, there I saw Ramanasramam and no sooner did I remember Bhagavan than the three thieves vanished. I woke up soon after. What a wonder! My fear of death had gone. Having the fear of death vanish by merely remembering Bhagavan, is there any doubt that the cycle of birth and death can vanish by remembering the holy feet of Sri Ramana? Has not Krishna vouchsafed in the *Gita* "These I speedily lift up from the ocean of death and existence."⁴

I want to cite one more pre-eminent greatness of Bhagavan. By this time the purpose of the human manifestation of Bhagavan on this earth was coming to an end, the period of my official service was

also nearing completion. In April 1950 Bhagavan's time of Mahanirvana was also nearing. At the same time I was to retire from service. So there was no possibility of getting leave. It had been publicised in newspapers that Bhagavan's physical condition was deteriorating to a critical state. On seeing this I had an intense desire to rush to the ashram to render my service to Bhagavan. If I proceeded without my leave being sanctioned, surely there would be trouble about my pension. If I cared for my pension, I would be deprived of serving my Sadguru. This state of mine was critical for me. I thought at length and decided that Bhagavan was my everything, that serving him should be of paramount importance and that my life's course should be according to its destiny, *prarabdha*. Deciding thus I hastened to the ashram the same day and engaged myself in his service. Bhagavan who was aware of my inner feelings allowed me to serve him. In his final days, from time to time, I was dispensing the medicines left in the ashram by Sri Kareiraj of Calcutta. Then I wrote to my superior authorities requesting leave. Soon came a telegram from the Minister of Education saying "Ramachandra Rao may stay and serve Bhagavan," and thus enhancing the prestige of the Mysore Government. Besides this, within one week of my retiring from service, my pension also reached me!

Thus in both spiritual and temporal affairs Bhagavan directly displayed his exceeding greatness directly to me. May his full Grace be on me always. ▲

³ "He who looks everywhere with equal eye, Arjuna, and regards the pleasure and pain of others as his own is considered a perfect yogi." 6:32.

⁴ "But those who surrendering all actions to Me, meditate upon Me and worship Me with single-minded devotion, whose hearts are fixed on Me, I speedily rescue from the ocean of death-bounded samsara." 12:6-7.



KEYWORD

Ananda

Sanskrit: *Ananda*: Absolute happiness; unconditional bliss; freedom from any lack or limitation; limitlessness; fullness; expanse of heart.

Ananda comes from the root 'nand' which means 'to delight', 'to revel in'. *Ananda* therefore means 'to revel in all-round happiness'. Sankara sings in *Bhaja Govindam*, "He alone truly rejoices whose mind ever delights in Brahman, be he in company or solitude, be he in divine communion (*yoga rato va*) or immersed in pleasures (*bhoga rato va*)."¹ Nothing diminishes his *ananda* for it has verily become his very nature (*svarupa*), being one with Brahman and hence absolute and unconditional. Thus a *jnani* is not an *anandi* who *has* happiness but *anandah* who *is of the very form of* happiness.

The *Upanishads* define *Brahman* as Existence, Consciousness and Infinitude (*satyam jnanam anantam brahma*) and also as *sat cit ananda*. While *sat* and *cit* are synonymous with *satyam* and *jnanam*, *ananda* directly flows from *anantam brahma*. Sanatkumara instructs Narada accordingly: "The Infinite alone is Happiness; there is no happiness in

¹ *Bhaja Govindam*, verse 22.

the finite.”² Therefore, *ananda* means infinitude or limitlessness, fullness, wholeness as the very nature of Self. Free from all shackling limitations, absolute happiness is a natural corollary of Self-knowledge. A *jnani* crosses all sorrow once for all and is absorbed in positive bliss — it is not a mere absence of misery but a fullness which does not know the slightest want and hence utter cessation of all desires and fears, otherwise called as total fulfilment (*aptakamah*). It is the fruit (*phalam*) of Self-knowledge — it is simultaneously *prayojanam* (utility) and *purushartha* (goal of human pursuit). Therefore scriptures (*shruti*) uses the word *ananda* in addition to *anantam* to unambiguously point out the nature of *Brahman*.³ Bhagavan Ramana opens his very first spiritual teaching *Who am I?* with: “As all living beings desire to be *happy* always, and being endowed with supreme *love* for oneself and as *happiness* alone is the cause of such love. . . . one should know the *Self*.” This echoes the Upanishadic instruction, “For the sake of the Self, everything is dear and not for the sake of the object itself; a wife is dear, not for her sake but for the sake of one’s own Self..”⁴ Thus happiness and love are synonymous with Self.

In spiritual literature, *ananda* is translated as ‘bliss’, which is alright as long as ‘bliss’ is understood as unconditional and supramental happiness and is in no way linked to the senses. In non-spiritual parlance, the word ‘bliss’ is usually associated with peaks of sensual gratification or emotional satisfaction as, for example, in terms like ‘marital bliss’, or the ‘ecstasy’ of any achievement or victory in this world. The word has acquired a certain conditionality and has made it a mere ‘state of mind’ related to a qualified event. Since by common usage, ‘bliss’ has come to connote a particular ‘thought modification’ (*vritti visesha*), it is an inaccurate translation; for, as we have seen, *ananda* is the very nature of *atma* (Self) and hence eternal (*nitya*) and not at all a thought (*vritti*) which comes and goes.

To avoid this possible confusion due to our linguistic conditioning, it is perhaps preferable to translate *ananda* as simply ‘Happiness’ as

this word does not carry the baggage of any conditionality. We often hear people saying, “I am simply happy now, for no reason whatsoever!” which is unwittingly *advaitic*, provided the identification with the mind is dropped. It is important to note these subtle details because much of the confusion that prevails in understanding Advaita is purely semantic in origin and *sabda pramana* (verbal testimony) by its very texture requires extraordinary care and deftness in handling words for unfolding the Self (*vastu*). A consensus of meaning is crucial between the speaker and the listener for transmitting the understanding.

In our daily life, we encounter the experience of happiness in many ways, which are purely *vritti visesha* only and hence transient. Even the greatest of these moments of undiluted happiness is said to be but a fraction of the limitless *atmananda* (bliss of the Self). Without these moments which act as the windows to the eternal *atmananda*, life would become unbearable and therefore, the Upanishads declare: “All sentient beings live upon an infinitesimal fraction of this very *Brahmananda*.”⁵ And, “Bliss is Brahman; for all these beings originate in Bliss and are sustained by Bliss.”⁶ However, being ignorant of our true nature as absolute happiness, we mistake these external situational windows to be the very source of our short-lived joys. At the grossest level, they happen to be sense objects. It is said camels relish eating a type of cactus plant full of thorny bush in spite of the ulcerated mouth that results from eating it. The saline taste actually comes from the blood oozing out of the ulcerated mouth but the camels mistake it to be from the thorny plant. Vedanta urges us to discover directly our real nature as *ananda* and not to be penalised by sorrow for the error of seeking happiness from the channels of sense objects.

Sense pleasures (*vishayananda*), being the lowest manifestation of our *svarupananda*, can be classified into three types to facilitate easy understanding as: *priya*, *moda* and *pramoda*. All three are *ananda vikaras*, the modifications of *vritti* (thought) which manifest as *ananda*

² Chandogya Upanisad, 7.23.1.

³ Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, 3.9.28.

⁴ Ibid., 4.5.6.

⁵ Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, 4.3.32.

⁶ Taaittiriya Upanisad, 3.6.1.

in varying degrees. A Bengali living in Hawaii unexpectedly sees a tin of *rasagullas* (sweets) and is thrilled; this flash of joy is called *priya vrtti*. He buys it and takes it home; it is his own now and relishes the prospect of savouring it, *moda vrtti*; it is a higher pleasure. Finally when he tastes the sweet that he is so fond of, the pleasure is highest, *pramoda*. These are all merely *vrtti viseshas* which arise and die in time and belong to the sheath of bliss (*anandamaya kosha*); they are all droplets of *svarupananda* but they make us commit the mistake that the joy comes from the object of enjoyment itself and thus effectively mask our real nature. So they 'cover' the Self *as though*, and hence is called the bliss-sheath.

A higher type of happiness is the one which comes from knowledge (*vidyananda*). Any appropriate piece of knowledge resolves the wanting ego temporarily and manifests the bliss of the Self partially; the joy is again mistaken to reside in the discovery of that particular knowledge. A still higher plane of happiness is gained by leading a disciplined life; the bliss becomes higher in proportion as the heart becomes purer, calm and free from all cravings. This is called *yogananda* which does not depend on any external conditions but still resting on the internal purity and the degree of self-conquest. *Vidyananda* and *yogananda* also belong to the bliss sheath because the *ananda* that is experienced is still conditional (physical and mental well-being are still essential) and is not known as one's own nature. Ultimately when the knowledge of the Self arises in the heart, *ananda* is recognised to be one's own *svarupa*; the five *koshas* (sheaths)⁷ cease to delude the intellect anymore. Unconditional bliss then shines forth in all its pristine and unfettered glory. This is the point where Bhagavan says 'there will come a time when one will have to forget all that one has learnt'⁸ ▲

⁷ The Self is said to be 'enveloped' *as though* within the five sheaths: physical body (*annamaya*), vital airs (*pranamaya*), mind (*manomaya*), intellect (*vijnanamaya*) and bliss (*anandamaya*). Each sheath fills the *jivatma* with progressively increasing levels of subtlety in that order.

⁸ *Who Am I?* Section 23, Translated by T.M.P. Mahadevan.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Fifteen

S. RAM MOHAN

15 Both the past and present subsist and are dependent on the present; these two, each one in its own time, are only present. The present is 'one' alone. That being the case, enquiring into the past and the future, instead of seeking the Truth that is present even now, is vain, like the attempt at calculation, omitting the primal number 'one'.

Commentary

What we experience is in the present moment. Every experience is, then, considered as happening in the present. As each experience passes and gives place to another experience, those that are remembered are called 'past' experiences, and those that are yet to come are called 'future' experiences. These two divisions are so called only in relation to the 'present'. Bhagavan says that these distinctions are in the mind and that all time is only in the present. What is real in the

present is not the time called 'present', but that which is *really* 'Present', the Real Self. That Reality is there at all times, unaffected by the apparent passage of time. That Reality not entangled in Time.

The right thing for us to do is seek and know this Reality. The truth that is worth knowing cannot be arrived at by investigating either the past or the future, or the states of the ghost-like self in the past or future. These kinds of investigations are taken up on the supposition that the endless stream of false appearances which occur in the present are real. They will always prove to be ineffectual.

Bhagavan gives an analogy of a person who makes the ultimately futile effort of performing a mathematical calculation without being aware of the significance of the primal number 'one'. All numbers are built upon this 'one'. Their meaning and value depend on this 'one'. Hence, knowledge of the 'one' is the basis of mathematics. So also the right knowledge of the One Real Self is the essential preliminary for all knowledge. As Bhagavan has said elsewhere, when this one is known, nothing else remains to be known.¹

Someone once asked Bhagavan: "How can I find out what I was in my previous life?". Bhagavan's reply was, "Before investigating previous lives, why don't you inquire whether your present birth itself is real?"² Thus it will be seen that researches concerning phenomena of the world by chemists, physicists or astronomers, concerning the sun the planets and the stars are all vain and lead to nothing. What existed before creation? How did man come into existence? All such researches are pointless for those seeking *moksha* (deliverance). In this light Bhagavan instructs us that the triad of past, present and future, are merely the traditional divisions of time which, on ultimate analysis, are found to be meaningless.

Many Hindu philosophical texts have extensively analysed the concept of 'Time'. There is a popular Hindu mythological story about Lord Krishna and the sage Narada who met to discuss the concepts of nescience and delusion. Narada was asked by Lord Krishna to fetch a

cup of water for him. Narada went in search of water and while on the way fell in love with a girl and married her. In the course of his married life innumerable incidents happened to him. Finally at the point of death, he cries aloud for help. He heard the voice of Lord Krishna who calmly asks, "Why have you taken so long to fetch a cup of water?" Narada then realizes that what he had apparently experienced in a long duration of time, had in actuality, passed by in a moment. The story recalls William Blake's assertion that it is possible to experience "the world in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour".

Ancient Indian civilization had discovered the brilliant idea of Relative and Absolute Time. The story of Lord Krishna and Narada demonstrates that relative time is not the true measure of activity. It showed two concurrent events which have independent measures of time! In this startling experience of Narada there is no perception of time, just as there is no concept of distance when there is only one point.³

In the *Sanatana Dharma*, Time is not a linear, single-directional movement, like an arrow speeding from past to future. It is "no more than a convenient delusion of our mechanical world, connecting a living vibrant time with the interior curling details of a fractal."⁴ When we enter into the curvature of eternal time, we experience a fullness of true inner rhythm of life.

The *Vedas* talk of the concept of rhythm or universal order (*rta*) which is manifested as Time. The Time-rhythm ranges from the fast ticking of the atomic clock to the inexorable expansion of the entire cosmos. We can see Time also unfold at different rates in the geological process of the Earth with the changes of the season and on a smaller scale in the life cycle of a butterfly.

Time itself or *kala* is connected to Lord Siva in *Sanatana Dharma*. Siva is called *Maha Kala* — 'the Great Time'. His consort Kali personifies the energy of Time. According to verse 10 of *Surya*

³ "The metaphysical doctrine simply contrasts time as a continuum with the eternity that is not in time, and so cannot properly be called 'everlasting', but coincides with 'the real present' or 'now' of which temporal experience is impossible." *Time and Eternity* by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, page 3.

⁴ See *Seven Life Lessons of Chaos* by J. Briggs & D. Peet. Harper Perennial 1992.

¹ *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* v.29; *Atma Bodham* v. 61

² See Talk 17. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

Siddhanta, the seminal work in Vedic astronomy, “Time is the destroyer of the world; another Time has for its nature to bring [things] to pass. This latter [power], accordingly is gross or minute; it is called by two names, real (*murta*) and unreal (*amurta*).”

The part of the time of which we are immediately aware of is called ‘the present’. But the present that is experienced is not a ‘point’ but a ‘length’ of time. In it, both the past and future meet. It is not possible to zero-in on a particular point where one ends and the other begins. Past, present and future are evidently distinctive, and yet they cannot be distinguished.⁵

P. D. Ouspensky defines the present as “the moment of transition from the future into the past — the moment of a transition of a phenomenon from one non-existence to the another. Only during this brief moment does a phenomenon really exist; before it exists as a potentiality and after as a memory.... We must admit that the past, the present and the future do not differ from one another in any way that the only thing that exists is the present... the ‘Eternal Now’ of Indian philosophy. But we do not see it because at every given moment, we are only aware of a small fragment of this presence.”⁶

“The past was present and the future will be present. Awareness is ‘eternity’ — the One on which, time, as past, present and future is superimposed. Trying to comprehend the dimension of time, without recognizing the timeless, eternal Now is like attempting to count without the primal unit of reckoning, which is the ‘one’.”⁷ ▲

⁵ “Let anyone try to attend to the present moment of time. One of the most baffling experiences occurs. Where is it, this present? It has melted in our grasp, fled ere we could touch it, gone in the moment of becoming.... It is only as entering into the living and moving organization of a much wider tract of time that the strict present is apprehended at all. It is in fact an altogether ideal abstraction, not only never realized in sense, but probably never even conceived of by those unaccustomed to philosophic meditation. Reflection leads us to the conclusion that it must exist, but that it does exist can never be a fact of our immediate experience. The only fact of our immediate experience is ... ‘specious present’.” *Principles of Psychology* by William James, p.619-20.

⁶ *Tertium Organum* by P. D. Ouspensky. p.25-6. Arkana Publication, London 1990.

⁷ Talk 17. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

Stories about Bhagavan

SADHU OM

The Judgment

Once, when Sri Bhagavan was going for his usual stroll on the Hill, everyone suddenly saw a dove falling at his Feet, half-stunned. When they looked ahead, there was a boy who had hit the bird with a stone and was now standing trembling.

Sri Bhagavan seeing the boy and turning to the devotees following him said, “If two annas were available, his hunger would subside.” On hearing this one of them ran down to the Ashram took two annas and rushed back to where Sri Bhagavan was attending to the bird.

At Bhagavan’s request the two annas were given to the boy who was very pleased and left. The bird was still stunned. Then Sri Bhagavan said, “If some one brings grapes, and if the grape juice is poured over the head of the bird, it should recover.”

At that moment a devotee, not seeing Sri Bhagavan in the old hall, was coming up the Hill searching for him, with grapes as his offering.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Seeing him with grapes in his hands, Sri Bhagavan exclaimed “The grapes have arrived.” Squeezing the grapes on the bird’s head, Sri Bhagavan watched and waited for a reaction. Slowly it started to regain consciousness and after some time, it flew away.

The Magic Touch

A Government officer who was newly married to a girl from Tiruvannamalai was working in Vellore. One day, she left for her home leaving a message for her husband that she had gone to her mother’s house at Tiruvannamalai and the keys were with a neighbour. That evening when he came from his office, he found the house locked. The neighbours told him that she had gone to Tiruvannamalai. He was an orphan and not having the love of parents, he was very dependent on his wife’s love for him. He could not bear the separation.

Immediately, not even changing from his office clothes of pants and shoes, he took a bus to Tiruvannamalai and reached his in-law’s house but his wife was not there. She had gone to Sri Ramanasramam with her mother. He wanted to see her immediately and was very upset at not finding her in her parents’ house.

He was not aware of who Ramana was and why people should go to see him. He left for Sri Ramanasramam to find his wife. When he arrived there, not knowing the rules he went inside with shoes on. He was then unsure as to where to meet her so he stopped for a while to light a cigarette and had a deep drag of smoke to relax him. The place where he was standing was the path Sri Bhagavan used to take to go to the Goshala. While he was standing there smoking, he felt a tap on his arm. When he looked around it was Sri Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan looked at him silently for a while and this man also looked at Bhagavan. No one knows what transpired between them.

The man went straight back without meeting his wife; he left his job and was no more to be found. The girl coming to know of this was initially sorrow stricken but later consoled herself with thoughts of destiny and the ultimate power of Bhagavan.

This story is an example of the power of Sri Bhagavan’s eyes – *kannokkam* – as Sri Muruganar calls it.



Waiting for Ramana

It was the time when Sri Bhagavan was living on the eastern slope of the Hill. In those days there were hardly any visitors. It was one of the hot summer months when a devotee came from his village having heard about the greatness of Sri Bhagavan and wanting to have his darshan. He came early in the morning, climbed up the Hill and went to the cave where Bhagavan was living. Sri Bhagavan was alone doing some masonry work and so the devotee, not recognizing him, thought that Bhagavan had gone out somewhere and sat down to wait for him and filled in his time by watching the mason doing his job although it seemed not to occur to him to ask this man where Sri Bhagavan might have gone or when he would return.

Time passed and when it was noon the devotee became hungry. He decided to go down the Hill, have some food and return to see Bhagavan later. On his way back down the Hill he met an old lady (Keerai Patti). She asked where he was coming from and the devotee told her that he had been to seek for Sri Bhagavan but he could not find Him in the cave and so was coming down for the food. She said that Bhagavan didn't go anywhere so He must be there and requested him to accompany her back again. When both of them reached the cave she showed him our Bhagavan. He was stunned. It was the same person he had been watching from the morning without a word having passed between them. His dilemma caused a lot of laughter. When the old lady asked Sri Bhagavan why he did not tell the devotee that he was Ramana, Bhagavan laughed and said, "Is it written in my head that this body is Ramana?"

We can conclude that how much the devotee was blessed! Had he known that it was Sri Bhagavan who was doing that masonry job, he would have seen Him and left immediately. Because of no exchange of words, in silence the devotee got the highest instruction (*diksha*) and also by waiting he could stay in His Presence for such a long time thinking of Sri Ramana.

Where is Ramana?

Once when Sri Ramanasramam was in its initial stage, a devotee who had only heard of Bhagavan did not get an opportunity to come and see him. Then he got the opportunity unexpectedly and came to Tiruvannamalai. Asking for directions to Sri Ramanasramam he was very excited that he would soon meet Bhagavan and started asking everyone he met "Where is Ramana?"

In those days there were very few buildings at the ashram and also not much of a crowd so he reached the old hall without difficulty. He rushed in but as it was the time for Sri Bhagavan's daily walk; the devotee still did not see Him and he continued asking those nearby, "Where is Ramana? Where is Ramana?" One devotee pointed out the way Sri Bhagavan usually went on His walk and so, because of his eagerness and unable to sit still, he went off searching for Him.

By that time Sri Bhagavan had returned from his stroll on the Hill and went to the kitchen at the same time as the devotee arrived there. He saw four or five people standing about and wasn't at all sure which one was Ramana. Seeing all those strange faces, he chose to ask the person who seemed like a simple man who would not get angry with him. The person he chose to ask was of course, none other than our Bhagavan.

He asked him, "Who is Ramana?". Without any hesitancy, Bhagavan smiled and pointed to a big vessel which had the inscription of 'Sri Ramana'. The others who were there laughed. Sri Bhagavan out of compassion explained his answer, "At least on these vessels 'Sri Ramana' is inscribed, but nothing is written on this body." The devotee who came to see Sri Bhagavan with love got a rare instruction (*upadesa*).

The whole of Sri Ramana's philosophy is contained in this. Sri Bhagavan's Self-knowledge (*jnana anubhavam*) is that he is not the body. ▲



Sri Oruganti Ramachandraiah

V. DWARAKNATH REDDY

Sri Oruganti Ramachandraiah's father, Oruganti Venkata Subbaiah of Kavali, Nellore district in Andhra Pradesh, had been an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi, and participated in India's freedom struggle from its beginnings. He was jailed (so was his spirited wife) by the British rulers of the time. He had three daughters and four sons of which Ramachandraiah was the youngest, born in 1912. As school-boys he and a brother used to walk the streets shouting anti-British slogans and were lodged in jails for minors (delinquents).

While studying to complete the B.A. Honours course of the Andhra University, he was implicated in a serious criminal case amounting to

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treason against the British rulers. It was known famously as the Kakinada Conspiracy (Bomb) case and from April 1933 till September 1935, he was in central jails and courts as the noose cast its ominous shadow on him. Then he was acquitted for want of proof and he returned to his studies taking his degree and achieving first in his class. After India gained her freedom, the sacrifices of persons like him and his parents finally bore fruit.

His political background created many obstacles to his career, rendering him ineligible for government service, and for over ten years he worked as a teacher of English at Birla Trust High School, Pilani. In 1944 he became a lecturer in Andhra University as Head of the Department of History. In 1972 he retired as professor and Head of the Department of Archaeology and History. In between he went to England and had field training under pioneering archaeologists like Sir Mortimer Wheeler, Prof. Childe and Frederic Zeuner at the London Institute of Archaeology. Back in India, he directed several famous excavations, including Harappa, Salihundam, and Jami.

Of greater relevance to Ramana devotees is how he came to Bhagavan, the universal Excavator who was laying bare the deep debris of ruined egos, to break and transcend the fallacious dictum that history must repeat itself. For what if Time itself were an untrue phantom?

Among the early devotees of Bhagavan was Sri Munagala Venkataramaiah.¹ He was a scholar to whom we are forever indebted for his assiduous and accurate compilation of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, the veritable gospel of Bhagavan. He also translated many Sanskrit texts for the benefit of future generations, which include *Tripura Rahasya* and *Kaivalya Navaneeta*.

Kamakshi was his little daughter, and she was permitted a child's indulgence of being allowed to play with Bhagavan. She received his loving guidance and parental care. Picking flowers in the Ashram, chanting and singing before the compassionate Master, privileged or petulant, impish or indulgent, the child grew into girlhood, and then into a prospective bride. It is said that at an appropriate age Bhagavan

¹ Later known as Swami Ramananda Saraswathi.

prompted her to learn Telugu. Though of Andhra lineage and Telugu her mother-tongue, she had been brought up in Tamil Nadu and had never been taught Telugu. Bhagavan personally helped her to learn the language. To some it might have seemed a casual act but soon its real import dawned, and a year or so later Ramachandraiah who also had Telugu as his native language, entered the scene as the prospective groom! With Bhagavan's warm approval and even intervention to smooth over obstacles, the wedding was sanctified in 1938.²

Kamakshi proved a willing partner for the six more years of penury that Ramachandraiah had to pay for the price for his high moral stand, his patriotic zeal and courage of character. After 1943 he was appointed a lecturer in Andhra University but contact with the Ashram was sustained. When he retired as a professor and head of his department in 1972, the couple settled in their house near the Ashram. The samadhi of Kamakshi's illustrious father is in the family compound.

It has been recorded that in the 1940's, when Kamakshi came to the Ashram to stay for a couple of months, she walked one morning into Bhagavan's presence. It was 4 a.m. and Bhagavan was alone. He gave her a slip of paper on which he had written *Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaaya* saying, "You chant this all your life." What solace and strength it must have been through the crucifixion of her health a few years later And also, what a gift of assurance in the years to come.

For Kamakshi's health had deteriorated while she was in Vizagapatnam in northern Andhra Pradesh and uncertain treatments had rendered her enfeebled. Too late, she was diagnosed with bone cancer of a virulent type, and with no skeletal rigidity she suffered great distress and total disability. Till her demise in 1975, Ramachandraiah cared for her and nursed her night and day through the prolonged and painful confinement, with quiet dedication and love.

² Ramachandraiah's family has a history of association with Bhagavan. One of his elder brothers was Krishna Bikshu, who also became a devotee of Bhagavan. He wrote *Sri Ramana Leela* in Telugu, a profound and lyrical narration of Bhagavan's life. The manuscript was closely perused, corrected, and approved by Bhagavan; it remains a treasure for us. It has been recently translated into English with the same title.

Once, seeing her sad state, our present Ashram president, Sundara Ramanan, then 40 years old, said with flowing tears, “Dear Auntie, why has Bhagavan let you down like this?” Eyes flashing and with sudden energy flowing, Kamakshi responded from her bed, “How dare you say Bhagavan has at any time failed to take care of me?”

Death took her body but not her spirit which lives on in memory.

Ramachandraiah stayed on in Tiruvannamalai never straying from his surrender to Bhagavan. A poet at heart, a scholar in Telugu literature, an awakened spiritual seeker, a lover of music, he poured his energies into authorship. He rendered into pure and melodious Telugu the cardinal writings on and of Bhagavan. He has left for future generations translations of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, *Maha Yoga*, *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*, *Guru Ramana Vachanamala*, and other texts. His love of Bhagavan mixed seamlessly with his profound understanding of Bhagavan’s teaching. With his heart yearning for liberation, he wrote and indeed often set to music more than one thousand poems and songs.

What a man he was! The imagery, perceptivity, vocabulary and cadence of his verse will thrill all devotees. He wrote with tears in his eyes; we cannot but read him with tears in ours.

Though I had known him for over ten years, and though he generously and genuinely accepted me as an earnest and intense seeker, I had not been able to plumb the depths behind that humble, unassuming façade which the perceptive Sandhya, my spiritual daughter, had instinctively felt and known.

The first of July, 1994. “Today is my official birthday, Amma,” he was to say that morning, meaning the day entered in official records as such. He said this to Sandhya, “Amma” (mother) is the endearing term addressed to young ones to mean daughter or child or “little mother”. Ramachandraiah’s affinity and affection for her were full to the brim since we met in 1983. These two shared an intense love of spiritual literature from ancient puranic classics to Bhagavan Ramanan’s compositions. Reading, chanting, and singing them almost daily for years had been the love of their lives — often including Sri Balaram Reddy, the celebrated ashramite. Sandhya could read the Telugu or Sanskrit verses fluently and melodiously, with feeling and understanding, and thus the affinity grew.

Later on that same fateful day he was in physical distress. He was sweating profusely, and was sitting rubbing a balm on his chest. He tried to make light of the situation. All the same, with a premonition inspired by the wisdom of age, he started calmly to tell Sandhya the where and what of his modest possessions — the money in the drawer, the pass-book on the shelf, the address-book on the table. . . . Sandhya, with permitted, and even pleasing impunity and impishness, said “Ayya (sir or father), if you believe you are to ‘depart’ we should be chanting (Bhagavan’s) *Aksharamanamalai*, the divine glory of Arunachala.” To which he replied calmly, “You are right, my child, and who will chant it for me but you? Right now, I am not acting out of any fear, Amma, I just want others to have no problems later.”

The then ashram doctor, Sri Ganesan, came and after an examination, declared that the cardiac problem was acute and that Ramachandraiah should be admitted immediately to a hospital.

We took him to Rangammal hospital, then on the other side of the Hill from us, near the Pradakshina Road. The patient sat composed and calm. The doctor on duty put him as close to intensive-care as the semi-urban institution could provide. Ramachandraiah while waiting for his room, said to Sandhya: “*Twamatma natham Ramanam Bhajami* (I worship Ramana who is the Lord of my self.) — is it not so, child?”

In the allotted room, Sandhya opened up the curtains, and to reveal that the holy mountain Arunachala was close behind outlined darkly against the gathering dawn. “Ayya,” she said, “Arunachala is right behind you.” “Yes child,” Ramachandraiah said, a catch in his voice, “Arunachala has always been behind me.” Those were almost his last words. Moments later life departed.

All that I have known of him posthumously fills me with admiration and reverence. Alone, but never lonely, he walked the arduous Mountain Path, his gaze penetrating the mists to focus on the sunny peak. If he went away from us, where else could he be abiding? Farewell noble soul, silence is your last song. . . . ▲



Seeing Light

ANANDA WOOD

Is the mind like a computer? In a way, it is. As attention turns from one thing to another, changing pictures come and go. This is a surface show of mind, a bit like a computer screen. Beneath the surface, our minds store data and process it for display, like a computer does. The results are shown in changing pictures and appearances, seen at the surface of each mind.

Thus we may think of mind as a complex process of activity: recording, organizing and displaying information. Most of the activity is hidden, but it produces the appearances we see. The hidden part is called 'unconscious'.

This way of looking at the mind is actually quite ancient. Today's computers are a recent offshoot, from a very much older approach to

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the question of intelligence. In India, that approach was much developed by Buddhist schools of thought. They point out that the mind is changing and impermanent. It is part of an objective world, whose objects change and pass away. This is an *objective* view. It is meant to cultivate detachment: from one's mind and personality, and from their biased views of world.

But mind can also be approached *subjectively*. Instead of outwardly describing it, as an objective process in the world, we can enquire back into the consciousness that it expresses, in our direct experience.

In each picture or appearance, consciousness is present. Without its light, nothing can appear. The pictures come and go; but they are all illuminated by a consciousness that is in each of them. As they change and vary, it remains: as a persisting background that continues through the changes and variations of all picturing. In short, it is a screen on which all pictures must appear.

However, this is not a screen that *transmits* or *reflects* light. As consciousness, it *is* light. What kind of light is it? How can it be rightly known, beneath all pictures that we see?

These questions are investigated in what Ramana Maharshi calls 'atma-vichara' or 'self-enquiry'. He points out that consciousness cannot be found by any theoretical arguments in the pictures that cover it. To know it rightly, one has to be oneself beneath the covering. There consciousness is one's own self. It is known by *being* it, oneself. It is one's real self, where knowing and being are the same.

That truth of self is known immediately: not through our minds and bodies, but beneath the pictures that they see. Seen indirectly, through physical and mental perception, it is obscured by false assumptions that are ingrained into our pictures of ourselves and of the world.

In particular, we habitually assume that consciousness is a personal activity which perceives objects, thinks thoughts and feels emotions. This is a changing activity, carried out by our bodies and our minds. It produces the changing pictures that come and go in our experience.

But consciousness is not this personal activity that fabricates our changing pictures.

This activity can't be experienced by itself. Nor can its made-up pictures. In order to appear, all activities and pictures must be lit by consciousness. It is the light that carries on, ever present through all pictures and activities.

Thus consciousness is not a picture, nor an object in our pictures, nor a physical or mental activity. Instead, it is what lights all pictures, objects and activities. It is pure light, which knows all our experiences. It's that which knows, unmixed with changing things that come and go before its changeless light.

And yet, in the pictures that we see, the light of consciousness seems mixed, with changing qualities and names and forms. How does this happen? How are the changing pictures drawn, on the unchanging screen of consciousness that lights them up from underneath?

What draws the pictures is called 'life'. The screen of light beneath is not a lifeless object. It is the living source of all experience. As underlying consciousness, it is inherently expressed in all the pictures that we see. They are inspired by it, from within.

That's what makes them come alive.

Thus, all our physical and mental pictures show nothing else but consciousness. It is the unformed light of which all forms are made. And it's the living meaning that is expressed by all names. It is both that which knows and the reality that's known. Ramana Maharshi puts it very simply in *Reality in Forty Verses*, stanza one.

Names and forms are picturing.
The one who sees, the light
and the pictured covering:
all of these are one reality,
and that alone.¹

¹ Translation made from the Malayalam version (*Sad-darshanam*).

*citramamnamarupam drasta prakazamcitra
vastravumokkeyekavastuvamavantanne*

citramamnamarupam: Names (*nama*) and forms (*rupam*) are (*am*) picturing (*citram*); *drasta prakazamcitra*: The one who sees (*drasta*), the light (*prakazam*) and the pictured (*citra*) covering (*vastravum*); *okkeyekavastuvam*: all these (*okke*) are (*am*) one (*eka*) reality (*vastu*); *avantanne*: and that (*avan*) alone (*tanne*).



The White Peacock and the Vina

G. V. SUBBARAMAYYA

This selection is from an upcoming Sri Ramanasramam publication for children. The artist is Luisot, a professional children's book illustrator from Barcelona, Spain.

At this time a new creature, the white peacock presented by the Maharani of Baroda, became the darling of Sri Bhagavan. All the way from Baroda he had travelled in a saloon with an attendant. Though very young he was wonderfully active and intelligent. He had his cage just beside Sri Bhagavan's couch and was watched by Sri Bhagavan day and night. He would get up on Sri Bhagavan's book-rack and gently peck at the books with his beak as if he wanted to read them. He would daily visit the work of temple-construction that was then going on in the Ashram. So Sri Bhagavan designated him 'the building-supervisor'. Occasionally he would also enter the dining-hall

and walk between the rows of people seated at meals, and so he earned from Sri Bhagavan the title *Assistant Sarvadhikari*!

One noon Sri Subbalakshmmamma observed that the white peacock who was being so much fondled by Sri Bhagavan might be Madhavaswami, the late attendant of Sri Bhagavan. A little later as I entered the Hall, Sri Bhagavan said that some people believe that the white peacock was the reincarnation of Madhavaswami; and ever afterwards Sri Bhagavan used to address him as ‘Madhava’.

On June 20, 1947, I composed eight Telugu verses on the white peacock in *Mayura Vrittam* (the ‘peacock meter’) and presented them to Sri Bhagavan in the Jubilee pandal. He appeared greatly pleased with them and handing them to Srimati Lalita Venkataraman, suggested that she sing them with her vina. Within half an hour she brought her vina and got ready to sing. At that moment the white peacock was absent. Sri Bhagavan said, “But the hero must be present to hear his praises sung! Where are you, Madhava? Come!”

Lo! At once the white peacock flew down from the roof of the pandal! When Lalita Venkataraman began to sing, he spread his plumage and danced. Sri Bhagavan sat and watched with beaming eyes. When the singing concluded, the peacock walked over to the vina and pecked at the strings with his beak. Thereupon Sri Bhagavan told the singer, “Madhava wants you to repeat the song.” So she sang once more and the peacock danced again! Truly a sight for the gods!¹



Modern Advaita: Its Lure and Snares

SADHU TANMAYA CHAITANYA

Advaita Vedanta is a spiritual tradition whose authority begins coevally with the origin of the Vedas, a sacred body of revealed knowledge that was not man-made (*apaurusheyam*). This sublime heritage has been at the heart of Hindu spirituality and in India today, continues to be an energetic catalyst. It has endured the past thousands of years, and remains as valid today as it was from the untraceable past.

A disturbing trend has been emerging in modern times where a new breed of spiritual movement, generally answering to Neo-Advaita, claims to guide many new seekers but is actually fraught with wrong impressions. It rests on dubious logic regarding what Advaita

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¹ *Sri Ramana Reminiscences* by G. V. Subbaramayya. pp.165-6. Sri Ramanasramam 1967.

Vedanta really means. At its core is the mistaken hypothesis that all one needs to 'do' is to be oneself and 'just see' the truth. Our everyday mind is regarded as irrelevant and the clearing of all its cobwebs is deemed a redundant nuisance because you are already *That* and therefore nothing further is needed. The burning issue *how?* is dismissed glibly as a wrong question! In traditional Vedanta, the emphasis is placed on first purifying and preparing the mind before one can begin to grasp and realise the higher teachings. It is clear we do have a mind and it cannot simply be wished away. *All knowledge takes place nowhere else other than in the mind* and only by educating it along the right lines one can ever hope to reach a stage where it becomes possible to transcend thought and see oneself as the actionless Consciousness. Bhagavan reveals the dichotomy of thinking in spurious peddlers of Advaita by pointing out the inconsistency of people 'who want to give up all efforts only when it comes to *sadhana*' while never flinching from utmost exertions to secure all creature comforts in the realm of everyday life (*vyavahara*).

Transcending one's personality is *jnana* but integrating the personality at all levels (body, mind and speech) is an essential prerequisite. This is what *yoga* is all about in its broadest sense. The preparatory stage of purification cannot be bypassed except at one's peril. Even the sharpest of intellectuals cannot claim an exemption to the exertion involved in integration of the personality: for each one has to face and contend with his own *vasanas* lurking deep within that are capable of derailing an overconfident seeker. Many self-appointed saviours glibly presume to have 'arrived' and claim in their '*satsangs*' and 'sharing sessions' that they can help others to 'arrive' too! Merely mouthing the vision of *jnani*s cannot make us enlightened if we do not apply ourselves in all seriousness and humility to practise and assimilate their profound teachings at the most basic level. For only a pure and subtle mind will not resist its own demise (*mano-nasha*) at the dawn of *jnana*; that is why the Bhagavad Gita is at once a *yoga shastra-cum-moksha shastra*! Sri Krishna exhorts Arjuna,

"Therefore, do thou strive to be a *yogi* (as a means to gain *jnana*), Oh Arjuna".¹

The new age gurus in all *naivete* are so prone to celebrate mere intellectual insights that they have lost sight of the cardinal characteristic of enlightenment (*jnananubhava*) namely that 'I am the body' consciousness must be burnt away without a residue in the unremitting fire of self-realisation and one is then identified with pure spirit. This was the distinguishing hallmark of sages like Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharshi, Anandamayi Ma, Nityananda Maharaj of Vajreshwari, Shirdi Sai Baba, and Papa Ramdas in recent history. This is a true clarity born of intense *vichara* and *tapas* and does not obtain from a mere mastery of popular paperbacks and DVDs on 'Vedanta made easy'.

To propound a thesis that 'enlightenment has to happen on its own and nothing can be done to hasten the awakening if the body-mind complex is not programmed for it' is a treacherous theory as it disparages the power of conscious *sadhana* that works towards receiving higher truths. To reduce a human being into a computerised object and all self-effort into a neatly packaged DNA programming ('its all ordered in the genes') is a trivial solution. Denying the conscious activity of one's true nature (*purusha prayatna*) and handing over all *sadhana* as well as enlightenment to the caprice of destiny (read DNA) is an absurdity. The difference between the original masters and the mushrooming gurus of the IT age is that the former exhort us to wake up from the slumber of delusion with a great sense of urgency 'as time is fleeting, the faculties are constantly wearing out and opportunities for evolution once missed cannot be guaranteed again'. The half-baked gurus play to the gallery by avoiding unpalatable truths and lull us into a comfort zone of 'feel good', 'take it easy', 'everything is fine', 'let go' and 'enjoy yourself' — a paradigm shift in showcasing enlightenment, largely approving (or at least conniving at) the *status quo* in one's lifestyle and attitude while never attempting to wean one away from false values and weaknesses.

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, 6.46.

The genuine masters promote a yearning for liberation (*mumukshutva*); the suave pretenders nourish *tamas* with clever justification. The latter enjoy a huge following, for they preach what is pleasant to hear (*priyam*), not what is truly good (*hitam*) for the soul. Riding on fallacious logic they countenance an indulgent life and even prove it to be a superior form of spirituality for it is embellished with ‘understanding’. To dive into the limpid purity of thought such as is found in classics like ‘Imitation of Christ’ by Thomas Á Kempis or ‘Abandonment to Divine Providence’ by Jean de Caussade would be far more ennobling and rewarding in our spiritual odyssey (even if they do *not* hint at Advaitic vision) than to be caught in the parodies of ‘modern’ Advaita. Is not pure silver any day better than imitation gold?

Finally, the acid test lies in whether your enlightenment reflects as perfect *vairagya* (dispassion) in everyday life. It cannot be overemphasised that the allure of ‘woman, gold and fame’ (*kamini-kanchana-kirti maya*) is stalking the seeker all the way up to *moksha* and one cannot afford to be complacent or lapse into inattention (*pramada*). Without *vairagya*, all else is mere polemics, endless and sterile; with *vairagya* one attains blessedness and beatitude.²

It is alright to focus on the non-doership of the individual but should it not immediately lead to the recognition of *Isvara* as the sole doer by whose Will everything ‘happens’ and hence surrendering all self-will at His altar in devotion become a natural corollary? But for the purveyors of neo-Advaita, the words ‘*Isvara*’, ‘devotion’, ‘surrender’, ‘*japa*’, ‘*upasana*’, ‘Grace’ etc. are anathema. They would rather have their listeners to ‘think and understand’ all the way to *moksha* and give them a different set of words like

² For did not Bhagavan Ramana say ‘desirelessness is godliness itself’? Bhartruhari, the king-turned-ascetic, declares famously: “every desirable object in all the three worlds is intimately fraught with fear; *vairagya* alone is fearlessness!” (*sarvam vastu bhayanvitam bhuvitrinam, vairagyam eva abhayam*). And Sankara exclaims ecstatically ‘*kasya sukham na karoti viragah?*’ (to whom will not *vairagya* confer bliss absolute?).

‘Reality’, ‘Stillness’, ‘Being’, ‘Now’, ‘Totality’, ‘Effortlessness’ etc. to hang the mind on. For them secular jargon is closer to Truth, freed from the demands of tradition and the labyrinth of scriptural testimony. That ‘Truth is beyond all concepts’ has become another fashionable concept for them, providing a convenient *alibi* to scoff at study (*shastra vichara*). They little know that scriptures are self-dismissive at their pinnacle and step aside for true silence to speak directly its own final message but only after accomplishing the spade work of clearing away all the wrong conditioning. This is the classical “deliberate superimposition and subsequent negation” (*adhyaropa-apavada*) methodology of unfolding the *vastu* (Self-discovery), where, after removing the first thorn with the help of a second thorn both are thrown away and Self-abidance becomes Self-knowledge.

Modern Advaitins speak of merely ‘understanding’ Truth but *never* talk about *self-realisation* where the false identity with body consciousness is irrevocably sublated. They insist only on one side of the coin namely ‘non-doership’ but conveniently omit the other side ‘non-enjoyership’ forgetting that the two aspects rise and die together.³

The *jnani* however knows himself to be a non-enjoyer (*abhokta*), and not just a non-doer (*akarta*) — *Isvara* being the Only Doer. So the pleasures and pains of phenomenal life neither interest him nor affect his poise as they have only a dream-like reality. His vision is ever riveted on the Self, the only Reality. To be an ‘enjoyer’ means to allow oneself to be acted upon by the world but the sage is empty inside with no ego available to be gratified from without. It is relatively easy to intellectually understand that one is not a doer but to ‘see’ that one is not an experiencer (of pleasure as well as pain) is *impossible* without shedding the ‘I-am-the-body’ idea (*dehatma buddhi*) to

³ Ramesh Balsekar typically says ‘an enlightened sage lives in the present and enjoys (the pleasures of) life as a *maha bhogi* – a super enjoyer!’ But a super-enjoyer has to be a super-doer too! And a super-doer will then be a super-*samsari*, never a *jivanmukta*! See his *Advaita, the Buddha and the Unbroken Whole*, p.123. Zen Pubs., 2000.

which the enjoyership (*bhoktrva buddhi*) is tied in the form of *cit-jada-granthi*. This knot can be severed only in direct experience (*aparoksha anubhava*) and never by smart thinking!⁴

Thus the advice ‘understand you are not the doer and enjoy phenomenal life’ does not hold. To ‘enjoy phenomenal life’ is to subconsciously treat it as real and be infatuated by it. Vedanta uncompromisingly asserts the illusory nature (*mithyasvabhava*) of everyday existence (*vyavaharika*).

Such a deceptive error is the progeny of treating Advaita as one more school of philosophy or speculative delight. Advaita is the ultimate vision of truth flowing from the direct experiential clarity of sages. It is an immediate recognition of one’s absolute identity and is self-referential without any need for external validation. It is unconditional bliss (*atmananda*) flowing from the knowledge of oneself as the limitless whole (*purna vastu*) without a blemish or lack. Let us be careful and not be fooled by the easy pills of intellectual jugglery hawked by modern messiahs who have thought it out all for you, so you can sit back and relax! All they have achieved is to administer large doses of seductive intellectual soporifics and create an allergy to all meaningful *sadhana*.

Cricket champion Sunil Gavaskar once said that a *good* batsman knows *only* what shots to play but a *great* batsman knows *in addition* what strokes *not* to execute! Palghat Mani Iyer, the legendary percussionist, told an aspiring disciple that he could teach him how to play *mridangam* in nine months but it would take nine years or more to learn how *not* to play it! In the same way, classical Vedantins aver that it is more important to discern what is *not* Vedanta before arriving at what it *is*; *neti, neti* (not this, not this) *vichara* has to commence from here before dismissing as not-self (*anatma*) the five sheaths (*pancha koshas*) which seemingly ‘surround’ the *atma*. For in modern times *Maya* is on the prowl in the garb of pseudo-Advaita! ▲

⁴In Vedanta terminology, this is because the sense of doership (*kartrtva buddhi*) is lodged in the intellect sheath (*vijnanamaya kosha*) while the sense of enjoyership (*bhoktrtva buddhi*) is embedded far deeper in the innermost of the five sheaths ‘enveloping’ the Self, the sheath of bliss (*anandamaya kosha*) in the causal plane. Neo-Advaitins do not recognise this vital point nor its profound implications for *sadhana*.

The Plunge into Siva’s Grace

MARLIES HIBSCHENBERGER

As a university student in Germany in 1959, I was one of a group of four friends interested in Eastern philosophy, whether through books or seminars or by any other means. As an only child I was somewhat self-conscious but I nonetheless swallowed all the books, articles and comments on psychology, yoga and Asian religions that came my way.

I thought, “There must be some very deep meaning to this life and our reason for being here, but if so, how to find out?”

As usual our little group spent its free time in a rather sophisticated book stall in a small town in south Germany. While casually looking for some new books I took out *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton. It felt like fire in my hands and I bought it with my last pocket money and quickly ran away to read it. I could not stop reading it as it

completely enthralled me. After some time, going back to that bookshop, I found *In Days of Great Peace* by Mouni Sadhu. I was so anxious to read those two books that I was forced to hide with a torch under my blankets as otherwise my parents would scold me for not doing my studies properly. I was completely distressed when I found out about the Maharshi's death, thinking, "Now I am too late." I cried endlessly being sure of having missed the chance of meeting a great being who had already stolen my heart and soul.

Anyway I reasoned to myself, how can a college girl without money run away to India? I had already decided for myself that the Maharshi was definitely 'alive' and so as soon as I had the money I resolved to go. I finished my training course in a newspaper publishing house and then got a job in the legal department in the Ministry of Culture.

Twenty three years of life had now passed. Not knowing the exact address of the Ramanasramam I wrote a letter to: "The ashram of Sri Ramana Maharshi at the holy hill of Arunachala, South India", being almost sure that there was very little chance of an answer to this rather vague address. I introduced myself, writing to the president asking for permission to come. It was not long before one evening, when I was sitting as usual on my meditation bench, already trying to follow the Maharshi's teaching of Self-enquiry, when I realised that my land-lady had put out my mail containing — what a miracle— a very welcome answering letter from the president of the ashram. I could hardly believe that Bhagavan was reaching out to take me "into the tiger's mouth."

From that day I eagerly saved up money. Nothing could be wasted having 'the final goal' in mind. As there was no such thing then as a cheap flight I booked my ticket by boat. My parents were staggered and shocked and my fiancé confronted me with "either me or India." I stuck to my decision and left from Marseille in France by a Messagerie Maritime liner for Bombay and not even fixing a time to come back. After 14 days I reached Bombay and proceeded to Madras where people advised me to go by train to Tiruvannamalai.

I was totally excited reaching the cute small railway station with Arunachala right in front of me. A horse-cart — what else in that

time, then took this exotic foreigner to Ramanasramam which was outside of that sleepy, little town and to the south of the hill. Entering the gate I knew that I was coming home; nothing was strange, everything familiar, there was no need to go anywhere else. I also knew that once I must have been here, but who cares for samsaric events! And Ramana Maharshi never died! What a solemn, vibrant and silent place. No cars, no motorcycles, not even a bicycle was to be seen, as if the clock was switched back to those times when Bhagavan was in his human form to pour out his grace endlessly towards everyone who came near him.

The ashram office was there in front of the mother temple and there was no grand samadhi hall, only a thatched roof and a rope fence around. A few inmates lived there, who silently moved around radiating that touch of peace which was all-pervading through Bhagavan's grace. The atmosphere was thrilling, powerful and penetrated my whole being. A warm welcome awaited me, a young girl who was eagerly longing to be One with that great being who is nobody else than one's own essence. The next days I ran (not walked) non-stop up the hill to Skandashram. Who gave me wings to feel like flying then?

There were only a handful of Westerners in the ashram. One of them was a German Hugo Maier who had already been there for five years and who shared with us his acquired knowledge, but naturally there was no one who could ever replace Bhagavan. And there was our great Muruganar Swami and Visvanatha Swami whose doors were practically open 24 hours for all the devotees requesting advice on Bhagavan's teaching. Or there was Kunju Swami or Annamalai Swami to whom we could joyfully listen. Mr Arthur Osborne who lived outside the ashram had been adding much to the explanation on vichara/self-enquiry which was the main and total point of interest. Mrs Lucia Osborne, Mrs Roda McIver, Miss Merston or Ma Thalayarkhan who in a more or less male dominated society cared very much for the needs of those single ladies who stayed at the ashram. For example, women at that time were not allowed to stay in the ashram after dinner.

And there was our beloved old postmaster Raja who used to place the incoming letters into the lap of those sitting for hours and hours together in the Old Hall. I had the opportunity to get a room beside our old Ramaswami Pillai who paved the path up to Skandashram with heavy granite stones in Bhagavan's lifetime.

And those days and weeks were spent sitting in the Old Hall where I felt Bhagavan had never left and where his grace was showered upon me uninterruptedly.

There was no electricity on the walk around the hill. One could only trace a few bullock-cart or horse-cart tracks and one could go all alone in the dark night being in tune with Lord Siva's all-pervading power manifested in Arunachala.

Days and weeks passed, I knew I had been born only to come here and be filled with what life's purpose means. Coming as an empty cup, I left Tiruvannamalai knowing that I carried now the greatest treasure a being in ordinary form can be capable of receiving.

I boarded the *Cambodje* in Colombo, Ceylon and came to Marseille two weeks later, where my husband to-be, already waited, eager to hear about my journey to Tiruvannamalai. Since then we have come every year for longer or shorter periods.

There is little that I can add to all the published memoirs about the senior devotees of Bhagavan who are no longer with us. When I was with Muruganar or say, Visvanatha Swami, they referred always to Bhagavan's teachings and never took upon themselves any role other than that of a humble devotee. What I felt being in their presence was their immense love for Bhagavan, which in its essence entered right into my heart and gave me a tremendous push to melt into the supreme source of my own being.

Surely, time has massively changed Tiruvannamalai after 40 years. The very intimate charming old days drenched in stillness and peace have in a sense, turned into a busy pilgrimage place for all people over the world in search of happiness, solace and spiritual experience. But HIS POWER REMAINS! ▲

The Conscious Cook

KAMALA DEVI

The Conscious Cook (1st. ed. 1997) is written by an Australian devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi. It is an inspiring resource for those who wish to follow a diet which supports health, happiness and peace of mind. A new hard-back edition of the book will be available soon but for now the book is conveniently available as an eBook, which can be downloaded and used from the desktop, or printed out as a hard copy. Links to Index and all Headings make it easy to find the page needed. The website is www.bigshakti.com The price is A\$24.95.

Some Basic Ingredients

Ginger Root

Ginger root has many uses as a medicine. It is very cleansing for the system and is good for clearing heaviness from the whole respiratory system, from the sinuses to the lungs. It is useful for relieving gas in the intestines as well as generally aiding digestion.

Garlic

Garlic is wonderfully rejuvenative, especially good for warding off coughs and colds and generally detoxifying the body. Respect it as a

medicine and don't add it to everything you prepare. Cooking the garlic reduces its heavy quality. A fine grater works well for mincing garlic. A garlic crusher can also be used. With good knife skills, and a good knife, it can be chopped very finely and quickly. Another way is to chop it roughly on a wooden board, sprinkle it with ½ teaspoon of salt and mash it using the end of a flexible knife. This mashes it really well.

Basic Curry Spices

Coriander. The ground seeds provide a cooling balance to the hot spices used in curry. It also enhances digestion. The fresh leaves are refreshing and beautifully formed for garnishing and adding to salads.

Cumin Seeds can be used whole or ground. This spice has a cooling effect and aids digestion. Dry roast before grinding to bring out the flavor.

Fenugreek. The seeds and leaves are used. It promotes digestion and is beneficial in convalescence to strengthen and eliminate toxins.

Turmeric. The bright golden colored dried root is ground and added to food. It is naturally antibiotic, is wonderful for the skin and helps to purify the blood.

Asafoetida is a resin extracted from a plant. Available in powdered form, it can be used in place of garlic and onions. It smells very strong and is excellent for stimulating digestion and expelling gas.

Chilies. These can be used green or red. Their fiery nature is stimulating to the circulatory and digestive system, relieving inner and outer feelings of cold.

Tamarind. The sticky, sour-tasting flesh found in the seed pod of the tamarind tree gives a fresh tart taste to light soups and sauces. It is available in concentrated form for easy use.

Garam Masala. A mixture of fragrant spices used as a garnish for sweet and savory foods.

Ground Nut/Seed Sprinkle. A small nut or coffee grinder or food processor makes this a matter of moments to prepare. Use sprinkled liberally over fruit salads and yogurt or sprinkle over salad or cooked vegetables to add to the nutritional value.

Grind together until fine ½ cup sunflower seeds, ¼ cup flax seed and ¼ cup whole almonds. Store in an airtight container.

Cashew Kichari (Indian Style)

This dish is very soothing to the digestive system and is ideal to give strength to the convalescing patient.

Enjoy it in good health too!

Other types of lentils can be used.

Wash and soak in water to cover, for an hour or so

¾ cup whole green mung beans.

Rinse and drain and place in a pot with

1½ cups brown rice.

Add **4½ cups water;**

2 Tablespoons grated ginger root.

Bring to the boil, then turn down to very low and allow to steam until all liquid has been absorbed (about 40 minutes).

While the rice is cooking, prepare the seasoning as follows:

In a heavy pan heat

3 Tablespoons ghee.

In the ghee, fry

½ cup raw cashew nut pieces.

Keep moving them around and, at the first hint of them darkening, remove them to a plate.

Now add and fry

1 heaped Tablespoon brown mustard seed.

Cover the pan so that they don't pop out all over the place. As popping subsides, add

1 medium onion, chopped fine few curry leaves (or 2 bay leaves, broken in pieces), 1 teaspoon sea salt.

Stir and fry until onion begins to brown. Remove from the heat, and, although the rice may still be cooking, add this mixture to the rice pot, stir it in and cover rice again to complete the absorption of liquid.

Serves 4-to 6.

Braised Aubergine with Tomatoes and Onions

This dish is surprisingly mellow and well flavored. Even those who don't usually like eggplants enjoy this preparation.

Wash **3 medium eggplants**.

Remove stalk and peel each aubergine lengthways leaving 4 evenly spaced 1" (3 cm) wide strips of peel in place. Slicing between the strips, cut each one in half. Cut side up, make 3 or 4 length-wise slashes through the thickest part of each half, spacing the cuts about 1" (3 cm) apart. Sprinkle generously with **salt**.

Rub it into the cuts, and leave for at least 30 minutes. Meanwhile peel and slice into thin rings

6 medium onions.

Drop the onions into a large strainer, sprinkle them generously with **salt** turning them about with a spoon to coat them evenly. Let stand 30 minutes, then rinse the onions under warm running water and squeeze them gently but completely dry. Place them in a bowl and add

5 medium ripe tomatoes, finely chopped.

Toss together well, adding a little salt if necessary. Into a heavy pan, big enough to hold the aubergines in one layer, pour

1½ Tablespoons olive oil.

Drain aubergines, rinse under cold water and gently squeeze and pat dry with kitchen towel. Force as much of the onion-tomato mixture as possible into the slashes and place the aubergines in the casserole.

Spread the rest of the mixture on top of each one. Peel

6 cloves of garlic.

Place one on each half and sprinkle them with

4½ Tablespoons olive oil.

Carefully pour into the pan **1 cup water**.

Bring to the boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low and simmer covered for about 1 hour until aubergines are tender. Alternatively, complete cooking in oven. Cool in the casserole and serve warm, sprinkled with

chopped parsley.

Baked Marinated Tofu

Prepare in the following way: **1 lb (500 g) firm tofu**.

Press the slabs of tofu under a chopping board weighted down with something heavy while you prepare the marinade ingredients. These instructions are for baked tofu slices, which can be cut about 3/8" (1 cm) thick. They are deliciously savory and, once baked, can be further cut into strips to add to casseroles or soups. They are ideal for the lunch box. If you wish to broil or barbecue the tofu on skewers, cut into large cubes, (3/4" or 2 cm) instead of slices and marinate for a while. It can be kept in the refrigerator and reused. Bring to the boil before placing further food in it.

Marinade (European Style)

Place all the following ingredients in a saucepan:

1 cup water; ½ cup olive oil; ½ wine vinegar (red if possible);

½ cup vegetable stock. ½ cup tamari (soy sauce); ½ teaspoon salt;

½ teaspoon black pepper, ground; 1/3 cup dried mushrooms; 2

teaspoons dried oregano; 2 cloves garlic; fine pinch of ground cloves.

Bring all to a boil and simmer for five minutes, then allow to cool a little. Put the tofu slices into the hot marinade for some hours, two at least. Oil a baking tray and lay the tofu slices on it, straight out of the marinade. Bake at 375° F (190° C) for 15 minutes or until golden brown and firm on top. Turn over and bake the other side similarly.

Marinade (Oriental Style)

This is a quick and easy way to prepare **firm tofu**. The slices can be added to stir-fried dishes. Chopped or cut in strips, they can be added to fried rice, burger mixtures or tossed in the salad.

Slice up a block of tofu and pat slices dry with paper kitchen towel or similar. Lay them out on a large plate or tray. Sprinkle liberally with good quality soy sauce.

If desired, sprinkle with **oriental style chili sauce**. Finely chop some **cloves of garlic & pieces of ginger root**. Spread or sprinkle this mixture over the slices. At intervals, turn the slices about two or three times before you fry them in very little **vegetable oil**.

Dried Fruit Delectables

Other dried fruits can be combined to make these sugar-free treats. In a medium bowl mix **1 cup chopped dried apricots; 1 cup dried dates, chopped; ½ cup fruit juice (or water); grated rind and juice of half a lemon.**

Cover bowl and allow to stand until moisture is absorbed, stirring from time to time. Transfer to a food processor or beat well and add

1 large ripe banana, mashed (or ½ cup ricotta cheese).

In a heavy pan or wok, dry roast

½ cup sunflower seeds.

Set aside to cool and dry roast

½ cup finely shredded coconut (fresh or dry).

Add seeds and coconut to the fruit mixture along with

½ teaspoon cinnamon powder (or ginger powder).

Knead well through your fingers until ingredients are smoothly mixed. Shape into balls and roll in **lightly toasted fine coconut shreds.**

Carob Fudge

No baking is required for this carob fudge, making it an ideal recipe for children to prepare. Each square is a concentrated form of sustaining energy. If desiccated coconut is unavailable, buy unsweetened coconut shreds and 'pulse' chop them very finely before adding to the other ingredients. A food processor makes this an easy preparation. Using a pulse action, so that they remain in small pieces, chop **1 cup nuts (cashews, almonds, walnuts).**

Remove them to a bowl. In processor, place

¼ cup dessicated coconut; ¾ cup carob powder.

Whirl together and add **½ cup coconut oil (or solid coconut cream) melted; 1/3 cup honey; 1/3 cup thick cream; 2 or 3 Tablespoons fruit juice; 1 teaspoon vanilla extract.**

Add this mixture to nuts and stir till well blended. Press into a greased tin about 8" (20cm) square and place in the refrigerator. When firm, cut into squares. Keep in the refrigerator or a cool place. ▲

Sankara's View of Meditation

JONATHAN BADER

Sankara's understanding of meditation is determined largely by his basic metaphysical assumptions. A look at some of the fundamental concepts of his thought should help to answer two important questions. Firstly, why does he seek to modify the obvious significance, which the older Upanishads attach to meditation? Secondly, what exactly is the place of meditation in Sankara's Vedanta? There remains the further question of Sankara's practical instructions regarding meditation. Recent studies have commented on his apparent failure to provide specific guidance in this area. Yet in at least one instance, *Bhagavadgita-bhasya* (GBh) 5.12, he has provided a clear outline of the spiritual disciplines the aspirant is to follow.

Sankara's *Upadesasahasri* is an independent treatise and allows Sankara greater range in which to expound his own thought than do

his commentaries. But above all the *Upadesasahasri* is a manual of practical instruction. As such, it provides an invaluable context in which to examine Sankara's teachings on meditation. In the *Brahmasutra-bhasya* (BSBh), on the other hand, his discussion of meditation is largely exegetical. Nevertheless, even here Sankara gives some suggestion of the role meditation plays in his Advaita Vedanta.

But Sankara's apparent failure in the BSBh. to enlarge upon passages concerning meditation is probably quite intentional. This is very much in keeping with his basic metaphysical position. Since he regards meditation as an activity relevant only to the lower order of truth, Sankara endeavours to minimise its importance. Sankara confines himself to the briefest of explanations when commenting on passages that he does not believe to be pertinent to the highest truth. When the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* (BU) itself goes to great lengths in presenting such topics, he treats the discussion merely as a 'supplementary section' (*khila-kanda*). This, he maintains, is needed in order to bring to completion the full range of material, which the Upanishad has encompassed. Alternatively, Sankara suggests that such 'supplements' are for the benefit of those aspirants who are incapable of grasping the highest truth. For those rather dim-witted souls (*manda-buddhinam*), the ancient teachers found it necessary to provide meditations based on the lower, or conditioned, aspect of Brahman.

In BSBh 1.4.1 Sankara describes what appear to be steps in a meditation leading to knowledge of the Self.¹ First, speech is withdrawn into mind. Then, the mind is absorbed into intellect, the intellect into the great Self, and finally, the great Self merges into the peaceful Self. Sankara takes this passage to be an illustration of the method by which the illusions that obscure the true nature of the Self are removed.

He explains a similar procedure, a progressive understanding (*kramavati pratipattih*), in BSBh 4.1.2. Here the meditation involves the cultivation of attentiveness (*avadhana*). This becomes the means

¹ See *Katha Upanisad* 3.13. In his *Katha Upanisad-bhasya* Sankara glosses the prescriptive 'restraint' advocated in the text with *upasamharet* which can suggest both 'let him withdraw' and 'let him become absorbed'.

by which one is able to gradually discard (*apoh*) the false identification of the Self with the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, and so on. Sankara refers again to this practice in his discussion of meditation in GBh 13.24. Here too, there is a progressive withdrawing (*upasamhr*) which leads to an absorption in the inner intelligence. In all these instances, the essential feature of the meditation is a process of discarding or removing. While the procedure may well involve a progression, it would be misleading to speak in terms of 'stages of progress' in this context. There seems little point in looking for development in a process, which consists solely in removing illusory identifications.

The problem, which *Brahmasutra* (BS) 3.3 is concerned with, is that of reconciling the varied *vidya-s*, which appear throughout the older Upanishads.² More specifically, as Sankara puts it, the question is whether the different Upanishads actually present divergent cognitions of Brahman. One could scarcely deny that the Upanishads do depict various cognitions of Brahman and a corresponding assortment of *vidya-s*. The task of the Vedantin is to demonstrate that this multiplicity does not detract from the unity of Brahman. Sankara's argument is that the passages on meditation do differ, but that they are all concerned with the same Brahman. He illustrates his point with an image of regal life: "The case is analogous to that of two wives ministering to one king, one with a fly-flap, the other with an umbrella; there also the object of the ministrations is one, but the acts of ministrations themselves are distinct and have each their own particular attributes."³

In BSBh 4.1, Sankara comments directly on the techniques of meditation. Still more important here is his discussion of the sacred utterance (*mahavakya*), 'Thou art that' (*tat tvam asi*). This *mahavakya* is the basis upon which Sankara constructs his method of liberation.

² *Vidya*, literally 'knowledge', in this context denotes 'meditation based on the knowledge of one or more of the various aspects of Brahman'. Virtually the whole of *Brahmasutra* 3.3 and Sankara's *bhasya* are occupied with a lengthy discussion of these meditations.

³ *The Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana with the Commentary by Sankara*, tr. George Thibaut (2 vols.; reprinted: New York, 1962), vol. II, p. 203.

As a traditional interpreter of Vedanta, Sankara must show that the seemingly diverse range of metaphysical viewpoints expressed in the Upanishads are actually a unified description of the nature of reality. More specifically, it is the differing perspective on the relationship of Brahman and atman that constitute the basic problem the Vedantin seeks to resolve. Before Sankara, the prevailing current of Vedanta thought seems to have been that of *bhedabheda*, identity-in-difference. In this interpretation, Brahman is at once identical and yet different from the individual being (*jiva*). Sankara repeatedly refutes this position, particularly in his *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad bhasya* (BUBh). In its place, he proposes that the fundamental message of the Upanishads is the complete identity of Brahman and *atman*. He maintains that this non-dual reality is absolute and unqualified. Although this non-dualistic attitude is present in the Upanishads, they also speak of Brahman as having qualities (*saguna*). Not only do they posit a distinction between Brahman and the *jiva*, but suggest a third entity as well, the world (*jagat*). Sankara attempts to tie together these apparently contradictory ideas: “In all the Upanisads, first identity is broached, then by means of illustrations and reasons the universe is shown to be a modification or part or the like of the Supreme Self; and the conclusion again brings out the identity.”⁴ For Sankara, any assignation of qualities to Brahman, or any discussion concerning the question of how creation is effected from the one reality, necessarily entails a limited or modified perspective of the absolute. The sole purpose in describing the ‘modifications’ of Brahman is to provide a support or object of meditation. The aim of the meditation is, in turn, to indicate the non-dual reality.

In a sense, it is not necessary for Sankara to provide arguments, which justify the concept of the non-dual Brahman. The *sruti* or revealed scripture,⁵ which he holds to be the ultimate authority and

⁴BUBh 2.1.20 in *The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad with the commentary of Sankaracarya*, tr. Swami Madhavananda, p.210.

⁵While ‘revealed scripture’ is probably the best translation for *sruti*, it can be misleading. The *sruti* is comprised of the corpus of the Vedas. The Vedas were transmitted only in oral form for many centuries. It is believed that the *sruti* represents the teachings



source of knowledge has already done so. His attitude to scripture is perhaps best demonstrated in the first prose chapter of the *Upadesasahasri*. Here, the discussion of metaphysical principles is wholly reliant on the citation of scriptural passages. Yet, Sankara does offer some further explanation for the identity of Brahman and atman. First of all, he suggests that the atman is self-established (*svayam siddha*) “The being of Brahman is known on the ground of its being the Self of everyone. For everyone is conscious of the being of (his) Self, and never thinks; ‘I am not’. If the being of the Self were not known, everyone would think ‘I am not’. And this Self (of whose being all are conscious) is Brahman.”⁶ Not only is the atman self-established, it is also self-luminous. Sankara employs a simple analogy for this, linking knowledge with illumination (*prakasa*). Just as the sun requires no other light for its illumination, so too, knowledge requires no other knowledge for its illumination. Sankara follows this line of thought to its logical conclusion: the identity of Brahman and atman is not something to be attained. It is already present. For this identity constitutes our very nature. Besides, if identity were something that could be effected, then it would not be an eternal truth.

Now if the atman is self-established and self-luminous, then the question Sankara must deal with is, ‘Why don’t we know this?’ He addresses this issue from the outset of his BSBh. This ignorance (*avidya*), he claims, is due to superimposition (*adhyasa*), “The apparent presentation to consciousness of something previously observed in some other thing in the form of remembrance”, *smrti-rupah paratra purva-drstavabhasah*.⁷ The result of *adhyasa* is that the unreal, in the

of the highest order, as directly *heard* by the ancient sages. While the *sruti* is a revelation, it is not revealed by a divine agency. The *sruti* is thought to have always been; it is eternal. At the dawn of creation the *sruti* simply reappears, in the same form in which it had appeared in previous cycles of creation. The *smrti* is what is *remembered* from the primeval teachings. *Smrti* compositions are believed to have a human (or semi-divine) author. For this reason, they are dependent upon the ultimate authority of *sruti*.

⁶ *The Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana with the Commentary by Sankara*, tr. George Thibaut. BSBh 1.1.1, vol. 1, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.4.

form of the temporal body, is superimposed upon the real Self. For this reason, we see the body as the Self and not the Self as it really is. Sankara cites further illustrative examples from the realm of ordinary experience. The mother of pearl appears to be silver, and the rope is mistaken for a snake.

The basic problem, then, is one of ignorance, while the obvious solution is simply true knowledge (*samyag-darsana*). Yet, the knowledge that removes this false appearance and therefore restores the original identity is not an activity. Sankara utilises a surprisingly realistic argument to draw a sharp distinction between ritual action and knowledge. While ritual actions depend both on the injunctions of the Vedic texts (*codana-tantra*), and on the mind of man (*purusa-tantra*), knowledge depends only on an existing thing (*vastu-tantra*) being an object of perception. In the case of ritual action involving the sacred fire, for example, both the Vedic texts and the correct actions of the participant are essential. Where knowledge is concerned, the situation is entirely different. Even if the Vedas were to tell us that fire was cold, or if an individual were to claim that the fire was wet, the actual fire before us would remain unchanged.

Since it is purely a mental process, meditation may not appear, at first glance, to be a ritual act. Nevertheless, it does depend on the agent-meditator. Therefore, *dhyana* is something that may or may not be performed, and which will necessarily remain subject to modification. Sankara designates the functions of ritual action as production, attainment, modification, and purification. All these terms might serve equally well to indicate the three goals of *upasana* that were mentioned earlier: averting calamity, achieving power, and gradual release. Needless to say, the characteristics of production, attainment, cannot be ascribed to a Brahman, which is absolute. Any of these actions would entail some sort of limiting adjunct (*upadhi*) or modification. For this reason, meditation cannot lead directly to identity with Brahman, to liberation.

Sankara tends not to reject outright those traditional Vedanta teachings that are incompatible with his Advaita. Instead, he subordinates them. This is basically what happens in the case of meditation. Sankara

is able to accord a place to meditation by associating it with a lower order of knowledge. In doing so he draws upon the distinction of the higher (*para*) and lower (*apara*) classes of knowledge which are set out in *Mundaka Upanisad* 1.1.4-5. The two orders of knowledge also correspond, for Sankara, to two perspectives of Brahman. From the *apara* standpoint, Brahman appears within the context of the manifest world, defined by numerous qualities. The *para* Brahman, on the other hand, is unconditioned and quality-less (*nirguna*).

Sankara finds it inadmissible to refer to 'going to' the highest Brahman. Neither can one properly speak of attaining identity with the absolute. J. F. Staal has commented on the important distinction between the notions of identity and identification.⁸ 'Identification' implies 'the act of making identical', as in *upasana*. 'Identity' only refers to 'being identical', which is a matter to be understood solely by means of knowledge. Sankara readily admits that by meditation one may attain the realm of the gods (*deva-loka*). But he insists that where Brahman is concerned, only the *saguna* aspect may be considered attainable. Still, he does bow to the clear statement of the *sruti* texts declaring that those who achieve identification with Brahman may win liberation.⁹ He concedes that one may undergo a gradual process of liberation (*krama-mukti*) in the realm of the *apara* Brahman. This process involves the achievement of perfection during the countless years one remains in the world of Hiranyagarbha, Sankara's preferred designation of *apara* Brahman. One will continue to dwell there until such time as this realm is reabsorbed into the absolute. When this occurs one will be liberated along with Hiranyagarbha himself.¹⁰

In Sankara's Vedanta, meditation remains a pre-eminent spiritual discipline whose role is to prepare the ground for the arising of knowledge. ▲

⁸ *Advaita and Neoplatonism: A Critical Study in Comparative Philosophy* (Madras, 1961), p. 109.

⁹ BSBh 4.3.10.

¹⁰ BUBh 6.2.15.

The Greatness of Arunchala

Extracts from Chapter One, the Holy City, of the *Arunachala Purana*

SAIVA ELLAPPA NAVALAR
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

Introduction

The Arunachala Purana is a *sthalapurana* portraying the greatness of the holy hill Arunachala. The material is drawn in the main from the *Arunachala Mahatmya*, a section of book I of the Sanskrit *Skanda Purana*, itself one of the 18 major *Puranas*. It was written in the 16th century when it became popular to praise the greatness of specific *sthalas*, (holy places of worship and pilgrimage), usually in the vernacular (in this case, Tamil), and drawing on local myth and legend to elaborate the stories. Saiva Ellappa Navalar, the author, was one of the major composers of such works. The encyclopaedia of Tamil literature, *Abithana Chintamani*, lists 5 others as being composed by him. He also wrote two fairly extensive poems in praise of Arunachala, the *Arunai Andathi* and the *Arunai Kalampakam*, both of which are

extant. The excerpt given here constitutes the greater part of Chapter I and extols Arunachala as standing above all the other holy places of India. The style is colourful, poetic and vigorous with few of the rhetorical and didactic excesses that mark the *Mahatmya* itself.

There is no complete translation of this work in English, although abbreviated excerpts, compiled by J. Jayaraman, have appeared in an ashram publication and have been published as a series in *The Mountain Path* under the title *Arunachala Puranam Vignettes*. The text can also be found on the Internet by tracing on the name. Additionally, Chapter 9, *King Vallalan of Tiruvannamalai*, a section inspired by local history and legend and not part of the *Mahatmya*, has been published with an introduction and notes on his own website by David Godman.

Nandi is the gatekeeper of Siva's palace on Mount Kailash, he is also in some traditions the head of Siva's army of attendants, the ganas, and he is also Siva's foremost disciple, one of the primal gurus. Here he is pictured seated in Lord Siva's palace giving upadesa to the assembled sages and rishis...

24. Exercising the holy ordinance of Lord Siva,

in whose locks the moon and the Ganges are intertwined
 whose shoulders are fourfold
 who wears the Brahmin's three-corded string
 whose fair and holy loins are ever girt with a tiger's skin
 whose hair is gathered up in a knot
 whose deep gaze is threefold
 whose body is smeared with white ash
 so that it resembles a mountain of red coral
 over which the moon spills her pale light,

he whose hands never loosen their grasp
 on the deer, sceptre, sword and noble battle axe
 stands guard upon Mount Kailash's silvery peak.

25. He resembles the One

whose hue is that of fresh-picked lotus flowers
 whose holy throat is stained with black
 who rides upon a fine white bull
 whose Cloud of compassion pours down its rain
 to nurture the crop of the Saivite faith.

He was as life itself to his father Siladan,¹
 watching over him whilst his five senses
 were turned inward and subdued.
 All the Gods pay homage at the red lotuses of his feet.
 Nandi is his holy name.

26. Shining with the combined radiance of the moon and river Ganges, the divine form of the Lord himself, and the holy ash that so decorously adorns it, stands Mount Kailash, upon whose summit the Gods with Indra at their head throng closely together, the tumultuous clash of crown upon jewelled crown dusting its slopes with a powder of gold and precious gems, so that it resembles golden Mount Meru itself.

27. Atop this mountain stands a *mantapam*, with pillars of diamond, sturdy as Mount Mandara, cornices of rubies massed together, capitals carved from red coral, and cross beams of emerald, its walls decorated with seamless mosaics of sapphire gems, and its ceiling plated with moonstone.

28. It happened one time that Nandi was seated therein upon a lion throne inlaid with pearls on either side, resting his lotus feet upon a noble footstool studded with bulky sapphires, holding court upon mighty Mount Kailash, his

¹ Siladan is one of the rishis and the father of Nandi, seemingly through adoption.

left leg resting upon the back of the Demon Muyalagan,² as he expounded the arcane secrets of the Vedas to the assembled rishis, as if he were Lord Siva himself.

At this point, at the request of Markandeya, who is amongst the assembled rishis, Nandi explains that final liberation may be gained by bathing in holy rivers and visiting holy places, and then proceeds to list some of the major ones, ending with the words:

43. To be born or to die in holy places such as these, to delight one's eyes with the sight of them, to perform ritual ablutions there, bringing joy to the holy mind of the effulgent Light who dances in the pure transcendent sphere of the divine, to accumulate wealth and to employ it liberally in the creation of broad groves and temples to Lord Siva, is to obtain for oneself the highest bliss, declared Nandi, to which the sage [Markandeya] replied:

44. To perform such works at each of these incomparable rivers and holy sites is impossibility even for siddhas and sages, and the Gods themselves in their exalted estate. Could such a thing be easily accomplished by man, whose lifetime is as brief as a lightning flash? And even were it so, Supreme One, it would still be beyond the reach of the various animal and plant life-forms!

45. Pray tell if there is one place where the knowledge of Lord Siva, earned through endless aeons of seeking, bathing in all these holy rivers, and visiting all these blissful shrines, might be gained in a short time without hardship, even by seekers who have missing limbs, are lacking in wisdom, are morally debased or are destined for the tortures of Hell, or by the beasts of the field, and all other beings!

² Muyalagan is the dwarf upon whom Nataraja performs his dance.

46. As soon as he whose austerities defeated Death himself, and the other assembled rishis, had finished speaking, and had made obeisance, touching the lotuses of his feet with the lotuses of their hands, Nandi, filled with deep compassion, began to speak: There is one such holy shrine where liberation may be gained in this way; this I shall reveal to you, he said, silencing the assembly with a gesture. Then, reflecting upon Arunagiri's black-throated Lord, he fell into a rapturous trance.

47. All the hairs of his body stood up on end, he shivered and trembled, rivers of tears burst forth from both his eyes, and speech deserted him as, palms joined in prayer, he remained for a long while in a state of deep absorption. Then, uttering these words of praise: 'You who wear the river Ganges in your hair! Arunagiri's Lord! You whose eyes are Fire! My own Lord and Master!', he recovered his senses and began his exposition:

48. I shall speak only the truth: this is indeed a place which, of itself, confers liberation. Its names are legion. Is it within even my power to speak them all? However, I shall list a tiny fraction of them. One of its names is *Gauri, giver of supernatural powers*, another is *City of Light*, another *Southern Arunai*, yet another *City which is the glorious realm of Lord Siva*, another *City of Vayu, the deeply wise*.

49. If you were to place the seven holy cities,³ and all the other holy sites with them in one dish, and this one in the other dish, and weighed them one against the other, this shining City would outweigh them all. Its name is *City of Liberation*. Its name is *City of Divine Knowledge*. Its name is *Foremost abode of Isvara* and *Immaculate City*. Its name is *Southern Kailash*. Its name is *Sonagiri*.

³ These are Ayodhya, Madurai, Mayapuri, Kasi, Kanchi, Avanti and Dvaraka.

MOUNTAIN PATH

50. This City cannot be laid waste even by the fiery whirlwinds, tidal waves and the seven clouds which attend the universe's dissolution. Nor can it be affected in any way by depravity, disaster, famine and the diseases which arise from disorders of the three humours. It is that excellent City where great yogis and successive incarnations of Lord Visnu have performed worship. It is that divine City where the six and ninety Brahmins who sprang from the lotus flower of Madhavan's navel made puja.

51. It is quite unique upon this earth. It is not recent in origin, for when the world itself, the Gods and the soaring vault of heaven came into being, it was there at that time. Unfailingly, it stands at the Veda's end. In that place an imperishable Mountain stands. Firmly established within the lotus-like heavenly sphere, in the Southern quarter it abides everlastingly, bringing prosperity to this world, girt by vast oceans.

52. *Arsa, Rakshasa, Asura, Daivata, garlanded Manusa, Svayambhu* — such are the names that are given to the Siva lingams that illuminate holy shrines everywhere with their radiance. But here it is the beautiful Mountain itself which stands as the lingam.

53. In the first [*Kṛta*] yuga it was a Mountain of bright red flame, then, in the *Treta* yuga, of ruby. In the *Dvapara* yuga it shone with the lustre of pure gold, and in the *Kali* yuga,⁴ in which we now dwell, it is formed of stone. Its name is Arunachala, the Red Mountain.

54. If the seven clouds, whose massed forms pour down rain as all incarnation ceases at the yuga's end, were each to

⁴The Age of Iron, the current yuga, reckoned to have begun in 3102 B.C.E.



be multiplied ten million-fold, and to rain down drops the size of palm fruits for a thousand years, all that rain would be reduced to mere river upon that Mountain.

55. Since Hari and Ayan wandered there through endless time, unable to fathom its size, could anything else be said to be the equal if it? The horses which pull the Sun's chariot rush through the heavens to drink at its Mountain tanks, which even the Celestial River praises.

56. White clouds gather about its foot, as if it were actually standing on top of Mount Kailash, which itself fills our minds with wonder. And to describe the light that appears there in the cool month of *kartikai*, we might say it resembles the jewel in the diadem of the Goddess Earth.

57. When The First One, whose greatness Mal and Brahma, he who faces the four directions, were unable to measure, took the form of a fragrant Mountain, Himavat rejoiced in his heart saying: 'It is good. Now my son-in-law and I are both of the same race.'

58. The twelve constellations, Sun and steadfast Moon all circle it, keeping it to the right. Could even my understanding be sufficient to describe its high estate?, said Nandi. Notwithstanding this, the force of his inner desire compelled him to continue:

In verses 59, 60 & 61 Nandi describes some of the mountains that stand in the eight directions around Arunachala, then continues:

62. In that holy place, whose glory is equal even to her own, the Earth's Mother performed austerities so many and so great that she merged with the One who is my own

Master, and became his left half.⁵ Knowing this, how could anyone hope to speak of its goodness?

63. Mal and Ayan as boar and swan sought diligently, yet were unable to take the measure of that Mountain whose nature gloriously embodies *mantra*, *bhuvana* and *tattva*,⁶ and were thus released from the sin of pride.

64. Beginning with these first ones and continuing up to the present day, many are those who have attained the deathless state of liberation, through dwelling on Aruna in their thoughts, through lovingly speaking its praises, through hearing of it, and then coming to gaze upon it, through performing *pradakshina* of it on foot, through dwelling there in a state of righteousness, through walking in the path of truth there, through bathing in its broad tanks, and through carrying out good works, performing holy service in the temple and worshipping there at the feet of that Effulgent Light.

65. That holy place is in the Tamil land. There, the river Pennai is praised as the *ida nadi*, the Seyyaru as the *pingala*, and the Kamalai of great renown, as the *sushumna*. A single act of bathing in these will yield fruit a thousand fold. Thirty three times ten million sages will perform religious austerities there. Its equal cannot be found anywhere, whether it be in the world of men below, or that of the Gods on high. Thus spoke Nandi.

67. The sage Markandeya rejoiced inwardly and his heart melted on hearing of Aruna's majesty from the mouth of One in whom no defect can be found. However, unable to

⁵ The story of how Parvati came to win Lord Siva as her husband and finally take her place as the left side of his holy form is told in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the *Arunachala Purana*.

⁶ Three of the six *adhvan*, paths to liberation in Saivite religion. Each of which, in initiation, is shown to be absorbed by the next one until the last is absorbed by the *tirodhana sakti* (concealing power) and this in its turn by Siva.

comprehend how its greatness could so exceed that of all other holy shrines, he spoke again: 'My understanding is feeble', he said, 'and there is something you said which is not clear to me'. 'Let me know it, then', said Nandi, who understands all things within his heart. Whereupon the sage spoke these words:

68. You have declared that to gaze upon Tillai, to die in Kasi, to be born in glorious Arur or simply to meditate upon Aruna whose greatness knows no measure, is the means to gain final liberation! Hear me, Master, and deign to explain why you spoke of Aruna, surrounded by water lilies all around, as the greatest of them all. To which Nandi graciously replied:

69. The actions of being born and dying cannot be achieved through the power of thought alone.⁷ Creatures that fly in the air, some wild animals, trees and other life-forms with a single sense,⁸ the depraved who are steeped in sin, and those who are blind cannot aspire to worship in the Hall where the Lord performs his holy dance. This is easy only to a very few, coming as it does as a reward for the highest moral and spiritual attainment. To the rest, it is a difficult thing indeed.

70. Those born out of wedlock, those who have renounced their religion, those illegitimately born of widows, those of low caste, murderers, those who have lost limbs, fierce savages and those who dwell at a great distance, if they but once with righteous intention fix their thoughts upon Mount Aruna, abode of compassion, the result will be liberation. Not only these but also wild beasts, plants, trees, lotus flowers and related species, all will gain liberation either by looking upon it, or germinating and growing there.

71. All stones in that place are lingams. It is indeed the Abode of Lord Siva. All trees are the wish-granting trees of Indra's Heaven. Its rippling waters are the Ganges, flowing through our Lord's matted locks. The food eaten there is the ambrosia of the Gods. When men move about in that place it is the earth performing *pradakshina* around it. Words spoken there are holy scripture, and to fall asleep there is to be absorbed in *samadhi*, beyond the mind's delusion. Could there be any other place which is its equal?

72. Whether they are guardians of the three sacrificial fires, or are fully versed in the knowledge of the four Vedas, whether they are the ministrants of the five sacrifices, whether they perform austerities or carry out good works of whatever kind, or are practitioners of the eightfold path of yoga, if they do not fix their thoughts upon that holy shrine, there will be for them no final liberation. That is why even the Gods in heaven have taken birth as holy men, meditated upon it, and thereby attained that deathless state.

73. Those who dwell in matchless Svarga, feasting on ambrosia, and those who severally stand guard over this Garden of Pleasure and the other worlds desire to be born there, believing birth in that city, even as a mere worm, to be the greater good. Except for those who have performed one hundred sacrifices, birth in that noble place is not attainable. Whilst it is easy for those who are recipients of the Lord's grace, it is difficult indeed for the other Gods, and the most eminent even amongst men.

74. In all other holy places, the glittering presence of Lord Siva dwells like a flawless gem, encased in a setting of impure gold, silver, brass, copper or worthless iron. But in that richly abundant place which is called Aruna, where our gracious Lord is enthroned in majesty, it is as if that same jewel were

⁷ The implication is that to gain liberation at Kasi and the other *sthalas*, one actually has to be born there, die there etc., one cannot simply imagine that one has done so.

⁸ Trees and plants are deemed to have only a single sense, that of touch.

set in sheet of pure gold. Thus spoke Nandi, the holy one, the embodiment of grace.

75. It is the eyes which light up the holy visage, and it is the holy visage which lends lustre to those dark eyes. And the combined effect of these causes the whole body to shine. In the same way, it is due to the Supreme One that Aruna shines, and due to Aruna's great City that our Master shines. And it is due to the Immaculate One and noble Aruna together, that holy shrines without number, all of them, shine out. Thus its glory far exceeds that of all other shrines, declared Nandi.

76. If water is poured onto the roots of a plant, its fragrant flowers, leaves and shoots will be refreshed. Similarly, if puja, however modest, is performed in the prescribed manner in Aruna's City, the result is as if puja of the most distinguished order had taken place in Kasi, or any of the other holy places. If puja is not performed here, what does it matter if it is performed in all the other holy places, or indeed in none of them?

77. If those who dwell in Arunachala, which the whole world reveres, entertain doubts in their heart, and conceiving a desire for some other holy shrine, depart and go to that place, the austerities and righteous deeds they have performed previously will become worthless. However highly born, they will become the lowest of the low. However greatly endowed with good qualities, they will become morally debased. Though living, they will be as the dead. The same fate awaits those who claim that any other shrine is its equal.

78. Thus, having pleasingly described and explained to the rishis the great glory of Aruna, Lord Nandi, who bears the fawn, battle-axe, and sword remained at peace. ▲

The Matsya Avatara

RAMESH MENON

Raja Parikshita now said, "Holy one, tell me about the Lord's incarnation as the Matsya, the mystic Fish. How did the God of Gods come down to the world in such a low and unevolved form, even as if he was bound by karma?"

Suka told him the legend of the Matsyavatara.

"Vishnu incarnates himself to help the helpless, the Rishis and the Devas, good men of dharma, men of the Veda. He also comes to protect the purusharthas, the four aims of life — dharma, artha, kama and moksha.

He pervades all beings, all things, high and low, rather like the air. Yet, he is a Spirit and unaffected by the evolution of the creatures in whom he dwells, by their qualities of body and mind.

As the last Kalpa ended and Brahma wanted to fall asleep at his cosmic twilight, the universe was flooded by a Naimittika Pralaya, a deluge. The three worlds lay submerged after that endless rain. Brahma was tired, and as sleep overcame him, he yawned and the Veda fell out

of his mouth. An Asura called Hayagriva, who was nearby, snatched up the holy Veda in a flash. The Lord incarnated himself as a Fish to retrieve the sacred book.

In that last Kalpa, once a king of deep dharma called Satyavrata sat in tapasya, worshipping the Blue God. The king lived sipping just water. Parikshita, it was this same Satyavrata who was born as Vivaswan, the Sun God's child and became a Manu in this Kalpa. Then he would be called Vaivaswata and Sraddha Deva.

One evening, at the third sandhya, Satyavrata sat performing jalatarpana, water rituals, beside the river Kritamala, when a minuscule and exceptional fish, smaller than a minnow, swam into his cupped palms. Satyavrata was king of Dravida, the southern country, and he poured the water in his hands and the little fish in it back into the river.

The fish said to him in a piteous voice, 'O King, your mercy and generosity towards the poor and the suffering are a legend across the worlds! Then why do you cast me back into the river, where I am always in fear for my life from bigger fish?'

At which, immediately, Satyavrata scooped the fish up again and decided to give it sanctuary. The king put the fish into his kamandalu and brought it back to his asrama where he was performing tapasya. Of course, he had no notion that the remarkable talking fish was the Lord himself, come to bless him.

After a spare meal, Satyavrata fell asleep that night and heard strange sounds just as dawn broke. He saw the tiny fish had grown so much in a night that his waterpot could no longer contain it.

The fish spoke again to the king, 'I cannot stay in your kamandalu anymore; it is too small for me. I beg you put me into a bigger vessel.'

The king let it into a bigger earthen pot and filled that with water. But in a moment, the fish was as long as his arm and as wide and thick too! In a few moments more, it was thrice that size and cried again to the austere king, 'Raja, look at me, I am much too big for this waterpot! Find me a bigger place to dwell.'

The king took the vessel to the pond in the hermitage and emptied it there, with the fish. In an hour, the fish filled the pond with its

supernatural growth and cried again to the king, 'O King, look how small this pond is for me. I need at least a lake to stay in comfortably. Find me a lake where there are no crocodiles.'

With some difficulty, and using a net and many of his men, Satyavrata took the fish to a lake. But in hours it filled the lake and the king had it hauled on wheels, using a legion of his men to a larger lake, big as a small sea. The fish filled this in half a day and cried pitifully to the king once more.

The king mustered an army and had the fish brought to the sea. It said to him, as always in the chastest language, 'Satyavrata, you must not put me into the ocean, for surely a whale will devour me if you do.'

Now Satyavrata spoke to the fish. He said, 'Who are you, O Fish? We have never seen a creature as extraordinary as you are. You speak, and you grow as no other fish ever. In a day, you have filled a lake of a hundred yojanas.'

He paused, then said with conviction, 'You can only be the Lord Hari! And you have come as a Fish to bless the worlds. Paramatman, I salute you that are the master of creation, nurture and dissolution. You are the soul of all of us, who seek salvation and refuge in you.'

'Every Avatara you have come as has been to save the worlds. Tell me, my Lord, why have you now come as this awesome Fish? Lotus eyed Vishnu, unlike serving the merely mortal, worshipping you never proves vain — look how you have come to me in this exceptional form! I am certain this is the fruit of my bhakti.'

The Lord is always absolutely loving towards his bhaktas. He had now come to swim and sport in the waters of the Pralaya. He had also come to bless his devotees, and he said to Satyavrata, 'O Raja, on the seventh day from today, Swarga, Bhumi and Patala shall drown in the waters of the Naimittika Pralaya.'

'When the earth is submerged I will send you a ship. You must board that craft with the seeds of all the trees and plants that you can gather, with a pair of every species of animal and bird, and with the Saptarishis. You will need to navigate the pitch darkness of the Pralaya and the Seven Sages shall shine as beacons of light for you in the night of nights.'

‘When the most violent waves and winds rock your ship, I will appear at its prow and you can moor your craft to my fin, using Vasuki as your rope. I will guide your ship through the waters of the deluge until Brahma’s night ends and he awakens and begins a new day and a fresh creation.

‘And through the perfect night of Brahma’s sleep, I shall reveal my inmost secrets to you upon the ultimate ocean, and you will realise the Truth, the Brahman, and you will find moksha and become free.’

With this, the sacred Matsya vanished. Satyavrata began his wait for the Pralaya to begin. He made a seat of durva grasses for himself on the ground, their blades pointing to the east. The king sat on the grass seat, facing the north east and meditated upon the feet of the Blue God, Hari who had incarnated himself as the Fish.

Dense black clouds filled the sky above the king at dhyana — the clouds of the Apocalypse. Thunder and lightning gashed the sky and it began to rain. Torrents fell from on high and the oceans rose and broke their shores. Tidal waves swept across the earth, drowning the continents. The loftiest mountains were submerged.

Meanwhile, as the Deluge began, Satyavrata remembered the Lord’s promise to him and immediately a vast and exquisite ship appeared on the sea before him. The king had already collected all the seeds of green living things, sacred trees and precious plants. He had called every species of bird and beast to him, a pair of each one. The Saptarishi, the seven sages, also arrived on that shore.

Together, they boarded the Blue God’s crystal ship that seemed to be made of the shards of a rainbow. The Saptarishi now said to the king, ‘Satyavrata, now meditate upon Keshava, the Lord Mahavishnu! For he shall be our refuge and our saviour.’

The king set the mind in dhyana upon Narayana and the Lord appeared as the splendid golden Fish, with a single dorsal fin. Except now he was a hundred thousand yojanas long! Vasuki, emperor of serpents, appeared beside the ship and Satyavrata asked the Naga to be the rope with which to secure his ship to the Matsya’s mountainous fin.

Once this was achieved, Satyavrata’s heart filled with uncanny ecstasy and he began to hymn Vishnu with a stotra:

‘anaadyavidyo apahataatma samvidastanmoola samsaara parishramaaturah.

yadrishchaye ahopasrita yamanuryuvimuktido nah paramo gurubhavaan...

Men who have forgotten the Atman through the darkness of ignorance suffer endlessly in samsara. Sometimes they find your grace and by that grace surrender themselves to you and attain to you. May you, O Enabler of salvation, always be our first teacher.

‘An ignorant man is bound by his karma. He continues to perform more karma in the pursuit of pleasure and binds himself deeper into darkness; he finds further misery for himself. Karma performed for the sake of pleasure is egoistic and selfish; it can only bring suffering. Only karma performed for you, dedicated to you, can free the shackled jiva.

‘Lord, let it please you to sever the knot in the heart of ignorance — the one that binds into darkness, the one that identifies the self with the body.

‘One cannot purify gold and silver by washing them; they must be purified in fire. So, too, karma cannot purify the self. A jiva can only find illumination by burning his sins in the fire of serving you, worshipping you: in the fire of your grace. Karma is only one limb of that service.

‘Only your grace, Lord, can lead us from the ignorant dark into light. You are the eternal One, the final Sovereign. You are the greatest Guru, by serving whom the stains of the heart and the mind are removed and the soul is restored to its primeval glory. I beg you, O Vishnu, enlighten us!

‘I seek sanctuary in you, the Paramapurusha. For a mote of your grace is infinitely more potent than the blessings of all the other Gods, Rishis and Gurus combined. An ignorant man taking another for his master is surely like a blind man asking another sightless one to show him the way.

‘But we want only you as our preceptor. You are the final Awareness, illumined by yourself. You are like the sun that lights up the world; you give consciousness and brightness to the senses.

‘Lesser masters can lead us towards material gain; they only enmesh us further in the tangles of delusion, of samsara, the unending cycle of births and rebirths. But you teach only the wisdom of the immortal and eternal Atman — the pristine beginning to which we must finally return. You teach the only true path, the easy one that only appears to be difficult.

‘You are the only real friend of every creature and of all the worlds. You are the only well-wisher, the only Lord, our soul, the one that grants our deepest wish, our single prayer. But we that are blinded by ignorance do not see you glorious and living in our very hearts. So it is with all the worlds.

‘I seek your shelter, my Lord, Noblest; teach me the way of the Atman. Speak to me; turn my darkness into light. Cut the knot of ignorance that binds the eternal spirit into body after body, birth after birth, death after death. O great Matsya, reveal yourself to me!’

The Blue God, who had incarnated himself as the Fish of interminable proportions, the Primeval One, swam where he would in the waters of the Deluge. He sported! As he went across those endless waters, he spoke to the worshipful Rajarishi and taught him the deepest secrets and every nuance of the eternal Atman.

This discourse by the playful and wonderful Fish is known as the Matsya Purana, in which Vishnu dwelt upon the three paths to the Soul — jnana, karma and bhakti: the way of knowledge, the way of deeds and that of devotion.

Some say that the Earth herself was the ship in which Satyavrata sailed upon the waters of the cosmic Pralaya! In it, the King and the Seven Sages listened to the Golden Fish’s Song of Truth, and it scattered the last vestiges of ignorance in Satyavrata’s heart so he was filled by divine light and became free.

Meanwhile, the Lord had slain the horse-headed Demon Hayagriva. When Brahma awoke from his slumber of a thousand ages, Vishnu returned the Veda to the four-headed Pitama, the Veda he had taken back from the Asura.

Having been enlightened by the Matsya Avatara upon the ocean of the Pralaya, king Satyavrata became the Manu of the next Kalpa, this present one. He is known as Vaivaswata Manu.

Those who know say that hearing the Matsya Purana, the conversation between the Fish and the king frees a man of all his sins. The bhakta that worships Hari every day by recounting or chanting the legend of this Incarnation will have all his wishes fulfilled and finally he will find moksha, as well.

I prostrate before the Blue God, the Cause of all causes, who came as a Fish and returned the lost Veda to Brahma. With all my heart I worship the Golden Fish that taught the Rajarishi Satyavrata the most profound and hermetic secrets of the Atman,” said the blessed Vyasa’s son.

Suka Deva was an enlightened one himself, and he saw all this with visionary sight, in the infinite freedom of his timeless soul. ▲

Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai Memorial Building

Devotees of Bhagavan gratefully remember Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai who first came to Bhagavan in 1902. He questioned Bhagavan and the answers were published as *Who Am I?* It is one of the principal texts of Bhagavan’s teachings. He eventually resigned from Government service in 1910 and retired to his native place Idayanpalsori, which is 10 km from Chidambaram. He would frequently visit Ramanasramam for Bhagavan’s darshan.

While at Idayanpalsori he practised Bhagavan’s teachings and wrote hundreds of verses in Tamil on the teachings and the grace of Bhagavan until his samadhi in 1948. When the death of Sri Pillai was reported to Bhagavan, he said, “Sivaprakasam has become Sivaprakasam (the light of Siva).”

The need for a memorial building where Sri Pillai carried on his sadhana was felt and steps have been taken to replace the old dilapidated prayer hall adjoining a Vinayaka temple.

With the active co-operation from Sri Pillai’s descendents, the work on a memorial building was started with a bhumi puja on 4th June 2007. The work is expected to be completed in four months’ time and will be suitably named in memory of Sri Pillai.

BOOK EXCERPT

Ramana Maharshi & René Guénon

XAVIER ACCART

TRANSLATED BY CECIL BETHEL

The following is an extract from Guénon ou le renversement des clartés (Guénon or the Reversal of the Light: Influence of a metaphysician on French literary and intellectual life) by Xavier Accart. Editit (Paris) and Arché (Milan), 2005, 1200 pp.

Guénon deliberately contrasted Sri Aurobindo's ashram with that of Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), which seemed to him quite 'traditional'. "He is perhaps the greatest, writes Silvia Ceccomori; he is also the most simple among the great masters."¹ Sri Ramana has sometimes been compared to Ramakrishna in so far as he was called to live the non-duality in the line of Sankara, while at the same time giving an important place to *bhakti*. He was born in the southern part of India where he lived throughout his life. At sixteen years, the young

¹ Ceccomori, S., *Cent ans de yoga en France*, Paris, Arché, 2001, p. 191.

Venkataraman took upon himself a simulated experience of death in order to be free from the fear of dying. It left him radically transformed. He became aware that he was not this body but an immortal spirit which transcended it. From the thoughts which sprang forth in him, he realized the Self on which all his inner activity was concentrated. "From that moment, the fascinating power of this 'Self' situated at the very heart definitely took precedence," the fear of death having disappeared for him. He then left his family home leaving a message: "I go in search of my Father, according to the order he has given me." He went to the sacred mountain of Arunachala where he stayed from 1896 until his death in 1950. Those who came to seek him called him Maharshi, that is to say the great saint for whom the truth is always present. However, strictly speaking he never accepted any disciple.

The testimony of Paul Brunton (1898-1981) in *A Search in Secret India*, explains clearly the method of the sage of Arunachala. After a battery of questions from the English journalist he kept quiet for a moment. He then asked about the subject of the 'I' who had raised the question. He was thus impelled to reflect on his 'intimate nature' in a continuous meditation. It was a question of striving towards knowing his true nature by asking himself what constituted his very essence. By meditation and concentration, (his) being became aware that he was neither the body, nor the subtle form, nor the vital force, nor the mind, nor even the totality of potentialities remaining in the undifferentiated state of deep sleep. The being could therefore only be identified as the one subsisting after all these elements had been eliminated. It was the pure conscience, the Self residing in the heart. Thus, the ultimate result of this research was 'absorption' in the source of existence. If it implied the 'extinction' of the individuality as such, this 'extinction' very far from leaving a void, made it appear a truly infinite 'plenitude'.² The Self was in fact the perfect unity of Sat-Chit-

² Guénon, René, *Études sur l'hindouisme*, Paris, Éditions traditionnelles, 1976, p. 169 (1938).

MOUNTAIN PATH

Ananda, the Hindu trinity which, according to Guénon, was the nearest to the conception of the Christian Trinity.³

Brunton's book which came out in English in 1935 and in French in 1937, contributed to introducing Ramana Maharshi to westerners. Several Europeans were very profoundly influenced by meeting the great *Rishi*. Dom Henri Le Saux, a Benedictine monk from the Abbey of Saint-Anne of Kergonan who came to evangelise India, wrote: 'O my Beloved, why do you hide yourself under the features of Shiva and Arunachala, of Ramana the Rishi... to give me Your grace?'

Many of Guénon's readers became aware of the sage's teachings through various publications, or even went to see him at the foot of Arunachala, symbol of the 'Heart of the World' representing the immanence of the 'Supreme Consciousness' in all beings. Many were struck by his exceptional depth. Jacques-Henry Lévésque, a friend of Blaise Cendrars and reader of Guénon, left an unpublished essay on the holy man.

There were two admirers of Guénon's work who were important for the dissemination of the Maharshi's teaching. The first was Arthur Osborne, an Englishman, who made a translation of *The Crisis of the Modern World* which appeared in London in 1942. After the Second World War he came to Ramana and wrote several books, notably a biography, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*. Later in 1964 he edited a review *The Mountain Path* under the inspiration of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The second is Henri Hartung who discovered the works of Guénon around 1938, at the age of seventeen. He was born in Paris in 1921, and later while living in Lyon he met Olivier de Carfort, a person of private means who spent his life in deepening his knowledge of the traditional doctrines. One evening, Carfort had asked this young man, if he knew René Guénon. He lent him *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, and from then on Hartung regularly read Guénon's

³ Guénon, René, *La Grande Triade*, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, p. 18, n. 1. Nevertheless, he added that there was a great difference between the points of view to which were linked these notions.



Henri Hartung and his wife, Sylvie,
on his last visit to Sri Ramanasramam in 1982

books. In 1947, on a business voyage to India, he was approached in a cafe by Raja Rao. The latter, although following the teaching of another master,⁴ suggested that he go to the ashram of Ramana Maharshi. He did and the meeting was decisive. After Brunton and Jean Herbert,⁵ Hartung contributed most towards the diffusion of the teachings of the Hindu sage among the French-speaking public. He later acknowledged his dual debt to the metaphysician of Cairo and the sage of Arunachala.⁶ On the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Ramana Maharshi in 1979, he published with Editions du Cerf a work dedicated to the latter. This book “owes much to René Guénon who represented, for him, through what he had been and all that he had written, a permanent inner force.”⁷ It echoes a significant debate of the synthesis that some have wished to make between the written teaching of Guénon and the oral teaching of Ramana Maharshi:

“Arthur Osborne — like that which happened to me several years later — had heard some Europeans make a distinction between the influence that Bhagavan [Ramana Maharshi] radiated and initiation such as René Guénon had defined. Thus he posed to the Maharshi himself this question: [...] Ramana approved the point of view according to which his presence like his indications are practical means of spiritual realization (*sadhana*).”⁸

Guénon had presented the case of Ramana Maharshi as departing from the normal conditions of initiation. The character of the ‘spontaneity’ of his realisation — he had never had a human master —

⁴ Krishna Menon, better known as Swami Atmananda of Kerala.

⁵ Jean Herbert (1897-1980) was the eminent French translator of Hindu texts and the teachings particularly of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramana Maharshi and Swami Ramdas. A chapter is dedicated to him in the book of X. Accart.

⁶ Hartung, Henri, *Spiritualité et autogestion. René Guénon, Râmana Maharshi*, Lausanne, L'Âge d'homme, 1978.

⁷ Hartung, Henri, *Présence de Ramana Maharshi*, Paris, Le Cerf, 1979, 157 p.

⁸ See Osborne, Arthur, ‘Le regard qui transperce’, *The Mountain Path*, vol. 15, n° 1, 1978; and Hartung, Henri, ‘Transmission initiatique. Ramana Maharshi, René Guénon’, *Connaissance des religions*, Vogue, volume III, n° 4, mars 1988, p. 22-27.

represented an exceptional path.⁹ Probably Guénon considered it as that which Islamic esoterism calls an *afrad*, that is to say a ‘recluse’, a category difficult to define, which seemed to have certain similarities, according to him, to the case of Padre Pio or his own. This is why the Maharshi — if he replied to visitors’ questions — did not deliver ‘a regular teaching’ but exercised rather what Guénon called an ‘action of presence’. “Furthermore, the imparting of Knowledge could only take place in the silence, by a radiance of inner force which is incomparably more powerful than the word and all other manifestations of some outer activity.”¹⁰ Thus Guénon could write to Hartung, at the time of the death of the holy man that he “understood the emotion only too well as the news of the death of Sri Ramana had also affected him likewise.” He himself was “very sad [...] for all those who would have still had a great need of his *presence*.”¹¹

Guénon also underlined the eminence of this figure in his letters as well as in his many reviews from 1935-1940.¹² He wrote to Hartung in 1949: “At the ashram, like Sri Ramana himself, one feels that everything is really *in order* from the traditional point of view, and that there is certainly no more or less doubtful element.”¹³ Moreover, it seems that Ramana on his part heard of Guénon. According to Hartung, he called him ‘the great sufi’.¹⁴ ▲

⁹ Guénon, *Études sur l'hindouisme*, p. 171 (1938).

¹⁰ Guénon, *Études sur l'hindouisme*, p. 184 (1940).

¹¹ Nous soulignons. Hartung, *Spiritualité et autogestion*, 1978, p. 76.

¹² Guénon, *Études sur l'hindouisme*, p. 131-2, 134, 168-9, 170-2, 178-9, 184-5 (de 1935 à 1940) et 190-1 (1945).

¹³ Lettre de Guénon à Henri Hartung, le 10 mars 1949. Citée dans : Hartung, ‘Transmission initiatique. Ramana Maharshi, René Guénon’, 1988, p. 25.

¹⁴ Author’s note: X. Accart is looking for some confirmations of this affirmation.

RAMANA KIDS' CORNER



Children, remember that Bhagavan is always with you, He will save you not only from drowning in the water, but also from drowning in worldliness!

Here is a moving story from the childhood of a devotee.

Saved from Drowning by Bhagavan

K. V. Mama's mother died when he was only an infant, and it was her dying wish that he should be raised by Echammal in Tiruvannamalai. Echammal, whose life in the world was a succession of tragedies, went and brought the motherless child directly to Bhagavan and placed the boy in his hands. "On seeing the babe, tears trickled from my eyes," Bhagavan later said, recalling the occasion.

The Maharshi looked after that child and protected him from harm. To illustrate this we need only relate the following story told to us by K. V. Mama:

"Once as a young boy, a friend and I were in the Arunachala Temple. As it was very hot we went to the tank in the temple and began splashing and playing in the water. I inadvertently went into the water over my head and began sinking. I came to the surface a few times but was unable to stay afloat. My friend seeing me in distress ran off. As I went under for the last time I remember distinctly seeing Bhagavan's face, and then everything went blank — I became unconscious.

"When I later regained consciousness I found that I was lying on a step just near the tank. I asked someone nearby how I got out of the water. I was told that an old man had come and pulled me out, laid me down on the step and then went away. Somehow I survived the ordeal.

After nearly drowning, I went to the ashram and sat in the hall without telling anyone what had just happened. Bhagavan turned in my direction and said with a gentle smile on his lips, 'Did you have a nice swim?' I put my head down, as I felt extremely guilty and thought that everyone was watching me. Who else was it than Bhagavan who saved me?"

Moral

Arunachala Paati: Children, I hope you enjoyed the story, as much as I did. Bhagavan takes care of us each and every moment of our lives. He is our only protector. We don't have to be drowning in a river or an ocean to be in danger. In fact, if we are not alert, we are in danger everywhere, every moment.

Children: How so, Paati? I go to school every day, study, I watch T.V., I play some video games and sometimes I talk with my friends on the phone and surf the web! That's all... where is the danger in my life?

Arunachala Paati: You children are innocent, you are not even aware of the traps. Childhood is a time for us to be learning and to be free! Ask your parents, they will always remember childhood with fondness.

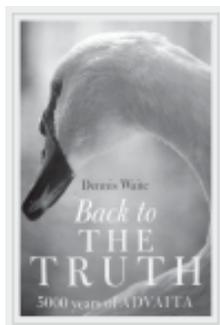
Children: Paati, where are the traps?

Arunachala Paati: As a child you should be able to play freely in Mother Nature's playground, which is everywhere. Run, skip, jump, hide, explore, enjoy your time with plants and trees, play with your animal friends... yes, just be free! The modern electronic entertainment traps your mind. Kids are so dependent upon gadgets, that they don't know what to do in their free time without electronics.

Children: Paati, I don't want to be a slave to electronics, I want to be a Master of my mind. But I don't know how to give up T.V. and computer games.

Arunachala Paati: Yes, it is exactly in these times of danger, you need to turn to Bhagavan even more. Just like Bhagavan saved young K.V. Mama from drowning in the tank, He will save you from drowning in electronics or worldliness. Talk to your parents, seek their guidance, think of things you can do in your free time, make friends who enjoy playing outdoors. Most importantly pray to Bhagavan to let you lead a more happy and healthy childhood! You will discover a beautiful world — Bhagavan's world! ▲

BOOK REVIEWS



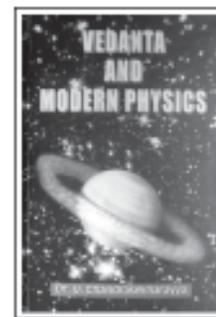
BACK TO THE TRUTH. 5000 Years of Advaita. By Dennis Waite. O Books, Winchester, UK & Washington USA. 2007, 620pp. £19.99 & \$49.95. www.o-books.net

Dennis Waite has been studying Advaita for over 20 years and maintains one of the best websites on the subject, www.advaita.org.uk He is the author of *The Book of One, How to Meet Yourself* and an introductory book on Sanskrit.

His *The Book of One* gave us a basic overview of the fundamental concepts of Advaita ranging from the nature of unreality, the role of the guru and the nature of the Self. It was a broad informative sweep suitable both for beginners as well as advanced students.

His latest offering is a more thorough and comprehensive study of Advaita and its implications for students of the subject. It is an intelligent systematic approach using a friendly step-by-step approach which leads the reader through some quite abstruse subjects. He has made an arcane tradition more accessible. There are numerous excerpts from texts and quotes from reputed teachers to 'explain' Advaita. As well, the author gives a clear and balanced picture of the differences between the more traditional schools and some modern perceptions.

For those who seek a one-stop authoritative book on the subject this is a highly recommended book. It is so well done that one has to be very careful and not confuse 'understanding' the concepts which have evolved to explain Advaita and the actual practice. This book should be an encouragement to walk and experience the path of self-knowledge. It is but the first step. In this respect, I have only one reservation about the book and that is the explanations of some of the so-called experts quoted. Advaita is a powerful tool to understand who we are. It is not an opportunity for would-be teachers to smother the principles with shallow remarks which are nothing but opinions, however well intended.



VEDANTA AND MODERN PHYSICS by Dr. U. Chandrasekharayya. Published on behalf of Lokashikshana Trust, Diwakara Bhawan H 2, Residency Road, Bangalore - 560 025 by Dr. C. Sitaram, Special Officer, Library and Publications, 2006, 652 pp., Rs300.

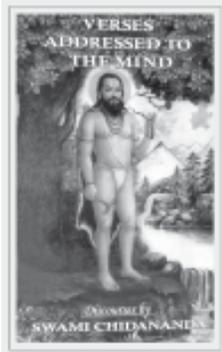
Classical physics and the Enlightenment period had as its aim nothing short of conquering the great mysteries of the universe through human reason.

Newtonian models revealed a world of order that, if studied closely, could be represented by words, numbers, formulae and ideas. Twentieth century science, on the other hand, painted a different picture: the universe is fundamentally non-linear and does not lend itself to ready classical descriptions. Relativity, the uncertainty principle, quantum mechanics and chaos theory, each in their turn, took a bite out of former simplistic Euclidean views of an ordered universe. Yet, what in a former era might have been feared as a *crisis* in science is proving to be a veritable revolution — the golden age of physics — filled with wonder and excitement, where all that was once held dear and indispensable is being renegotiated and deepened. As contemporary (quantum) theories grope for a language to describe what seems to defy description, there is an increasing reliance on conceptual levers and metaphor systems from ancient (Eastern) religions, among them Vedanta.

In this his doctoral dissertation, the author attempts to correlate the ancient wisdom of the Upanishads (as contained in the thought of Adi Sankara) with the contemporary physics and cosmology of Einstein, Heisenberg, Dirac and Schrodinger as well as that of other notables like Hermann Weyl, Arthur Eddington, Neils Bohr, Max Born, and James Jeans. The author has an adequate grasp of his subject and raises challenging questions relevant for both the student of Vedanta as for those of contemporary physics. While his scope is vast, his treatment is

thorough and erudite. He lays out a buffet of challenging ideas and new ways to rethink, on the one hand, Vedanta, *vis-a-vis* contemporary science and, on the other, the revolution in physics, *vis-a-vis* the ancient wisdom language of Vedanta and the classics of Adi Sankara. He elucidates a number of fascinating subjects which have intrigued scientists, philosophers and spiritual seekers over the centuries. Some examples: the role of the *observer*, which is the scientific expression of *consciousness*, is mapped onto Vedanta's *Witness* for comparison; Einstein's Relativity theory is discussed as a physical version of Sankara's superimposition (*adhyasa*); the 'field' model of reality in science is articulated in terms of Brahman's potential to manifest names and forms. In the author's skillful hands, a number of the wierdities and oddities of quantum theory and observation are able to find conceptual grounding in classical Vedic language. Systems theory, causality, the quest for a unified field, scientific epistemology, cognition, toward a theory of perception, paradox, and indeterminacy are just a few examples of the concerns raised in this very comprehensive text. The author's reflections are engagingly fresh and exciting.

— M. S. Balasubramanian



VERSES ADDRESSED TO THE MIND. Discourses by Swami Chidananda on *Manache Shlok* by Sant Samartha Ramdas. Divine Life Society, Shivanandanagar 249192. 2006, 271pp, Rs110.

The Manache Shlok or *Admonitions Addressed to the Mind* is a famous set of verses in Marathi and many homes in Maharashtra either have copies of the small book or are able to quote it at will. Like the ghazals of Hafiz in Iran or the Telugu verses of Vamana, they have become part of the group consciousness of that particular race. Swami Chidananda of Shivananda Asham, Rishikesh, is fond of giving devotees copies of it and in 2002 gave a series of forty talks on the first 110 verses. He is one of the most respected *sanyasis* in India today. A person of great humility and authority, when he speaks it comes from the heart and the simple words of his talks contain the power of one whose mind has absorbed the teachings and have become a part of his being. This is rare.

— T.V. Ramamurthy

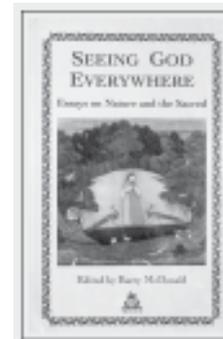
HOLY GITA. READY REFERENCE. Chinmaya International Foundation, Adi Sankara Nilayam, Veliyanad, Ernakulam Dist. Kerala 682319. 2005, 647pp, Rs190. www.chinfo.org

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the principal bedrocks of Indian spirituality and culture. If a person just read and studied the Gita it would sufficient to elucidate all the salient points in spirituality.

The Chinmaya Mission at Ernakulam has published an all-inclusive volume which covers every aspect of the Gita's teaching using the many commentaries on it by Swami Chinmayananda. The format employed is a question and answer method that is thorough and comprehensive. It is not a book one can read from cover to cover but is meant for study and reflection. It would be an excellent teaching tool in homes as well a study groups who wish to deepen their knowledge.

Take for example Chapter 6 where the ninth note asks: "What does the word Krsna mean? Answer: The word *krsna* comes from the Sanskrit verbal root *krs* — 'to scrape'. The term *krsna* is applicable to the Self because, on realization of the truth, the threats of the delusory mind and the consequent *vasanas* will all be scraped away from our cognition(6.34)."

— T. V. Ramamurthy



SEEING GOD EVERYWHERE. Essay on Nature and the Sacred. Edited by Barry McDonald. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221 001 UP India. 2006, 323pp, Rs375. indicabooks@satyam.net.in

This is an Indian edition of a book published by World Wisdom Books, USA. It is a collection of stimulating essays on Mankind's connection with nature and the role we play together. The premise is that our continued well being both physical and spiritual is dependent on our ability to see the divine in nature and to respect the sacredness of the earth. The contributors are of a high calibre: Frithjof Schuon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Kathleen Raine and Titus Burckhardt among others.

We are confronted today with a crisis for which there is no precedence: Mankind has the capacity to destroy the earth. The problem stems from our forgetfulness of who we are, what our role and duty is in this world and what creation is. We should understand that this earth is a sacred creation

and we cannot separate ourselves from it by denying its existence or using it to simply fulfill our legitimate desires but more often, our greed. How many physical things do we need to feel secure and comfortable?

As the Dalai Lama says in his transcribed lecture from the Buddhist point of view: "Taking care of the planet is nothing special, nothing sacred or holy. It's just taking care of our house. We have no other planet, no other house, except this one."

The spiritual significance and understanding of the created world has been dismissed for the most part from our vision. Many people now live in urban areas and the days when people grew up relatively free from the clutter of 'civilised' life among the riches of nature are fast fading. The ubiquitous TV has made inroads into the innocence of children and we wonder where it will end: will we one day visit a museum to see a piece of forest? Our sense of belonging to nature, the universe, humanity and ultimately our own life, are endangered by the de-personalisation created by modern commercialism.

My favourite essay in this book was on Polynesian navigation and how the sailors read the Pacific Ocean: its currents, the many types of waves, the taste of the water and the stars. Fascinating.

This book is a welcome reminder that there are traditions of thought, which given the opportunity, can show us light and the possibility to belong, to be known to ourselves and others as a person and not as a commodity, and to be part of a cosmic identity at one with nature and our fellow human beings.

— Andrew Clement



THE THREE JEWELS. The Central Ideals of Buddhism. by Sangharakshita. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt Ltd, Delhi. 2006, 245pp, Rs395(HB). mlbd@vsnl.com

Sangharakshita is a well-known English Buddhist monk and scholar. After twenty years in India he returned to England and founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order in 1968. His knowledge and grasp of Buddhism coupled with a clear, succinct style makes his writings a pleasure to read. He has brought to our attention a wide-ranging book centred on the three principles of Buddhism: The Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha.

It is an excellent introduction for those interested to know more about this great religion. It is also inspiring for those Buddhists who wish to dive deeper into the historical and philosophical context of the Buddha himself, the evolution of the Dharma and how the Sangha developed. Sangharakshita's command of the subject is impressive. He sweeps away the obscurities and cant, and shows us a religion intelligent and relevant to the needs of today.

— Andrew Clement

BOOKS RECEIVED

SRIMAD BHAGAVATA AS I SEE IT: D.A. Desai. Bhavan's First Edition 1998. Pub: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapathi Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007, xi + 248 pp. including Appendix. Rs180.

SELECTIONS FROM THE MAHABHARATA: Re-affirming Gita's Call for the Good of All: by Satya P. Agarwal. Pub: 11293, Ridermark Row, Columbia, MD 21044, USA, mlbd@vsnl.com, vii+298pp, Rs395.

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH: Pub: Vimal Prakashan Trust, Bodakdev, Ahmedabad 380015. 24pp; Rs. not stated. **AN INDIAN QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY:** Pub: J.Doshi, 28, Indus Court, A Rd., Churchgate, Mumbai 400020. 51pp; Rs. not stated. Both booklets by Vimla Thakar.

AVADHOOT OF ARBUDACHAL, The Biography of Vimala Thakur by Kaiser Irani. Om Mani Padma Hum, 1 Spenta Society, R.P.T.S. Post, Old Khandla Road, Khandala 410302 (Mah) India. 2004. 416pp, Price not mentioned.

AYURVEDA: Secrets of Healing by Maya Tiwari. Pub: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt.Ltd., Delhi. 1998.

ROOTS OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE A Critique of Ethnic Metaphors by Ignatius Jesudasan. Media House, 375-A, Pocket-2, Mayur Vihar Phase1, Delhi 110091. 2007, 175pp, Rs130. jesudasansj@gmail.com

All the following titles published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. **SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA : A PORTRAIT IN PICTURE & PHOTOGRAPHIC BIOGRAPHY OF SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA** 2005. 85pp, Rs100(PB), Rs125(HB). **DVADASA STOTRAM** by Sri Madhvacharya. Trans. by Kowlagi Seshachar. 90pp, Rs20. **MAN THE KNOWN AND MAN THE UNKNOWN** by Swami Ranganathananda. 36pp, Rs12. ▲

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Ashram Tree**

Sri V.S. Mani, the ashram administrator, is a keen gardener and is responsible for the abundance of trees in the ashram over the past twenty years. He recently received a letter which is worth sharing with devotees.

Dear Sri V.S. Mani,

I like to share with you one of the many wonders of Beloved Ramana that happened a few days ago. It has been an unusually difficult period and that particular evening the difficulty increased due to my mother's illness.

I prayed to Ramana to give me strength to deal with the coming night and on opening *The Mountain Path* I saw the article of Ramana Kid's Corner. My heart got filled with the sweetest joy to read about the plants growing in the ashram and about the olive tree from Italy. It was irrational, but I started crying and felt Ramana's presence very vividly inside me and in the room. I knew without any shade of doubt that Ramana had accepted my prayer... There was a sudden shift in the house and my mother got happy, so happy without reason... Then it felt like something really vanished and she got better and better and after a few days she returned to her home strong and healthy!! Wonder of wonders Bhagavan!!!

It may be not even the olive tree we brought you, the one mentioned in the *Mountain Path*, dear Mani, but it is such a lucky tree to be able to grow under the direct sun of the Holy Feet of Beloved Ramana.

Thank you. Please give our best regards to your wife and love from us to all devotees in the Ashram. In gratitude with respect,

— Anna-Maria and Thierry

Who Am I?

The translation of the Tamil 'Nan Yar?' into the English 'Who am I?', is inadequate.

I appreciate two recent *Mountain Path* articles which contained a discussion of this topic. The articles were: 'From Vak-Vichara to Atma-Vichara' (Vol. 43, No. 1), and 'Vichara and the Turning Word' (Vol. 44, No. 2). The English literal translation of the Tamil as 'I-who?' is more accurate and therefore better. There has not been much discussion in Ramana literature, about the topic of translation, but its quality is important, especially as this phrase forms part of Bhagavan's principal instruction to his devotees.

The ordinary meaning of the English 'Who am I?' is: What sort of a person am I? The 'who' in English presupposes the presence of a person, but this is not the deeper meaning of the sadhana (spiritual practice).

We need to remember that the words of a language are signposts only, they are sound or written symbols pointing to something called the referent. In the Tamil and the literal English translation, putting the 'I' at the beginning, emphasises its primary importance. Bhagavan stated that 'I' is the pre-eminent name of God (Talk Nos 92, 106 and others), even previous to OM. The initial referent is the person undertaking the vichara, but the final referent is the unlimited Source from which the word 'I' comes.

I also suggest that the translation of the Sanskrit 'vichara' should be 'investigation', rather than 'enquiry'. The latter word implies verbal questioning, which is only the start of the sadhana. 'Investigation' goes deeper, like a dog smelling the path to its master, to the source.

— Hans Heimer



Aradhana

On 14th May was observed the 57th anniversary of Sri Maharshi's *videha kaivalya*, when he left the body. A large gathering of devotees assembled for this special occasion.

The function started at 5 a.m. with the chanting of 'Arunachala Stuti' and 'Ramana Sat-Guru Stuti'. The *puja* commenced at 8 a.m. with the chanting of the *Taitireya* and *Mahanarayana Upanisads* and *Sri Rudram*, *Chamakam* and *Purushasuktam*. *Ekadasa Rudra Mahanyasa Abhishekam* was also performed. After the *Sahasranamam* (chanting of the thousand names of Bhagavan), the *arati* of flaming camphor was performed and the devotees powerfully felt Bhagavan's gracious Presence.

Aradhana was also observed according to the Western (Gregorian) calendar, that is, on 14th April. *Aksharamanamalai* was recited by a large group of devotees before the Nirvana room on 14th April between 8-15 and 9 p.m. This chanting movingly re-enacted the scene at the very same time of Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*.

Mahapuja

Mahapuja commemorates the mukti of Sri Bhagavan's mother Alagamma, which was celebrated this year on 9th June. Special *abhishekam* and *puja* to the Matrubhuteswara Lingam over the Mother's Samadhi was performed. A large number of devotees paid their respectful homage to the mother who gave them their Sadguru.

Sri Ramana Bhagavan Temple Consecration at Puducherry (Pondicherry)

Sri M. S. Chandrasekar is a popular name in Sri Ramanasramam and among the visiting devotees of Sri Bhagavan. Ever since the time he stayed a few days at the ashram in 1992, his service to the devotees of Sri Bhagavan started with all his body, mind and resources. He took voluntary retirement from active business and started Sri Bramadesam (Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi devotees seva ashram) and Sri Ramana Kendram in his spacious house, the doors of which are always open to Ramana devotees.

The new Ramana Bhagavan Temple
at the Puducherry Kendram, March 15, 2007

To serve the devotees in the state of Puducherry, he has constructed 'Sri Ramana Bhagavan Temple' in the Kendram premises with a 'meditation hall'. The Kumbhabhishekam of the temple was performed by the priests of Sri Ramanasramam on *Guruvaram* (Thursday) 15th March 2007. The ashram president Sri V. S. Ramanan and Sri V.S.Mani, along with their wives as well as hundreds of devotees from various parts of Tamilnadu. The Puducherry Chief Minister with a few of his colleagues, attended this spiritually surcharged function. Copies of *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* including Audio CDs and books on Sri Bhagavan, and clothes were distributed.

Obituary

Krishna Ganapatigal

Sri Krishna Ganapatigal was a Vedic teacher who started teaching at the Ashram Vedapatasala in 1938. He served as the teacher for over forty years till his retirement in 1980. He was born in a small village near



Villupuram in 1910 and died in Bangalore on 31st May 2007 at the age of 97. He served the ashram in those difficult early days with great devotion and whole-hearted commitment to Bhagavan. His starting salary was a negligible Rs.4 a month and life was hard for him and his family. He taught the boys at the Patasala with diligence and sincerity. In those days because there were few houses near the ashram, Ganapatigal lived in the town and walked each day to the ashram. Along with the boys he

attended the morning Vedic chanting and then taught them till eleven. After the ashram lunch he would rest until two when he resumed the teaching until about four p.m. After Vedaparayana in front of Bhagavan at five o'clock he retired to his home for the night. This routine showed a steadfastness and strong resolve of character. He was responsible for the training of many priests including the former chief priest Kittu and the present incumbent, Appichi. ▲