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## Ramana Ashtottaram

47. ओं अभयप्रदाय नमः

oṃ abhayapradāya namaḥ

Prostration to the giver of freedom from fear.

Fear comes from the presence of 'another'. When the sense of duality is destroyed, when identity with all creatures, the unity of all beings, is realized, who is to fear whom?

48. ओं दक्षिणास्यनिभाय नमः

oṃ dakṣiṇāsyanibhāya namaḥ

Prostration to the one who is equal of Dakshinamurti.

A modern *avatar* of Dakshinamurti, Bhagavan was a master of *mounopadesa* who could teach the profoundest wisdom through silence.

49. ओं धीराय नमः

oṃ dhīrāya namaḥ

Prostration to the intrepid, imperturbable one.

*Dhiratva* corresponds to the Tamil word *uran*, inner strength. Pure, still, firm awareness knows no change, no disturbance, no movement. Such unshakeable firmness, unclouded clarity, heroic self-reliance marked Bhagavan. ▲

## EDITORIAL

# Instruction

History reinvents itself with each passing generation. What was seen as new and exotic is now taken for granted; what was blindly believed is now observed to be short-sighted, if not downright mistaken. One who was seen as moving against the trends is now shown as a prescient forerunner and one who demanded respect and power has been judged narrow and an obstacle to the advance of equality and opportunity for all. Each generation begins anew and arranges their perceptions of the world according to the inscrutable rhythms of history. According to the viewpoint, truth is self-evident.

We see today, fifty-seven years after his physical departure, that Bhagavan's teachings have taken on a life of their own and the interpretations of what he actually taught are now being coloured by the perspective of self-appointed exponents. The temptation is great for many of us to 'explain' Bhagavan and we can see the results in various viewpoints saying Bhagavan taught this or that to the exclusion of all else.

This is natural in the course of events for Truth is not fixed by formalities or custom. The rules which govern our lives change shape according to the needs of the time. What was unthinkable once is now commonplace and will one day be redundant.

Then what is unalterable in Bhagavan's teachings? First, there are the original works which he composed and over time carefully proofed for publication. The accounts of his life which he scrutinised and corrected line by line as well as the accounts of his conversations with devotees who recorded them and showed them to Bhagavan for approval. Also the individual accounts of daily life which were corroborated by other accounts and a general consensus are also acceptable.

We should realise that eventually even the written word will be open to dispute and legitimate interpretation according to the epoch, for words shift and their significance and gravity can alter in degree. Who nowadays can deeply appreciate the beauty of Bhagavan's Tamil and his grasp of the intricacies of Tamil poetic diction? But does that matter to one who is ignorant of the conventions but whose intention is genuine? No. For, "When heart speaks to heart what need for words?"

We see on a more general level as the teachings were translated into English, Hindi, French, Czech, Gujarati and an ever increasing variety of world languages. Even now, as a current example, what does a Korean language with the best of intentions make of Tamil nuances of speech? We can only use analogies that are relevant to us; we can point out the direction, but the direct seeing must be experienced personally. Words are the beginning and actions along the right guidelines are an essential prerequisite if we are to know ourselves and see how we have limited ourselves by identification with the mechanical impulses of our body and mind.

The written word, though vital for ready access and the perpetuation of the teaching, is in the end, a pointer, it is not the answer. Once we have understood the intent and are able to apply the instructions, words are only of secondary importance, our primary consideration must be the pursuit and absorption of our minds and hearts in that ineffable

presence, Ramana-Arunachala.<sup>1</sup> With each new generation we apply and reaffirm the spirit of the teachings. It requires discrimination and sincerity to hear what Bhagavan is really offering for our benefit.

First and foremost, he asks for the silence of the heart wherein one can listen free of preconceptions. He gives us the tool, *atma-vichara* which can if properly applied, quieten the mind and open us up to the possibility of sharing in that transcendent silence in which he dwells.

He tells of the importance of devotion to the truth in the form of Arunachala, his guru and benefactor. He offers us an example of his whole total commitment to the power of Arunachala so much so that the difference between the two is indistinguishable. Does that mean Bhagavan is also made of rock? It would be a foolish person who wants to be transformed into rock to be one with Ramana-Arunachala.

There is a story of a Jewish Hassidic mystic and teacher, Rabbi Zusya. "Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said, 'In the coming world, they will not ask me: "Why were you not Moses?" They will ask me: "Why were you not Zusya?"'"<sup>2</sup>

Though the spirit of Bhagavan's teachings will not be found in books, we do trawl them for ideas that can stimulate our inner quest. There is a tremendous power in what Bhagavan has offered to us when we open a book and read his wisdom. Like mantras they can preoccupy us as they grow like seeds in our hidden consciousness until one day we cannot ignore the implications and step out and follow the beam of light. Even in a language distant from the original Tamil, let us say Russian, the native speaker will grasp the kernel of what is written, as truth, in whatever language, shines with a light of its own. It seems inexplicable but nonetheless true as any who come to Bhagavan will testify. That is why the ancient Upanisads, the teachings of the Buddha originally in Pali, the words of Christ and Mohammed ring true today

<sup>1</sup> We give it a name and a form but in fact this presence which resides in our own heart (*bridayam*) is not conditioned by time or space. It is from the view point of manifestation that we say the Self dwells in us.

<sup>2</sup> *Tales of the Hasidim*, The Early Masters by Martin Buber, p.251. Thames & Hudson, London 1956.

as they did the day they were uttered. It is because they speak of universal Truths which are already inscribed in our hearts and that we have forgotten. We are not asked to wear deerskins and live in a jungle, nor eat the one begged meal a day of the Buddhist monk, nor be immersed in baptismal water or ride a camel. We read between the lines and see how the spirit of the teaching can be applied. Bhagavan's teachings are immensely practical and sensible.

The crucial word is application. Bhagavan was not a philosopher. He did not indulge in polemics for the sake of argument or scoring points. More often than not he curtly dismissed those who wished to challenge him in debate. The point of Bhagavan's writings are to elucidate and encourage us to apply our talents to the question of our own existence. The question is not so much why the world is the way it is as how we can be liberated from the burden of our ignorance.

The three prose texts, *Self-enquiry*, *Who Am I?* and *Spiritual Instruction*; the poems, *Upadesa Saram*, *Forty Verses on Reality* and its supplement; and the hymns on Arunachala, are the core from which all the necessary insights can be extrapolated. The texts are so dense with wisdom that a single sentence can at times be sufficient food for consideration.

The practice of the instructions requires persistence and conviction. We are not involved in making an imaginary grade nor do we seek a silky set of answers to confound others with our knowledge and accomplishments. What others do or do not is of no concern to us. Each of us is unique and comparisons are odious and detrimental. We each start from where we are and not from where we think we should be. The gap is enormous between our vaporous dreams and the crunch of reality when we are brought down to hard unyielding earth. But it need not be so hard because to be absolutely ordinary is therapeutic as there are no more expectations. Have we ever considered how our dreams of superiority, self-esteem and achievements only exist in relation to others? The dependence on the opinion of others or of society hampers us with a never ending confusion of half thoughts and demands to conform to standards which no one in their right

mind can fulfil. We are all sinners as much as saints in the small moments which make up our day. In the larger picture we are caught up in the spirit of the times, the zeitgeist, and our individual responses are along carefully calibrated lines. We rarely step out of the ordinary rhythm of our life. This is normal. We are not required to be perfect — an impossibility; the one stipulation is that we seek self-knowledge. The rest will take care of itself, for when we see clearly, life is magical; each time we are true to ourselves life will conspire to help us.

On the world stage we see that history is capricious and events are interpreted according to a prevailing fashion or slant. We deduce our own image too according to the necessity of the moment. Our personality is inherently unstable. Like the history of the world our own history is subject to incessant change. There is no fixed viewpoint in the sequence of thoughts. One thought succeeds another; one mood another. The angles and attitudes vary and quite often, contradict each other. Who is it who interprets these thoughts and emotions? Asking who am I? brings to a halt, if but for a second, this frantic train of thought. It opens up a moment of silence and potent emptiness. This is the beginning.

It does not matter where we start or at what age. It is irrelevant, for in truth our sense of aliveness is timeless. It is ever present, ever fresh and ever available. If we think we should be perfect in order to begin or that we should have the right set of clothes or all the books in the world to understand, we will never start. Even if our understanding is askew which it will be, it doesn't matter. The decisive point is to begin and like the child who haltingly stands up to walk we will struggle and fall but each time we begin again it is with the new confidence that we have learnt something to aid our intention to walk straight.

The grace is always available to help us if we but sincerely ask. In truth we are all beginners, each day we begin anew with whatever we have at hand. We have implements and maps: our intelligence, emotional commitment, the capacity to act with integrity applying Bhagavan's words. They are said to be sufficient. It is up to us to use them correctly. ▲

# The Crest-Jewel of Sri Bhagavan's Teachings

MICHAEL JAMES

*This article is from a forthcoming book entitled Happiness and the Art of Being, which will soon be available for sale at the ashram bookshop. Up-to-date information about where this book can be bought over the internet is available at [www.happinessofbeing.com](http://www.happinessofbeing.com).*

*On page 555 of this book Michael gives the following translation of the first mangalam verse of Ulladu Narpadu:*

*Other than ulladu [‘that which is’ or being], is there consciousness of being? Since [this] being-essence [this existing substance or reality which is] is in [our] heart devoid of [all] thought, how to [or who can] think of [or meditate upon this] being-essence, which is called ‘heart’? Being in [our] heart as [we truly] are [that is, as our thought-free non-dual consciousness of being, ‘I am’] alone is meditating [upon our being]. Know [this truth by experiencing it].*

**I**n the first of the two verses of his *payiram* or preface to *Ulladu Narpadu*, Sri Muruganar writes that Sri Ramana joyfully composed

this clear and authoritative text in response to his request, “So that we may be saved, [graciously] reveal to us the nature of reality and the means to attain [join, reach, experience or be united with] it”. Accordingly, in this first *mangalam* verse Sri Ramana reveals to us both the essential nature of reality and the means by which we can experience it, which is possible only by our being one with it.

In the first two sentences of this verse Sri Ramana reveals several crucial truths about the nature of the one absolute reality, which is *ulladu* or ‘that which is’. Firstly he explains that it is not only being but also consciousness, because other than ‘that which is’ there cannot be any consciousness to know ‘that which is’. Therefore ‘that which [really] is’ is self-conscious – that is, it is absolutely non-dual self-conscious being.

Secondly he says that that truly existing reality or ‘being-essence’ exists devoid of thoughts, or devoid of thinking. That is, it is not a mere thought or mental conception, but is the fundamental reality that underlies and supports the seeming existence of our thinking mind and all its thoughts. However, though it supports the imaginary appearance of thoughts, in reality it is devoid of thoughts, and hence devoid of the thinking consciousness that we call our ‘mind’, because both this thinking mind and its thoughts are unreal. In the clear view of the one self-conscious reality, thoughts do not exist, because they appear to exist only in the distorted view of our mind, which is itself one among the thoughts that it imagines and knows.

Thirdly he says that it exists ‘in heart’, that is, in the innermost core of our being. In other words, it is not merely something that exists outside us or separate from us, but is that which exists within us as our own essential reality. He also adds that it is called ‘heart’, thereby indicating that the word ‘heart’ does not merely denote the abode in which the reality exists, but more truly denotes the reality itself. Moreover, since the word *ullam* means not only ‘heart’ but also ‘am’, by saying that the truly existing reality or ‘being-essence’ is called *ullam* Sri Ramana reveals that it is not something that exists as an object but is our own self – our essential being or ‘am’-ness.

In other words, the absolute reality exists not only in us but also as us. It is the real ‘heart’ or core of our being. That is, it is our own very

essence, substance or reality. It is that which we really are. Other than as the one absolute reality, we truly do not exist.

Because we mistake ourself to be this thinking mind or object-knowing consciousness, the one fundamental reality is said to exist within us, but this is only a relative truth – a truth that is only true relative to the distorted perspective of our mind, which experiences dualities such as subject and object, ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, and so on. Since the one fundamental reality transcends all such dualities, the absolute truth about its nature is not merely that it exists within us, but that it exists as us.

Finally, by asking, “*ulla-porul ullal evan?*”, which means ‘how to [or who can] meditate [upon this] being-essence?’, Sri Ramana emphasises the truth that since the absolute reality is that which transcends thought, it cannot be conceived by mind or reached by thought. Therefore, since its nature is such, what is the means by which we can ‘reach’ it, ‘attain’ it or experience it as it really is?

Since it is not only that which is completely devoid of thought, but is also that which is essentially self-conscious, and since it is our own ‘heart’ or essential being, the only way we can experience it is by just being it. In other words, the only means by which we can ‘attain’ this one non-dual absolute reality is by simply remaining as we always truly are – that is, as our own true, essential, thought-free, self-conscious being. Therefore in the third sentence of this verse Sri Ramana says, “Being in [our] heart as it is alone is meditating [upon this truly existing reality, which is called ‘heart’]”, thereby declaring emphatically that this practice of ‘being as we are’ is the only means by which we can experience the absolute reality as it is.

Thus in this first *mangalam* verse Sri Ramana succinctly reveals both the essential nature of reality and the means by which we can ‘reach’ it, ‘attain’ it or experience it as it really is. Hence in a nutshell this verse expresses the very essence of *Ulladu Narpadu*, and all the other forty-one verses of this profound text are a richly elaborated explanation of the fundamental truths that he expressed so briefly yet so clearly and powerfully in this first verse.

Indeed, since it reveals so clearly not only the nature of the one absolute reality but also the only means by which we can actually experience it, this verse summarises the essence not only of *Ulladu Narpadu* but of the entire teachings of Sri Ramana. Therefore it is truly the *chudamani* or crest-jewel of his teachings, and if we are able to understand its full import correctly, comprehensively and clearly, we have truly understood the very essence of his teachings.

As in all his other teachings, in this verse Sri Ramana explains to us the nature of reality for a single purpose, namely to direct our mind towards the one practice that will actually enable us to experience reality as it truly is. Unless we understand the real nature of our goal, we will not be able to understand why the only one path by which we can 'reach' that goal is to practise just being as we always really are.

If our goal were something other than ourself, there would be some distance for us to travel in order to reach it. But since we ourself are the goal that we seek, there is absolutely no distance between us and it, and hence the path by which we can reach it cannot be essentially any different from it. That is, between us and our goal, which is our own real self, there is truly no space to accommodate any path that is other than our goal. Hence our path and our goal must be one in their essential nature. Since our goal is just thought-free self-conscious being, our path must likewise be just thought-free self-conscious being. This is the essential truth that Sri Ramana reveals so clearly in this verse, and that he reiterates in so many different words throughout his other teachings.

In our natural state of absolutely non-dual self-knowledge, which is our goal, our experience of our thought-free self-conscious being is effortless, because it is what we always really are. However in our present state, in which we imagine ourself to be this thinking mind, we appear to be not devoid of thought, as in truth we are, and hence we feel that we have to make effort to experience our thought-free self-conscious being. Thus the only difference between our path and our goal is the effort that now seems to be necessary in order for us to abide in our natural state of thought-free self-conscious being.

In this path, the effort that we have to make is not actually an effort to be, because we always effortlessly are, but is an effort to avoid

mistaking ourself to be this thinking mind. So long as we imagine ourself to be this mind, we do not experience ourself as the true thought-free self-consciousness that is our real nature. Therefore in order to avoid mistaking ourself to be this thinking mind, we have to make effort to focus our entire attention upon our essential self-conscious being, 'I am', thereby withdrawing it from all thoughts.

This state in which we focus our entire attention upon our own self-conscious being, thereby excluding all thoughts, is the true state of 'meditation', which Sri Ramana describes in this verse as *ullatte ullapadi ullade* or 'only being in heart as it is [or as we are]'. That is, since the true nature of our essential self or 'heart' is just thought-free self-conscious being, 'being in heart as it is' is just the state of abiding calmly and peacefully in our own essential self as our own essential self – that is, free of all thoughts as our own true non-dual self-conscious being, 'I am'.

Thus the only path by which we can 'reach' or 'attain' our own essential self, which is the one and only absolute reality, is this simple practice of keenly attentive self-consciousness – self-consciousness that is so keenly attentive that it gives absolutely no room for the rising of any thought. Since no thought can rise unless we attend to it, when we focus our entire attention upon our own essential self-consciousness, 'I am', we automatically exclude the possibility of any thought arising.

That is, thoughts arise only because we think them, and this act of thinking involves an imaginary diverting of our attention away from our essential self-consciousness, 'I am'. Therefore the only effective means by which we can remain completely free of all thoughts – and hence completely free of our mind, which can rise and appear to exist only by thinking – is by just being attentively, keenly and vigilantly self-conscious.

This state of thought-free and therefore mind-free self-conscious being alone is the state that Sri Ramana describes as 'being as we are', and it is not only our path but also our goal. When we practise this vigilantly attentive and therefore thought-excluding self-consciousness with effort, it is the path, and when we experience it effortlessly as our unavoidable natural state, it is our goal, which is the absolutely non-dual state of true self-knowledge. ▲



# Effortless Meditation

## Part Two

MADHURANANDA

*The subject of Effortless Meditation though simple, is elusive and is misunderstood in a variety of ways. In an effort to clarify the subject and to dispel any wrong notions, some words and pointers in this article are repeated. That there is little which can be written about Effortless Meditation is itself revealing.*

### **How does this meditation differ from alert and vigilant thinking?**

**W**hen we say a person is alert or thinking, it means that he can actively respond to a situation. It is not the same relationship with the world as that of a person who remains in Stillness. The unconscious person thinks that objects are completely independent and have no relationship to his own existence. He does not see that every object is perceived in and through his own existence. He is totally oblivious and ignorant of the synchronicity, so when he or she is thinking and is vigilant, there is reciprocation with the world, but not a connection or intimacy of true understanding.

This is a continuation from *Effortless Meditation* Part One, October 2006.

In comparison, when one is utterly still, one perceives innumerable things without any deliberate intention. One feels an intimacy with the surrounding objects, as well as an unspoken potential to adequately respond should it be required. Even if everything is not perceived from a heightened state of consciousness, there is — in a moment of Stillness — a deep intimacy with the outside world. Mostly people experience neither a spontaneous flow of words nor perceive the world around them. Irrespective of whether we are intelligent or not, we live somewhere, either in the past or the future. Ordinarily, we have stepped out of the world, i.e. we are unaware most of the time, and live in the dream world of our own personal mental making. There are many who do not accept this observation as they feel so sure that they are entirely aware of the world in which they live. They are quite certain that this world is nothing but inert matter. It's only when a person dips into Stillness again and again, that they realize how we are unaware most of the time. With time and experience we learn that this very mundane world, which is ignored or denigrated as matter, if our perception is accurate, is sacred and divine, a most adorable place.

#### **How to distinguish this meditation from chattering or restlessness?**

It is an interesting exercise to look at ourselves when the mind is lost in chattering or unconscious activity. We would see that we are seldom aware of the flow of words or external objects. Even if we are aware of them, we tend to censor words or objects as good or bad, and then instantly enter into a mode of daydreaming sparked off by the association of words, memory and fantasy.

If we are agitated we are neither aware of the internal word-flow nor external objects.<sup>1</sup> However, if you are in an effortless, silent state,

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<sup>1</sup>We should also note that if we are in the midst of work which demands serious thinking then one will not or cannot be aware of any words. However the intimacy and harmony with the outside world will prevail if one is in this meditative state. It does not mean that you deliberately try to remember those statements. Rather it just happens. When word-flow is very fast, you may not be able to remember any sentence other than that which upsurges at that instant.

you will be vividly aware of words and external objects. If somebody asks you, 'What is the thought/word you just experienced?', if you so chose you could recount it exactly. But if you are lost in day-dreaming and someone asks you the same question, you cannot answer what words you were aware of; the only thing you can say is a general description about what you were thinking.

With experience we notice the major difference between the normal chattering mind and the quiet mind is that one never becomes bored with the silent, effortless meditative state. It is lively and original, whereas the babbling mind brings boredom and numbs the creative instinct. Our aim is to get rid of the prattle as quickly as possible but not this spontaneous word flow.

When we go deeper into this practice we won't be bothered when word sequences come to an end. When we notice that we can experience peace in spite of words and in the midst of words, why should we bother about their stopping? *What do you really want? Peace or the eradication of words?* Thoughts, words, and every perception come to an end only at the moment of enlightenment which leaves you eternally alive, if the sages are to be believed. But that enlightenment will not happen when, in the state of discontent with words or objects, you desperately try to avoid or obliterate them. Let us depart for a moment from the main subject and discuss a relevant point. No matter how subtle your experiences become, Sri Ramana Maharshi advises us to continue questioning 'Who am I?'. What does this mean? The implication is that words can exist until the moment of enlightenment where all experiences disappear with all their subtleties. Of course, both in the effortless meditative state and in the state of self-enquiry, there will be moments when words can become extremely subtle, appearing altogether absent; you feel that you are in the field of total emptiness, which, though very dynamic, devours all thoughts as soon as they are born.

#### **This is our existence!**

Whenever we perceive something without actually focusing our mind on it, without any specific effort we experience the sense of existence. Objects can be words experienced in the mind along with images,

feelings, etc., or anything perceived through the senses. It can be a dog's bark or a child's scream. It could be people moving in front of you or any of the innumerable objects in this vast universe. Every object gives us the opportunity to experience our existence. At the very instant you wake-up from sleep, your own body and the bed on which you slept give an opportunity to experience the feeling of being alive.

How can you possibly perceive anything without your existence? Can you see anything without *you* being there? Every minute atom you perceive is there because you are there. The vast clouds you see are there because you are there. Whenever you perceive anything spontaneously, you are experiencing your own existence.<sup>2</sup> Even if you hold the view that your existence is because of the object it does not matter, what is important is to just experience the unique sense of existence.

If your mind starts reacting with the sentence, 'I don't understand these things at all; it is all hair-splitting', you can see that each and every syllable of that sentence is full of your existence. But that does not mean you keep repeating a random sentence to know you exist. If you repeat it, it becomes mechanical instead of being spontaneous and lively.

Let us go a bit deeper. When you perceive the words 'I don't understand these things at all' does each syllable think of anything? *Is not the moment of perception of each syllable, the actual moment you step out of thinking?* Nevertheless, don't you exist? You don't have to even tell yourself that. The very fact that you have perceived each syllable shows that you exist.

The same thing applies to the world of sound or objects perceived through any of the senses. For example: you hear a bird's sound; every infinitesimal part of that sound is filled with your existence, but do those tiny parts of the sound think? Are you not there at that infinitesimal moment of time? Is not that moment a state free from

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<sup>2</sup> Truly speaking, it is wrong to say 'the experience of our own existence or Beingness', because that is what we truly are. Such words are necessary only for communication purposes.

thinking? Is not that moment the state of experiencing yourself as the 'sense of existence'?

Of course you may say that words have come into your consciousness because of the act of thinking. That is true. But remember, in spite of the thinking, you are experiencing that which is free from thinking, which is a simple existence or Beingness, the moment of no effort — that is what gives peace in this meditative state and strengthens its profundity. That is what will liberate you from the reactive thinking which our mind identifies itself with normally. Here lies the path to freedom.

This Beingness looks entirely irrelevant and we tend to ignore it. But it has the supreme power to handle the most powerful and disturbing emotions. Sages say that this is the way to realize the deathlessness of your intrinsic sense of existence, it is the key to uncover solutions to all existential problems, it looks laughably simple but it is incredibly potent!

### **It is not materialism!**

As you go deep into this Effortless Meditation your mantra will be, 'Words give peace! Objects give peace!'

When I say that 'Objects give peace at the moment of spontaneous perception' it is as good as saying 'My existence gives peace'. My existence and that of objects are interrelated and inseparable at the moment of spontaneous perception. Sri Ramana Maharshi says, "If you are conscious of anything you are essentially conscious of yourself."<sup>3</sup> This statement of the Maharshi contains the whole gist of effortless meditation. If you understand Sri Ramana's statement, right now you can drop this article.

Every word gives peace, *but* only at the moment of *spontaneous* perception! It is not an artificial state of word-induced calmness. All objects give peace, *but* only at the moment of spontaneous perception! In the state of deep peace, they so sparkle, you can feel them! However, if you focus your mind on the objects or words, you miss this dynamic

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<sup>3</sup> 'The Jnani and the World', *Maharshi's Gospel*, p.51. Sri Ramanasramam 2002.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

peace there and then; they become matter, totally estranged and alienated from you. Matter cannot give you peace. Nobody has attained lasting peace from matter. And nobody ever will. Had that been the case this world would have made everybody everlastingly peaceful. Consequently, there would be no need for discovering the innumerable medicines and relaxation techniques to heal the body and calm the mind. I am not speaking about materialism here by saying objects give peace. Materialism never says objects give peace; it says objects give pleasure or pain. The focus of this article is diametrically opposite from this point of materialism.

It is very important to understand that as it has been explained above; objects can give peace if understood aright in the light of chaste consciousness, as we spend most of the time with eyes open. This outlook takes away the conflict with the world of perception. It also shows the possibility that this world is not an obstacle to happiness or peace.

Understanding these statements makes it clear how the path of wisdom is different from the path of meditation as an act of concentration. By concentrating, we try to get rid of the world of perceptions, on the assumption that the world is lifeless matter and therefore an impediment.<sup>4</sup>

As one establishes oneself in this meditative state with passion and love, one realises the mysterious nature of the universe, i.e., that there is a vast difference between pure spontaneous perception and focused perception. It appears there is no difference, but in fact there is an ocean of difference!

Why don't we see the difference? Because we don't cherish this simple gift of understanding and keep ourselves in the state of pure spontaneous perception. We ignore it. We take it for granted! We think that ever since we were born we are in this state! For that complacency we are paying the price, the heavy price of untold sufferings.

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<sup>4</sup> "...the mind, body and world are not separate from the Self; and they cannot remain apart from the Self. Can they be other than the Self? When aware of the Self why should one worry about these shadows? How do they affect the Self?" 'Mind Control', *Maharshi's Gospel*, p. 12. Sri Ramanasramam, 2002.



**This is not Descartes' dictum 'I think, therefore I am'**

When I say that 'Everything exists, I exist' or vice versa, it is not Descartes' dictum 'I think therefore I am'. His statement gives the feeling that only when we think do we exist, otherwise we are dead (or sleeping). His statement also implies that we exist only when we make an effort, as thinking is a state of effort. What is discovered and meant here is exactly the opposite. We say, 'Only when we make no effort do we truly live'. This meditation is a state of no-effort, no thinking. It is the state of Being, not doing. It is 'I perceive, I exist', or 'I exist, I perceive'; it is the point where you cannot separate your existence from the objects being perceived. Existence and objects are affiliated on the manifested level.

**There is no controller here!**

When I first experienced peace, what became clear to me was, first of all, that two sentences cannot exist at the same moment; and secondly, that there is no controller of those sentences at all. For example, if the sentence, 'What should I do?' comes, at that moment, that sentence alone exists. The next sentence may be, 'Is there no controller at all?' At that instant, this sentence alone exists. In the effortless meditative state, at any particular moment, only one sentence flows in the mind. So, who is to control what? Is there one to control and another one to be controlled? This is the meaning of Sri Ramana's repeated statement, "...are there two selves one the knower and the other knowable object."<sup>5</sup> With this understanding, we can stop the futile effort to control the mind and be instantly captivated by the state of effortless meditation.

Again and again, we should see that there is no controller of the thoughts. One thought-sentence goes, and another comes. At any one moment, two thought-sentences can never exist simultaneously. The very sentence, 'I want to control thought' is one more sentence. Though this spontaneous upsurge of words comes from unconscious thinking, don't analyze it. If we analyze, we will only strengthen thinking, and aggrandize our reactive mind. We will miss the effortless

<sup>5</sup>Talk 144. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai.

state. If we don't analyze the endless string of thoughts, we will be immersed into the effortless state. It is as simple as that.

**Silence – Transcendental and Dynamic**

One frequent question that is asked is, is it really possible to experience Silence or meditative mind, in the midst of word and the world? It is a natural question as we apparently find all the causes for our own disturbances in the outside world. One may even wonder then if our seeking dynamic Silence is a disguised passion for objects that will satisfy our craving for security. The sages say that Silence is transcendental.

It is true that Silence transcends speech, thought, and the world, and because of that it is eternal and worth seeking. However, sages like Ramana also say, "One might be in the thick of the world and yet maintain perfect serenity of the mind; such a person is always in solitude."<sup>6</sup> Now 'the thick of the world' includes the words, which arise from the thoughts, which are inevitable in the life of the world. Of course, it also includes the objects we perceive. Therefore, it is obvious that Silence can co-exist with thoughts, words and objects.

We should also note that Bhagavan always asserts that *advaita sadhana* is also possible in the midst of activity. He replies on different occasions: "... when deep quietness prevails without obstructing the consciousness where is the need to dive?"; "One should be in spontaneous *samadhi*, that is, in one's pristine state — in the midst of every environment."; and "Leave the thought free state to itself. . . the thought free state is not affected by your actions."<sup>7</sup> Do not all these statements of Sri Ramana clearly show that Silence is possible in spite of the word and world? If one reads Bhagavan's second experience of death, one finds that even though Bhagavan's heartbeat had stopped, still he was aware of surroundings which is ample proof that Silence is not only transcendental but immanent too and is accessible in the midst of objects, even in most critical moments.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 'Silence and Solitude', *Maharshi's Gospel*, p.10. Sri Ramanasramam 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Talk 348; Talk 54; and Talk 146. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

<sup>8</sup> *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma. 25<sup>th</sup> January 1947. Sri Ramanasramam 1995.

When we say words disturb us the simple but crucial question is this: what is it that whenever we encounter or hear some word from within or without — and each syllable is made of mere sound vibrations—, robs us of Peace by giving pleasure or pain? Is it not our own reactive mind or ego, with its interpretations that causes disturbance? In fact, it is this ego or restless mind that creates the illusion that objects, which are in fact manifestations of Reality, are separate from us.

### **Take shelter in Stillness, not in doubts**

We find that, if we are unbiased, there are many questions in spirituality that cannot be resolved. Though they are very intriguing, it is futile to solve them on the intellectual level, since really, there are no definitive solutions.

The best and highest solution for all these problems is to take shelter in Stillness, not in doubts and analysis. This will immediately relieve you from the torture of uncertainties. If you do not know what Stillness is, try to ‘stumble’ on it by persistent practice as described above, and treasure the deepest urge in your heart to know this Stillness. Help then will come surely from within. Once you know this Beingness, you will experience the deepest certitude that you have found the anchor within you, which cannot be shaken by this wavering mind — your own or another’s.

### **Spiritual Experiences**

In this meditation you may experience the heart centre at the right side of the chest which Sri Ramana Maharshi speaks about. In those moments you may vividly realize the world is within you. When I say that the world is within, it means that the world is not different from oneself; it is the experiencing of oneness with the world where you will instinctively know that objects do not exist independent of your existence. Sometimes you may feel immense energy at your heart centre, but without feeling that the world is inside; this will mean that the undercurrent of thought activity is still active. We should remember that this heart centre becomes automatically activated without apparently wishing for it.

There can be moments where you feel utterly tranquil and your experience is that the world is within you, but without however experiencing the heart centre. It shows that to experience the heart centre is not essential, but to remain in effortless awareness is. At times, you may find that you are seemingly weightless. In those instances you may realize that the idea of time and space is a myth. That happens when one is in the state free of all hankering. But none of these experiences remain permanent until the reacting mind disappears in the moment of enlightenment. Truly speaking, these are not the experiences in the everyday sense where the ego dominates the act of perception, but they are rather glimpses of reality, which our mind constantly obstructs.

We should remember that if we stress any one experience, there is a possibility that the brain can register those experiences and repeat them, giving us the false feeling that we are flowering spiritually. The brain may reproduce the experience but it cannot orchestrate that deep peace. If we keep this in mind, we won’t hanker for any spiritual experience but will always return to Stillness.

### **Don’t hanker for peace, please!**

Sometimes Effortless Meditation puts you in the state of profound peace, and sometimes not, but a sense of inner respite begins enveloping us the moment we become meditative. There is a sense of being keenly absorbed without any kind of ensuing pleasure or conflict. However, there is the trap of wanting to make inner peace more profound by unwarranted efforts which will breed conflict in your mind. The crux of sadhana is to see that you don’t enter into conflict. If you are in a conflict-free state, peace is bound to come. The moment any hankering comes, know that effort has come and Stillness is gone. Hankering means effort. So it is best not to hanker for anything — either for peace or for suffering. Many people believe that one must suffer in order to experience peace. One need not. One can experience peace, as it is ever there. If suffering happens in the course of one’s sadhana, that is another matter.

We should not be disheartened. The benefit we receive from this meditation cannot be compared with anything the world can offer. For within it rests the possibility to discover cessation of sorrow, supreme peace, felicity and fulfillment. So, why should we lose heart?

If you haven't proceeded this way before, try it anyway; just try. As one friend told me, it is like permitting oneself to be accident-prone! We don't know when this understanding will blossom in our heart. So, at least for a few minutes a day, by trial and error, we should allow ourselves the possibility of entering into this effortless meditative state.

### **Surrender**

After having said that you should try to 'stumble' on this meditation with deep love and earnestness, I wish to add one more word, and that is 'surrender'<sup>9</sup> If the humbleness of surrender is not there, then there is a possibility that you may rely too much on your own effort, which can become an obstacle to Stillness. When I say 'surrender', I mean surrendering yourself to your own true being, which remains untouched by any effort. Though surrender and the wish to enter into Effortless Meditation appear to be contradictory, when we become mature, we see that these two notions can be blended together without any conflict. ▲

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<sup>1</sup> Even when we surrender to external Guru or Supreme Reality, truly speaking it is surrender to one's own true Being, as they are all one and the same.

# Video Interviews

## Part One

*The ashram has recorded over the past few years video interviews with devotees. Many of them throw light on some lesser known incidents which occurred in Bhagavan's lifetime. These edited interviews have their own charm as devotees who are uncomfortable with writing are able to speak freely and share their reminiscences of Bhagavan.*

### **T. Navarathnam**

**I**n the 1940's when I was in my early 20s I was confused about the world and the sorrow experienced by human beings and animals, even birds and fish. This confusion and anxiety arose in my mind and carried on right through the day and night. In a day there are 24 hours but within those 24 hours how many minutes are we free from sorrow? When we consider it, there are but a few moments free from grief. In this little forest of the world, there are birds and other animals and so many other living beings as well as human beings. This is the creation of God. We were taught in the school that God created the entire universe including animals and human beings. He is omniscient and

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omnipresent in all living creatures yet stronger animals kill weaker ones. Why does this happen? Wherever we look, there is only sorrow. It consumes so much of our time on this earth.

Then there is happiness. I was thinking if God created the universe, He would not have filled it with sorrow. This line of thought always confused me and I had discussed it with many swamis and educated people. I wanted to know the reason for sorrow and how God, if beneficent, could have created such conditions for all living beings. While continuing this line of enquiry I was humbly doing prayers and developed bhakti. I eventually arrived at the conclusion that if God created all these living beings, he could not create sorrow in them. This suffering must have some other cause.

One day a friend of mine gave me a Tamil book, *Ramana Vijayam* by Suddhananda Bharati. As I was reading it I felt that here was the person who could give me the answer to this burning question and I decided to visit Ramanasramam.

It was in 1943 that I arrived at the Ashram when Niranjanananda Swami was the Sarvadhikari and managed the Ashram. I requested him to permit me to stay for sometime, as I hailed from Sri Lanka and was far from home and family. He immediately gave me a room and he looked after me like a father. His heart was good and kind. He showed me the old meditation hall where Bhagavan sat. I prostrated to Bhagavan and gazed at him. I observed that his eyes were not fixed on anyone. Suddenly he looked at me and I felt his gaze pierce my heart. I couldn't face him and felt a current passing through me. His two eyes blazed like twinkling stars, I can't express in the words the feeling that overwhelmed me whenever he looked at me directly, so much so that I closed my eyes and only opened them when his gaze was turned elsewhere. His look often had a 'blank' appearance, but suddenly he would focus with a gaze which penetrated my heart. I had seen so many saints and swamis, but here I could see a bright halo around his body. The halo was around him and persisted for more than one hour. This was not a dream, as I could see consciously and clearly.

I watched his movements for three consecutive days. Once when he went onto the Hill I went quickly ahead of him, as I was young at the time, and waited for him to come up the path. It was a narrow



path which made it certain that I would meet him alone. There was no idea of talking to him. All I did was sit near the edge of the footpath and wait for him to pass. Suddenly Bhagavan stopped in front of me and asked me, “Where have you come from?” I was bewildered. I first became nervous and then somehow managed to tell him that I came from Sri Lanka, and had come here to have darshan of Bhagavan. He made a statement and in short he said that eventually the goal of my spiritual journey would be reached. I was very emotional on hearing Bhagavan’s words. He looked at me very hard and the look injected something into my system, and I felt my mind had faded away.

After three days I bought some fruits and placed them before him. I prostrated before Bhagavan and told him that I had to return home. There was no answer. Bhagavan simply nodded his head. Then I went to Sri Lanka and in the years that followed I came as often as possible.

I had the answer to my question. Sometime after his nirvana, in a dream, I was passing through a doorway when I suddenly saw Bhagavan standing in front of me. I told him, “We will go”. Bhagavan replied, “Where will you go?” I told him that the Swamigal who had never left Tiruvannamalai at any time had come to my cottage (at least in my dream), and so I had nothing to worry about. Then the thought came to my mind: ‘Whenever anyone surrenders to God, whether he is high or low caste, he is sure to be lifted up from his fallen state.’ Bhagavan was saying to me in my heart: ‘When you surrender to me I will come to take you up.’

### Kameswaran

In 1943 when I was studying in second grade I first came with my uncle, a sub-magistrate, to see Bhagavan. The ashram was very simple and to my childish eyes there seemed to be no substantial buildings at that time except a thatched shed and a small kitchen. As a school boy I was not aware there was anything special about Bhagavan but I used to sit before him with my eyes closed, attracted and perhaps somewhat awed by his glowing eyes.

Many creatures such as squirrels, dogs and monkeys played with Bhagavan as he fed them peanuts. He was fond of the cow Lakshmi which was fed by him every day. He would go round the *gosala* (cow

shed) to see that all the cows were fed properly.

In answer to a query, Bhagavan once said that you can keep in mind the name of God of your choice and meditate on it. Bhagavan’s eyes were so powerful and attractive they forced us to remain still. After Bhagavan’s *nirvana* I started to come to the ashram every year for the *aradhana* (death anniversary), and sit still before his picture in the Old Hall. Even though there is now a convenient auditorium before his *samadhi*, I preferred to be in the old hall where Bhagavan sat in the old days, where though always still, he did sometimes talk.

If a devotee wanted clarification from him, Bhagavan would simply look for a long time into his eyes without replying. After a while another devotee would ask a question, the answer to which would quite often apply to the query put by the earlier devotee. But more often his concentrated look, *dikshanyanam* (look of initiation), was itself enough to clarify any doubt.

Once I was privileged to listen to Bhagavan beautifully explaining Sankara’s *Vivekachudamani* for about half an hour. I was present at one *mahapuja* (Mother Alagammal’s Anniversary) where Bhagavan went around the temple after attending the *puja*. It was a grand sight to see him taking food and mixing together all the varieties of food served. Whatever *prasadam* (food offerings) had been given by devotees it would be distributed to all those present.

Later in 1994 I was engaged in arranging my second daughter’s marriage and there arose a dispute with my eldest son. This so confused matters that I could not proceed with the arrangements. I sincerely believe that Bhagavan is present in the Old Hall and therefore sat before him and asked that he settle the dispute. I resolved that until a reply was received I would not leave. After three days of such sitting, on the 8th May Bhagavan told me to do what I considered *my* duty and that my son is only secondary in this case. I took it as his direction and successfully proceeded.

In 1995 I was in a very depressed mood. I sat before the picture of Bhagavan and I prayed to him as to why this sad state arose and to relieve me of it. I saw something move in Bhagavan’s photo saying to me, ‘Who was this son? Was he your son and you the father? What

were you before this son's birth and why do you worry? *Isvara* is the only father to all'.

While I was sitting in the prayer hall, suddenly I saw a big diamond-like glow around Bhagavan's head which lasted for about ten minutes. I did not see anything except the circle of light. I felt Bhagavan to be still here and everywhere.

I had no occasion to go through Bhagavan's teachings. I do not know philosophy or Vedanta. I have not studied any spiritual books though my wife was conversant with them. I was very happy being able to look at Bhagavan, always seeking and receiving his Grace.

#### M. Natesan

I am now working as an attendant to Swami Ramanananda (T.N. Venkataraman, the former president of Sri Ramanasramam). My father's name is Munuswamy and he used to be called Munsiff. He was a shepherd with about ten lambs which he used to graze in a field. This area was once a dense forest. Once one of the lambs went missing and so he went in search of it. Bhagavan (then known as Brahmanaswamy) told him that it had been taken away by Annamalai (Arunachala Siva). Later it was found to have been killed by some wild animal. At that time I was five or six years old. With the help of Nataraja Iyer brother of Narasimha Iyer (both of whom were school teachers and served in the Ashram kitchen on their holidays) I got admitted to the school nearby even though I had not completed my elementary education.

My father used to irrigate the fields by drawing water from the well. He was a good singer and he used to sing while doing this work. I used to rotate the manual rotors for sending the water through relay channels. When the Mother's *samadhi* was under construction Chinnaswamy tended to engage men only from our village, Chettippattu. At that time Annamalai Swamy was working as a helper to my father who was employed in cutting granite for this building. My father designed a special cart to bring the granite slabs from Adi Annamalai village.

Sadayan was engaged to look after the peacocks. Once Bhagavan was coming down the hill from Skandasramam, when along with my father, I bowed before him. Bhagavan tapped my shoulder and enquired

about me. I used to pull the *punkab* (fan) along with other devotees in the Old Hall. Fruits and eatables like idlis were also given to cows. The gosala had about twenty cows and everyday Bhagavan would go round the gosala and look at all the cows and calves.

Once I was chastised by Bhagavan for having hit a monkey. Bhagavan said that it would hurt the monkey as much as I would be hurt if I was hit by others. I was serving in the gosala and doing other jobs, like taking children to school and making sure they got their meals.

Behind the canal at the rear of the ashram there was a lime mortar grinding wheel, where I was asked by Chinnaswami to bring stones in order to grind lime for construction work. Near the big well opposite the office there was a small well arranged by Chinnaswami. He made me go down the well to clean it and he would even beat me if I didn't do the work properly, but I would bear it all as it was a service to Bhagavan and to swami.

On the day of Bhagavan's *nirvana* I was helping Chinnaswami during interment. Afterwards many workers were sent away but I remained in the Ashram on weekly wages and then later on monthly wages. Only 10 or 15 people remained here after Bhagavan attained *Maha-samadhi*. I served as an attendant for Sri Balram Reddy, a senior devotee of Bhagavan who stayed for many years in the Ashram. Before his death, while he was in a Bangalore hospital, he summoned me and said that Bhagavan was calling him and was talking to him to the effect that he was in Ramanasramam. I could not understand the meaning of this prediction but I felt sad that he was nearing his end. He never referred to me by the familiar "dey" but only called by my name on this day he called "dey Natesa, see Bhagavan has come", and then he died. I was the only person present at the time of his death. The hospital staff and I carried him out on the stretcher and he was taken by car to his native place and buried (*samadhi*) in the same yard where his parent's *samadhi*'s were constructed.

I have been serving the Ashram from the age of five and now am 71 years old. I pray to Bhagavan to keep me ever in his service. ▲



## KEYWORD

## Pramada

**Sanskrit:** Inattention; forgetfulness; non-vigilance.

Bhagavan says we are forgetful (*pramada*) of our true nature.<sup>1</sup> Indeed *pramada* is death, the scriptures assert<sup>2</sup> because even a slight lapse from watchfulness makes one forget his true natural state and instantly the mind becomes extroverted helplessly and enters into the world of objects, leaping from one thing to another even as a ball that slips out of one's hand rolls down a flight of stairs quickly. Mind, being a product of *prakriti* (nature), naturally gravitates towards matter and its manifestations. The sense organs invariably lure the mind towards the latter for, as the Upanishads declare, the Creator 'injured' the senses at the outset by making them outward-looking all the time.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> "D.: What are the obstacles to remaining steady in unbroken Bliss? How can they be overcome? M.: The obstacles are: (1) Ignorance which is *forgetfulness of one's pure being*. (2) Doubt which consists in wondering if even the experience was of the Real or of the unreal. (3) Error which consists in the "I-am-the-body" idea, and thinking that the world is real. These are overcome by hearing the truth, reflection on it and concentration." Talk 95. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

<sup>2</sup> *Vivekachudamani* v.321-329.

<sup>3</sup> *Katha Upanisad* 2.1.1.

functioning of the senses created with such a 'deliberate manufacturing defect' help us to transact with the outer world. Thus *pramada* is a natural phenomenon because of the *very constitution* of the mind and the senses but the wise man does not let the mind or the senses linger outside for more than the minimal duration necessary for transactional life (*vyavahara*). Whenever the external demands are fulfilled, he immediately withdraws the senses from the outer objects and brings with great alertness the mind back to the Self.

There is another reason why *pramada* is inevitable in a seeker's life. Mind thrives on excitement and survives because of its fascination for features. At the physical level, it loves sensations while at the level of thoughts, it rivets upon emotions or feelings and is attached to ideas at the level of the intellect. The enticing food for all these is available only in the external world of objects and never in Brahman or the Self which is devoid of all attributes! Hence the mind can have no taste for the featureless Self. Is there then an alternative to the natural inclination of the mind to stray from its source?

There are two antidotes to the poison of *pramada*. Firstly, the mind must be educated to see clearly that the external world can never give it lasting happiness (*ananda*), through constant discrimination and reflection on the defects of the world (*pratipaksha bhavana*). Secondly, repeated practice of meditation on the Self gives the mind a positive and deep experience of abiding peace. By dipping into this ever-available fountain of peace within, the mind eventually develops a taste for abiding as the Self and *pramada* will cease to be a demon that derails sadhana.

Bhagavan gave us a tool which is a remedy for our ignorant state, caused by *pramada*, namely *atma vichara*. How do we remember this tool and pay attention when it is applied? Firstly, we should discriminate between self-observation and self-remembrance. Self-observation is dualistic. There is an observer and an observed. The observer is aware of his thoughts and if he closely scrutinises them he sees that they bubble up from a causal source which his mind cannot grasp. They come and go. Their transient nature indicates they have no permanent reality. They are dependent on the observer for their existence. It is similar to the vain person who peers into a mirror and

thinks the object of attention is himself. It is not, it is just an inert image. Who is it who is aware of the mirror, the image and the act of gazing? Can words say?

Self-remembrance is a higher step in the quest to know oneself, such as the remembrance of the import of *tat tvam asi* but still there is an element of duality. There is the entity that remembers and forgets. "I am performing *atma vichara*", "I forgot to do *atma vichara*" and "I am one-pointedly concentrating on the guru" all involve a doer, however noble the action.

Whenever there is a thought, there will inevitably arise forgetfulness or veiling. Instead of trying to 'catch' ourselves as if we were an object of thought, we should remain still and attentive. Bhagavan stated clearly that pure consciousness cannot be grasped by the 'thinking' mind. It is not an 'object' of awareness. What is it in me that is thinking, seeing, hearing? The intention of self-enquiry is to bring us to that point where we who are perceiving wonder, who is asking the question? Keeping the attention of mind focused on that feeling of 'I' is self-enquiry.

It requires strength of mind to maintain our attention on this sense of 'I' and that is why we are advised to purify our minds by right behaviour, right diet and right thinking. All these are aids to strengthen the mind's ability to focus its attention on the 'I', the gateway to the source of its existence.<sup>5</sup>

There is a difference between acquired knowledge and the application of that knowledge. One may read the instructions on how to drive a car and mentally repeat them by rote interminably, but unless one sits behind the wheel and drives the car, the information already available lacks purpose. Our attention is necessary to apply the knowledge and with experience one acquires an understanding of the dynamics. We concentrate our attention on the task until the function becomes natural and we can drive automatically. It doesn't mean we stop paying attention but that the occupation becomes natural and effortless.

Attention is of two kinds: concentration and diffuse awareness. By the latter one means the ability to take in a wide range of activity; to

<sup>5</sup> *Self-enquiry*. Question 20. Translated by T.M.P. Mahadevan. Sri Ramanasramam.

focus one's attention on the diverse strands and see their interconnectedness. It is inclusive while concentration is exclusive.

To begin any new task requires concentration. Once we have acquired the knack we can step up into another level of consciousness. For example, the peripheral vision widens as we live at a higher rate of ability. We see and notice more details. The same applies to intensity — we see deeper and further. Prayer, yogic mental exercises, ritual devotions, reading of scriptures or uplifting texts, all help to refine and deepen our attention and remind us of our purpose.

What is our purpose? It is to reunite ourselves with that which resides in all our hearts, the one true 'thing' that is not dependent on anything for its existence as it is ever-present and is self-illuminating. It is called Self, 'I-I' or Heart.

How do we focus our attention of this mysterious 'thing' we cannot locate in time or space? Let us allow for the moment that this 'thing' has a name and form, then where does it reside and how do we get in contact with it? Those who have intellectually understood advaita will say that you are already That, so such talk about achieving 'union' with this Reality is ignorance. True, but that does not help us who think we are in ignorance. Unless we start with what we think we are and acknowledge our forgetfulness (*pramada*), we will remain deluded.

The one self-evident clue we each have is that our sense of identity remains the same whatever the circumstances. We should be careful here and discriminate this sense of 'I' with the sensation of identification our minds and emotions create between our bodies and the external world. We unconsciously accept various thoughts and emotions much like clothes. They become so familiar we never take them off. Our faces become rigid repetitive grooves of action and reaction. In short, we become who we think we are. This is *pramada*.

Returning to the driving analogy, we should not be so fixated that we are blinkered nor so casual in our attention that the mind flies off on tangents. We do not forget that we are driving and yet are aware of the changing road and scenery, and adjust accordingly. It calls for fluidity of attention. It requires us to be alert to the moment. It is a skill that, with practice, will slowly absorb us into the pure sense of 'I'. ▲

# Ulladu Narpadu

## Based on Lakshmana Sarma's Commentary

### Verse Sixteen

S. RAM MOHAN

16. Where is time and where is space apart from us? If we are bodies, we shall be held captive in time and space. But are we bodies? We are the same now, then and ever; the same here, there and everywhere. Know this: We exist, timeless and beyond space.

#### Commentary

In the previous stanza, we were shown that time is not real; on investigation we find our assumptions to be unsound. In this stanza, Bhagavan adds the concept of space to time as something that has an illusory appearance. As Einstein has shown space and time are related to each other and will dissolve in the same way as illusory appearances. They have no independent existence apart from the Self, which is awareness. Bhagavan says that the 'past' and 'future' have no relevance unrelated to the 'present' or 'now'. Similarly, the spatial references like

‘this side’ and ‘that side’, ‘near’ and ‘far’ have no relevance unrelated to ‘here’ and ‘now’. Once the light of intelligence is focused on them they vanish.

Apart from us, what is ‘Time’? If, without seeking the truth of ourselves, we think of ourselves as bodies, then time will consume us. Are we bodies? Since, we are the same always, in the present, in the past and in the future, we are the Self whence has emerged time. Here we see that in ignorance, Time swallows us up; but in the state of pure awareness, Time is swallowed up by the Self.<sup>1</sup>

The verse indicates that space and time acquire meaning only with reference to the physical body and the mind. So what is involved in space and time is the body-mind complex. The Self is unchanging, eternal and omnipresent. It is the source, now, here and everywhere. The Self can never be limited by space and time while the body changes and moves in time and space.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says that Time is the great destroyer of all things; as such, he is identified with Death and with Yama the ruler of the dead. Lord Krishna also declares that “I am *Kala*”.

From a metaphysical point of view, “Any conscious functioning in terms of time and space, ‘now’ succeeds ‘now’ without interruption. None of these ‘nows’ has any duration and that as measures, all alike are zeros... It is a matter of relativity. It is we who move, while the ‘now’ is motionless and only ‘seems’ to move — much as the sun only seems to rise and set because the earth revolves.”<sup>2</sup>

From a basic point of view, all measures of time from micro-divisions of a second to cosmic years are united in the union of the triad of apparent time procession (*pravritti*), recession (*nivritti*) and stasis (*sthiti*). Time (*Kala*) unites these three and by these the entire universe is united (*sambhita*) in the now. The whole world passes through a mutation in each moment so all the external qualities of the world are relative to

<sup>1</sup> “Time, inherent nature, destiny, chance, the elements, or the individual soul, cannot be the source, because they exist for the Soul. The non-independent soul, bound by joy and sorrow cannot be the source.” *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 1.2.

<sup>2</sup> *Rig Vedic India* by C. A. Das. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1971.

this present moment.<sup>3</sup> It is because time exists as a separate entity that the ideas of succession and simultaneity are considered. Time as such is not perceivable. The changes in objects infer the existence of time as continuity linking such alterations. Though time is one, due to its association with diversity of events it appears as many. The conclusion is that our perception of things can only occur directly and immediately with reference to objective things alone, and not by time for, with each passing moment however subtle it may be, the object changes.

The perception of succession is derived from the discernment of modification in objects. The observation of duration is derived from the scrutiny of what we think and see as the so-called present. We experience this perception of an erroneous present as real. It is the core of all our sense of time and our individual sense of consciousness that lives *in time*. The past and the future are brought to consciousness by memory and expectation. We are ‘consciousness’ of our existence as a separate, changing individual who, though in flux, falsely thinks there is one, unchanging centre when in actual fact we are a series of modifications *in time*. Therefore how can we say this sense of ‘I’ is real when it exists but for an instant? “Indian philosophers are of the opinion that time is a co-efficient of all consciousness including external perception and internal perception. But they do not recognize the perception as an independent entity. According to them, there is no sense for empty time as an independent entity.”<sup>4</sup>

Kant considered time as a purely subjective form of our perception. “Conditioned as we are by the properties of our perceiving apparatus, we create time as a convenience for perception of the outside world.” He continues, “In other words, we perceive reality as though through a narrow slit. What we see through this slit, we call it present. What

<sup>3</sup> The transcendent and immanent *Atma* is called *Kala* who devours all that exists as his food. *Maitri Upanishad* 6.2. In the *Vedas*, Time is equated with the Consciousness. *Sankhayana Aranyaka* 7.20. Absolute Time is the source of all relative times. It is not a duration but the Eternity on which all moveable times abide. “Day and night are death but they do not affect the divinity *Aditya*; for they are only the occasions of his rising and setting. But really he never sets.” *Aitareya Brahmana* 3.49.

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Psychology — Perception* by J. Sinha, Ch. X, London. Kegan Paul 1934.

we saw but see no longer, we call the past and what we do not see at all but expect to see we call the future.”

According to *Vedantins*, time is a co-efficient of all perception. Can a time be an object of visual perception? Does it have magnitude or tangible colour? Time is perceived through the visual organ as a ‘fact of experience’. We have the unequivocal experience of the existence of an object existing ‘now’, such as “the chair exists now” which demonstrates that in addition to the object, an element of time, that is, the present moment also enters into the perception of the object. The present moment is perceived as a qualification of every object of perception. Whenever an object, event, or action is perceived, it is not perceived as timeless but as existing or occurring in time, or qualified by the present time. The perception is not limited to visual perception. It is perceived by all the sense organs, external or internal as a qualification of their objects.

One important point to be considered here is that time is a function of ‘succession’. It is not possible to cognise it apart from changes that occurs in it, which is indicated by temporal signs like ‘before’ and ‘after’. Time is a qualifying adjunct (*viseshana*) of events or actions. There is no perception of independent time at all, but only that of actions. That is, there is no perception of time free of object or actions.

According to *Vedanta* a mental impression (*vritti*) continues in the field of consciousness as long as it is not interrupted or until the mind assumes the form of different objects. Actions are never perceived without being qualified by time.

Bhagavan tells us that we superimpose the limitations of the body on the Self because of our wrong identification. Each moment our mind assumes a new form through identification with an object in the physical or mental realm. Once we stop this identification by residing in the stillness of the heart, the world-appearance loses its reality and is only ‘apparently’ real. Hence, he declares that we are; time and space are not.

The words ‘*nal nadu il*’ in the last line may be taken to be either an adjective clause to ‘we’ meaning ‘who is devoid of time and place’ or an independent clause meaning “time and place do not exist”. ▲

## BHAGAVAN’S HANDWRITING

# The Editing of an Article about Him

**B**hagavan often took an interest in articles and poems which were presented to him. He would carefully read through them and make corrections to the spelling, grammar and wording if an important point was raised. It is interesting for us devotees to see Bhagavan’s hand at work and to note his proficiency in English grammar and his ability to skillfully clarify the text.

The following selections are from an article composed by Rama Varma Appan Tampuran, a member of the royal family of Cochin. It was written as an introduction to a Malayalam biography of Bhagavan by Sri Appunni.

The first five pages of the article, which were corrected by Bhagavan, have been reproduced from the complete text which was further edited by an unknown hand, possibly the author, and may be read in its totality in a publication entitled *Fragrant Petals*, an anthology of devotees’ reminiscences on Bhagavan published by Sri Ramanasramam.

4

(There is no ~~slackness or stint~~ <sup>limit to.</sup> in the surging rise or sinking stillness of the mind) There are no bounds to its potentiality for being a curse or a blessing. It is the cause of happiness and misery (as well as) bondage and liberation. (If the source and changes (~~metamorphoses~~) of the mind are understood, the <sup>feature</sup> reality of the illusory ~~dream~~ that we bewilder at, as the wakeful state in this world, would also be understood.) If it is known that the world (bondage or Samsar) is nothing out the offshoot (~~product~~) of the mind (the mystery of) the cycle of births and deaths of the Jiva would also become clear.

"Mind alone is the cause of bondage

and liberation of men." ~~When~~

~~all beings are plunged  
in darkness of night  
It is awake with mind~~

~~subdued.~~ "In that which is right to all beings, he who has subdued his mind is awake." (B-gita)  
(Hundreds of such authoritative

sayings of Scriptures that could be grasped only by experience, ~~do~~ establish only this <sup>Real</sup> ~~inherent~~ characteristic of the mind.)

There is none who does not desire to <sup>get</sup> rid ~~himself~~ of misery and ~~be~~ attain happiness. Persons striving for it are not wanting. There is no lack of psychologists engaged in research regarding the movement or stillness of the mind. (But <sup>those who</sup> few know that the real study of the mind has to be

made made in one's own self (by introspection] and not in an outsider, and that joys and sorrows are self-infl~~ic~~ted, are rare) Persons striving after Self-Knowledge are few; those that realise are fewer still.

" Verily, One of many Sidhas<sup>d</sup> persevering ~~Kindness~~ *Me Truly*"

Thus hath said Sri.Krishna. It cannot prove otherwise.

The path to <sup>(Self-Realisation)</sup> Divinity, is very arduous and not easy of reach. There is no alternative but to traverse that path to attain that <sup>pinnacl</sup> state of Infinite and Supreme bliss<sup>ful state.</sup> Subjugation of the mind is an indispensable (expedient) for those endeavouring to get Self-Realisation. It is for this reason that control of the ~~senses~~ has been

laid as the first step in yoga practices. Without perfection in yoga the eight-fold Sidhis (Ashta Ayswarya) could not be had. Even Sidhas ( men with superhuman powers) may be without self-knowledge (Whom then, would the praise of the glory of one who has attained ~~even~~ this fail to exalt?)

(Divine wisdom dawned to Sri.

Ramana MahaRishi all at once) Like an electric light, the lamp of Knowledge flashed in a moment. (With the approach<sup>ch</sup> of the time of culmination <sup>of Karma</sup> of past the good efforts made <sup>in the last birth</sup> ~~in the last birth~~, the mature fruit of the good ~~efforts of divine meditation made in~~ *made the mature fruit of Divine* Meditation lying inside latent ~~in the last birth lying inside latent~~ *as Vasanas* ~~at subconscious impressions made~~ *within* Self-Realisation a matter of easy reach *of experience (enquiry)* ~~of~~ *self-revelant*. The accidental hearing of

the name of SriArunachala, and the subsequent death-like experience, were mere (incidental circumstances) *(just devices)* to kindle the divine spark. (Like the flash of electric light in the bulb from the <sup>subtle</sup> current passing through wires the inner light blazed in the nerves of life current <sup>embedded</sup> ~~contained~~ in the gross body.) The Jīva knew himself as distinct from the body.

(He needed neither the aid of <sup>any means</sup> ~~Yoga practices~~ nor ~~tiresome travels~~ (wearisome wanderings) to reach the centre from the rotating circumference of the wheel of Samsar) (The Lord of the Universe lifted him aloft in his lovely hands and placed him in the <sup>heart</sup> ~~throat~~ of eternal bliss) When he opened his eyes he saw the world as ~~permeated with~~ Divine effulgence.

# Is Enlightenment Knowledge or Experience?

JAMES SWARTZ

The Vedas define enlightenment as freedom from suffering, the most desirable human goal. To attain freedom they present two *apparently* contradictory paths. One, the experiential approach, is *generally* known as Yoga.<sup>1</sup> It says that there are two basic states of experience, suffering and freedom from suffering. There are many yogic lifestyles employing various yogas, techniques, which are meant to set one free. The most well known are Astanga Yoga, the eightfold path, and Kundalini Yoga. Both promise experiential enlightenment. 'Experiential' means that through spiritual practice one sets in motion

<sup>1</sup> People have misunderstood Yoga to be an activity and a passing experience. Patanjali's Yoga in its final essence is no different to Vedanta, though we will see in the course of this article Yoga is a preparation for jnana. For the sake of argument and convenience we will assume, as in the popular perception, Yoga as being different from Vedanta or jnana. See Keyword Yoga in *The Mountain Path*, April-June, 2007.

a process that eventually results in freedom. Astanga Yoga helps the seeker patiently develop a disciplined mind, one that is capable of attaining Samadhi, a high thought-free state of Self-Awareness which it defines as a key to freedom. Kundalini Yoga is also a disciplined approach that through certain rigorous practices 'awakens' the dormant spiritual energy and generates, it is said, mystical experiences that lead to the 'final' experience, union of the individual with the universal.

The second approach to enlightenment is called Vedanta. Like Yoga it presents freedom from suffering as the most desirable human goal but it does not share the yogic view concerning the means.

To understand the validity of these views we need to consider a basic existential problem: what is the nature of reality?

If we are going to accept the popular perception of the Yoga view, reality needs to be dualistic. A dualistic reality provides the proper conditions for action and experience: an ego experiencer and a world of experienceable objects, subtle and gross one of which is the Self, the pure experience of which is freedom. On the surface at least, this seems to be what we have: I am here, the world is there. I interact with the world and make experience happen. If I do the actions recommended by my particular brand of yoga (meditation and the like) I can set myself free and attain a state of 'union' (yoga means union) or non-duality. Non-duality is freedom. Freedom from what? From limitations which are seemingly real and the struggle to be free. Why is non-duality freedom? Because in a non-dual reality there are not two states, suffering and freedom from suffering, bondage and liberation. Non-dual awareness removes ignorance of the Self, gives Self-knowledge and hence, gives freedom from limitations.

Vedanta sees a problem with the yogic view because it says that, contrary to appearances, reality is non-dual and the nature of the Self. Though our experience of Self is totally conditioned by *dehatma-buddhi* ('I am the body' idea), because one is never without a Self and in truth one is never lacking non-dual experience, and therefore the attempt to obtain such an experience is gratuitous. It says that you are a conscious being and that all your experiences are held together by one thread and that thread is you, Awareness or Consciousness. How

can there be experience without you this Consciousness? You are It is always present and Self-evident in every form of experience. You are It is the very essence of experience. If this is true then the solution to suffering, liberation, is only available through understanding the nature of reality, the Self. The 'path of understanding' is often called *jnana yoga*. We should be careful here and discriminate between analytical understanding of Vedanta (*paroksha jnana*) which ultimately does not remove suffering (*dukkha*) and direct, immediate knowledge (*aparoksha jnana*) which does liberate.

Vedanta contends that for the experiential argument to hold water the non-dual ever-free Self would have to be separate or away from you. But the nature of the Self (and there is only one Self according to the Upanishads) is *chaitanya* (consciousness). What is always present is you, Consciousness. So the Self is never away from you, which is to say it is never perceived as an object of experience. If it is an object then there was a time when it was not experienced and it will eventually not be perceived. But this is not possible because it contradicts experience. When did you not experience? When are you not aware? Even the absence of so-called experience, like deep sleep, is experience, a pleasurable one at that. Our problem is we are always wrongly experiencing the Self. The 'I am the body' identification (*dehatma buddhi*) tricks our experience of Self and gives us a false identity.<sup>2</sup>

Vedanta presents another argument that calls into question the yogic idea of enlightenment. Remember, the common misunderstanding is that Yoga counsels action, the result of which is enlightenment. The result is perceived as something positive that one gains. Whereas in Vedanta you don't gain anything but 'lose' ignorance. To do action a doer is required. But Vedanta contends that if there is a doer the doer is limited in nature. Secondly, if the doer is limited the results of its actions will necessarily be limited. But freedom, liberation, is limitless. No number of finite actions will ever add up to limitlessness. Vedanta says that enlightenment is the discovery that one is not a doer, that

<sup>2</sup> All samadhi experiences should lead to *jagrat sushupti*, pure awareness untouched by body consciousness.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

one is limitless actionless Consciousness already, and it offers a proven means by which the Self can be known.

Vedanta also argues against the evolutionary or yogic view that the one Self, limitless consciousness, 'became' limited at some point in the distant past and is now involved in the patient process of evolving out of its material roots toward some divine experience of oneness. If we accept the Yogic view that the Self is a limited transformation of Pure Consciousness or the product of material evolution, how will it ever know or experience limitless Consciousness? Just as the senses cannot experience the mind/ego entity, the mind/ego cannot 'experience' its far subtler source, the Self, for the mind simply dissolves. Only 'Experience' remains swallowing the 'experiencer ego'.

Vedanta, however, does not dismiss Yoga altogether. It provisionally accepts Yoga's limited dream of duality and its experiential orientation because that is where we are when we begin to look for a way out. If we accept the idea that consciousness is transformed into a world of experience through some mystical or 'supramental' process then as consciousness 'involves' itself with itself as matter, its 'light' or consciousness is seemingly absorbed by the objects and apparently stops shining. For example, even though light reflecting off my body falls equally on a mirror and the black wall on which it hangs, I will only see myself in the mirror. The Self is also seemingly absorbed by a mind clouded with emotion and thought, making it unexperiential for all intents and purposes. It can, however, be 'experienced' in a mirror-like pure mind. So the way to get the experience of the (reflection of) Self is to purify the mind. This is the essence of Yoga as explained by Pantanjali in his *Yoga sutras*.

Vedanta does not accept that the experience of the Self in the mind is freedom but it does value a pure mind for another reason: only a pure mind is capable of Self-enquiry. It is capable of Self-enquiry because it has a clear experience-able (experiential) reflection of the Self as a basis for enquiry. Only Self-enquiry will produce freedom because Self-enquiry produces Self-knowledge, which is the removal of the ignorance about the ever-free nature of the Self. The implication produce knowledge. It is also acceptable if it is understood that literal



Diane Cousens

is that if this is a non-dual reality we see that the problem of suffering is ignorance based.

In fact, Vedanta argues that Yoga experience, is at least as valuable as knowledge because you can't gain firm knowledge unless you have a pure mind and you cannot get a pure mind without doing some work, i.e. altering your experience, since the mind is both the instrument of experience and the instrument of knowledge. Therefore, Yoga is essential for anyone seeking freedom. As what? As a preparation for Self-knowledge. In this light epiphanies of all ilks, no matter how fleeting, if properly contextualized by the teachings of Vedanta, can be valuable aids for liberation. Vedanta only reminds the seeker that discrete experiences are impermanent and limited freedom is not freedom at all. In truth, Patanjali's Yoga does not contradict Vedanta, rather it culminates in jnana.

Actually, the confusion that has bedevilled the spiritual world for millennia is little more than a linguistic problem but therein lays the rub. When enlightenment is presented experientially it is presented metaphorically as an attainment, a merger, a union or a shift. Merger, union and shift are verbs. Verbs are action words that give the idea that something happens or is happening. Of course we know that if reality is non-dual nothing ever happened; the perception of action is simply the operation of the moving instrument, i.e. by the mind, through which reality is being perceived. The moon seems to be racing across the sky when viewed against the backdrop of moving clouds. When you no longer assume the mind's point of view, time, meaning motion (and experience is just motion or change) stops.

And if it is a shift, what kind of shift is it? Is there any time when you are not conscious? If the answer is no (which happens to be the truth according Vedanta and Patanjali's Yoga) then the 'shift' is merely a loss of ignorance, not an experiential gain. Again, we should be careful to discriminate between unlimited pure consciousness and body-consciousness (*dehatma buddhi*).

Experiential language need not be a problem if you understand the limitation of words and know that the implicit meaning of words can

interpretation of words can easily be misleading, particularly on the road to enlightenment. Perhaps the unthinking acceptance of experiential words is the primary factor in the failure of seekers the world over to set themselves free. It is an enormous problem because modern spiritual literature and the words of deluded teachers create the impression that enlightenment is only experiential both because of their lack of scriptural knowledge as well as their own limited experience. Additionally, there is an insidious corollary to this misunderstanding: knowledge is 'only intellectual' and not a valid means of enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> True knowledge is a transformative power (*jnana shakti*). We cannot with our limited intellects conceive the simultaneous occurrence of pure knowledge and experience as being one and the same.

Vedanta and any realized soul worth his or her salt, including one of the greatest modern sages, Ramana Maharshi, categorically state that only through Self-knowledge is enlightenment 'gained.' Knowledge in this sense is not a dead lump of facts but a supremely alive awareness, which is wholly experiential (*aham-sphurana*).

To gain this knowledge a means is necessary. If you want to know the world you need senses. If you want to know ideas the senses will not work; you need an intellect. Inference and testimony are other valid means of knowledge. These means are fine when it comes to objects and ideas but how can they help if the Self is the object of knowledge? They cannot help because the Self cannot be objectified. Try to see yourself. You cannot because you are Consciousness and Consciousness is eternal and non-dual; it does not split itself into subject and object and become you, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.

Objectifying the Self is rather like trying to see the eyes with the eyes. This example is useful in another way because the only way to see one's eyes is to look into a mirror. Two mirrors are available for the spiritual seeker, a pure mind gained through experience and the teachings. Secondly, Self-enquiry is the application of discrimination between

<sup>3</sup> Without *aparoksha jnana*, all 'understanding' is intellectual only and does not liberate.

of Vedanta. A pure mind is not enough for enlightenment, however, because any experience, including an experience of the Self, presumes an experiencer and something experienced, and is only as good as one's understanding or interpretation of it. In most cases, any experiencer can only interpret experience according to what it already knows. If the experiencer, the ego, is a product of Self-ignorance in the first place, this being a non-dual reality, then any interpretation of the Self would be incorrect. In fact the belief that the Self can be attained through action (and the many other ignorances masquerading as knowledge in the spiritual world) is the result of incorrect understanding of the nature of the Self.

In rare cases, like that of Ramana, it is possible to understand the nature of the Self without outside help apparently in one go. But this does not apply to the rest of us. However, help is definitely available in the form of Vedanta, a purified word mirror whose *prakriyas* (teachings), are *sruti*, revealed Self-knowledge. Revealed knowledge is knowledge that has not been contaminated by the human mind. The knowledge that makes up Vedanta is also confirmed by *smriti*, the experience of Self-realized souls, like Ramana and many others. Vedanta is a *pramana* (a means of self-knowledge) that has been setting people free for millennia, not a philosophy or a school of thought.

Knowledge (*vijnana*) is not gained like in the same way as the accumulation of everyday experience is gained. It is the perception and the removal of ignorance. Coupled with a pure mind it provides the guidelines for Self-enquiry. The purpose of Self-enquiry is not to gain an experience experiential; it is to remove Self-ignorance.

Nobody can remove your ignorance but help is required for the removal of ignorance. Enquiry needs to be guided by knowledge, not by personal interpretation of reality, which is always biased, based as it is on beliefs and opinions.

Simply by asking mentally 'Who am I?' will not help either. First, because the jury has not returned a verdict on this topic. Complete, earnest commitment is required to focus attention on the 'I-thought' (*aham vritti*) and to realize that you are limitless actionless Consciousness and not the experiencer entity you take yourself to be.

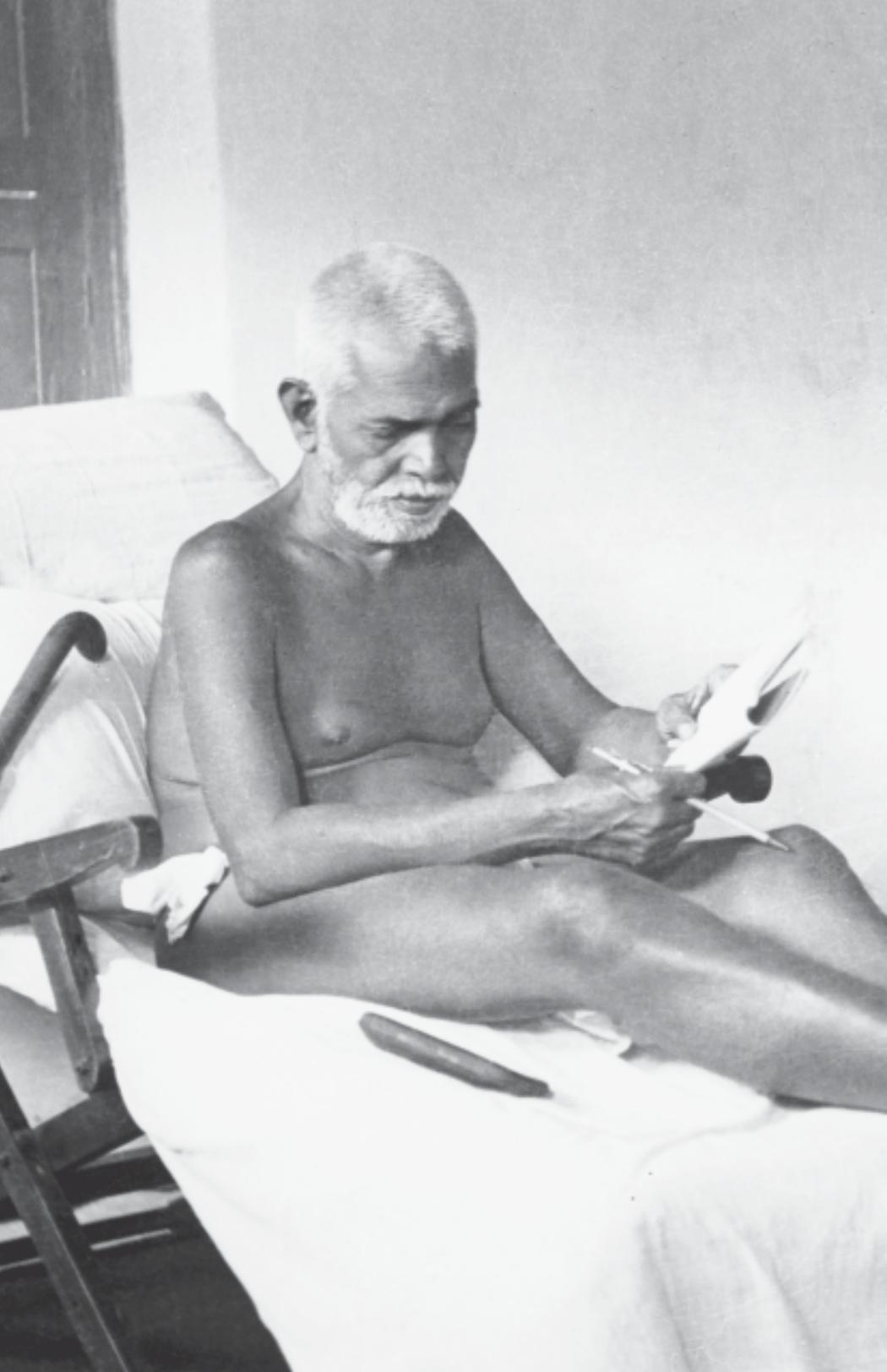
the real and the unreal. And to develop discrimination one needs to understand the difference between the Self as pure Consciousness and the Self as mind or manifest consciousness, not with the idea of transcending or destroying the mind experientially but to destroy all experiential notions, including the pernicious idea that it is possible using the mind to transcend or destroy the mind at all.

Discrimination removes one's identification with the mind/ego/ doer entity, which is not an actual experiential entity as we think, but only an erroneous self notion. Our ego is a false experiential entity which vanishes in the pure experience of the Self. Vedanta unfolds the method of discrimination by describing in great detail the nature of the world, the individual, and the Self. This knowledge, however, gives only indirect knowledge (*poraksha jnana*) which is not an end in itself but must lead to the vichara marga of Bhagavan and results in *aparoksha anubhava* (enlightenment).

Since the Sixties, the exponential increase in spiritual seeking is a telling commentary on consumerism's limitations as a solution to the problem of suffering. Unfortunately, what could be a conscious search is almost always a blind fumbling, an attempt to fashion a modern relevant means of Self-knowledge. Consequently we have the 'New Age' with its plethora of quasi religious pseudo therapies, and since the Nineties there is Neo-Advaita, the modern 'satsang' movement whose spiritual deficiencies are apparent to even the untrained eye.

There is no need for a 'relevant' modern approach to the spiritual quest because there is nothing modern about human beings. A few material gadgets do not qualify the human race as spiritually evolved. Ignorance, greed, fear, superstition, selfishness and vanity have not been dispelled on account of the internet and the iPod. Human beings are human beings. It so happens that a long time ago, the Vedic seers solved the human problem once and for all. For those who are inclined and qualified, the means of Self-knowledge that has served for millennia is with us today in the form of the teaching tradition of Vedanta, the royal road to Self-realization.





# Bhagavan's Role in the Editing of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*

DAVID GODMAN

*Most of this article has been taken from the introduction to a new English edition of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* that has been translated and edited by T. V. Venkatasubramanian, Robert Butler and David Godman. The book will be available later in the year. All the translations of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* verses that appear in this article have been taken from this new book.*

*Guru Vachaka Kovai* (*The Garland of Guru's Sayings*) is a Tamil poetical work that contains 1,254 verses composed by Muruganar and a further twenty-eight that were written by Ramana Maharshi. The vast majority of these verses contain teaching statements made by Ramana Maharshi. Taken together they form a vast and comprehensive summary of Sri Ramana's teachings.

In the 1920s Muruganar began to write down Bhagavan's teaching statements, usually recording what he had heard in the form of a four-

line Tamil verse. Muruganar would generally show Bhagavan what he had written either immediately or within a few hours of the verse's composition, and it has been reported by both Sadhu Om and H. Vaidyanathan<sup>1</sup> that Bhagavan would occasionally make changes to these verses to make sure that his teachings had been properly recorded.

In the Tamil edition of *Crumbs From His Table* there is an interesting example of how this process worked. In 1935 a conversation took place in the hall between Bhagavan and a devotee. Muruganar, who was present, immediately composed a verse that summarised the teachings which had been imparted and passed it on to Bhagavan, who looked at it, and then showed it to the devotee who had been speaking to him.<sup>2</sup> This particular dialogue appears in the English edition,<sup>3</sup> but the extra information about Muruganar spontaneously composing the verse that summarised it can only be found in the Tamil edition, on page twenty-six. The lines that Muruganar composed on this occasion appear as verse 707 in the current edition of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*.

On a few occasions when Bhagavan was shown a verse by Muruganar, he felt inspired to compose a verse of his own on the same topic. These verses were preserved and later incorporated in *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, where they have their own separate numbering system to distinguish them from Muruganar's. Some of the verses that were composed for *Guru Vachaka Kovai* ended up in *Supplement to the Forty Verses (Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham)*, and some of the verses that were originally in *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* were incorporated in *Guru Vachaka Kovai*.

<sup>1</sup> Ramana's *Muruganar*, p. 69 and p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> The Tamil edition of *Crumbs From His Table* also reports that the dialogue that appears on pages 32 and 33 (pp. 43-44 in the English edition) is the basis for verse 432 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*. The English edition of *Crumbs From His Table* preceded the Tamil version, so these additions must have been added to the Tamil edition by the author, Ramanananda Swarnagiri. Both dialogues took place in 1935.

<sup>3</sup> *Crumbs from his Table*, 1969 ed. p. 24.

By 1939 the number of verses that Muruganar composed exceeded 800, and it was decided that they should be published in book form. Muruganar had never attempted to put the verses in any kind of order; he had simply composed a verse whenever he heard Bhagavan say something of interest that he thought should be preserved. Bhagavan entrusted the sequencing of the verses to Sadhu Natanananda, who had previously brought out his own collection of Bhagavan's verbal teachings under the title *Upadesa Manjari (Spiritual Instruction)*. Since Sadhu Natanananda had already written a Tamil commentary, entitled *Upadesa Ratnavali*, on 108 of the verses of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, Bhagavan knew that he had both the interest and the competence to do the work.<sup>4</sup>

Sadhu Natanananda first placed the verses in one of three major subdivisions that he entitled 'Investigation into Truth', 'Meditation on Truth', and 'Experience of the Truth'. Within these three broad categories he put verses on similar topics together, giving each group of verses a subheading that reflected the contents of the verses. The result was sections such as 'The Reality of the World', 'The Nature of Self and *Jiva*', 'The Heart', and so on.

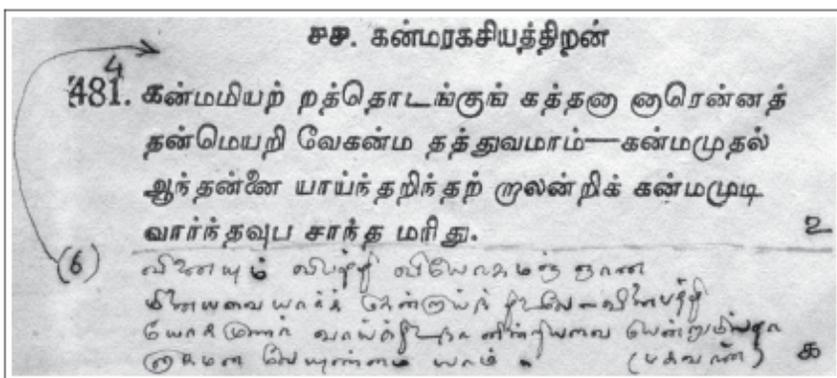
During Bhagavan's lifetime all of Muruganar's writings were published by Ramana Padananda, a devotee who was so inspired by Muruganar and his writings, he spent years of his life collecting, preserving and publishing his poetry. When Sadhu Natanananda had arranged all the verses thematically, they were sent to Ramana Padananda to be published. At some point during the printing process Ramana Padananda printed a proof copy and sent it to Ramanasramam so that Bhagavan could have the opportunity to check and revise what had been written. This proof copy, with Bhagavan's extensive corrections scribbled all over it, still exists, and is now stored in the Sri Ramanasramam archives.

Many of the changes Bhagavan made could be classified as copy editing: in some places he improved the style of the poetry; elsewhere

<sup>4</sup> *Upadesa Ratnavali* was written in 1931, but never published. Bhagavan himself went through the manuscript and made a handwritten revision to one of the comments. The original manuscript is now stored in the Ramanasramam archives.

he made more felicitous and euphonious rhymes for some of the lines; he changed the sequencing in several places,<sup>5</sup> and on at least one page he corrected a grammatical mistake that Muruganar had made. More importantly, though, he checked each verse to ensure that his teachings had been properly and accurately recorded. Whenever he deemed it necessary, he crossed out a part of Muruganar's original verse and substituted words of his own that he felt gave a more accurate rendering of his statements.

As Bhagavan worked his way through the proofs, he composed nine more verses and wrote them down in the place where they should be printed.<sup>6</sup> When the work was ready to go to the press, there were a total of twenty-four verses by Bhagavan in the text in addition to those composed by Muruganar. Bhagavan's verses were printed in bold type and given a separate numbering system to distinguish them from the verses that Muruganar had composed. Here is a typical example of a new verse, composed by Bhagavan, and written on the proof sheet:



<sup>5</sup> Verses 27, 192, 303, 307 and 740 (1939 edition numbering) were moved to their final published location by Bhagavan. Presumably this was done to give a better logical flow to the ideas being presented.

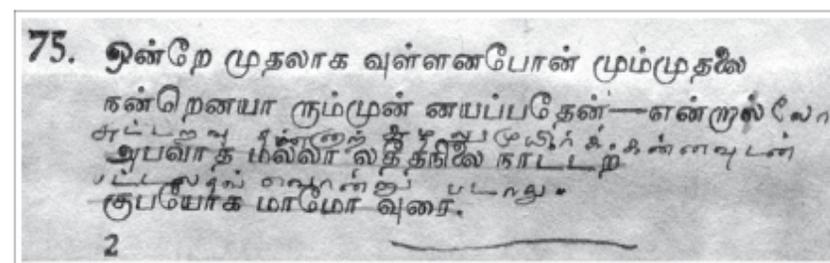
<sup>6</sup> In all editions of the work Bhagavan's verses are numbered B 1, B 2, and so on. B 10, B 11, B 12 B 13, B 15, B 20, B 23, B 26, and B 28 (numbering from the present edition) were handwritten by Bhagavan on the proof copy. It is reasonable to assume that he composed these verses as he was checking the proofs.

The (6) indicates that this is the sixth of Bhagavan's verses to appear in the text, and the arrow shows where Bhagavan wanted it to be included. The verse Bhagavan wrote here says:

Simply to enquire, 'Who is it that experiences this karma, this alienation [*vibhakti*], this separation [*viyoga*] and this ignorance?' constitutes in itself [the paths of] karma, *bhakti*, yoga and *jnana*. For when, upon enquiry, the "I" ceases to be, these [karma, and so on] are [known to be] eternally without existence. Only abiding as the Self is the state of reality.

I will now give a few more examples from the proof copy to show how Bhagavan's editorial interventions modified the meanings of the verses he chose to change. I will give the 1939 verse number first, followed, after a colon, by the number in the current edition. The 1939 edition only had 852 verses by Muruganar, whereas the current edition has 1,254. These extra verses were interpolated at appropriate places in the book, rather than at the end, so the numbers in the current edition differ from the original 1939 edition.

Verse 75:115



With Bhagavan's revisions the verse says:

If it is asked, 'When the prime entity is only one, why do all teachers and religions soften their stance and accept initially



## Verse 36:57

36. மண்டுபல வாக கீயங்குமிப் பாழுலகப்  
பண்டைநிலை பல்வண்ணப் பச்சையில்—அண்டரசம்  
ஒன்றேபோ லொன்று யுறுசுகமா மிவ்வுண்மை  
நின்றேபா ரான்ம நிலை. ௨௭

The revised version says:

Just as the yolk of the egg of the many-hued green peacock is only one [in colour], the original state of this empty world, which appears to be distorted into teeming multiplicity, is pure and unalloyed happiness. By abiding in the state of the Self, know this truth now, even while that Self, appearing as an effect, takes the form of the world manifesting through the power of *maya*.

Through changing only one letter here, Bhagavan makes an interesting philosophical point. Muruganar had originally written 'which shines as teeming multiplicity'. Bhagavan's correction indicates that it is the Self alone that shines, not the distorted and fragmented, unreal world that is projected by the individual self. In a similar correction to verse 274 (the original verse number was 185) Bhagavan changed 'shines as an ordinary human being' to 'appears to be an ordinary human being'. In Bhagavan's terminology only the formless Self shines; its various appearances and manifestations do not.

## Verse 4:10

Muruganar felt that it was Bhagavan who was guiding and inspiring him to record the teachings of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*. In his original draft of verse four, which was part of a sequence that explains how the work came into existence, he wrote:

Upon examination [it will be discovered] that all these letters are certainly not those written by me, a dull-witted fool, through intellectual exertion. The one who wrote them is Venkatavan, divinity in human form.

Venkatavan is one of the names of Bhagavan that Muruganar frequently uses in his poetry. When Bhagavan read this verse in a proof copy of the text, he made some significant changes to the text:

4. இந் த வெழுத்துக்கள் யாளவயுமே தேருங்கால்  
மந்த மதிபடைத்த மத்தனே—புந்தியால்  
எண்ணி யெழுதியவே யல்ல வெழுதியோன்  
புண்ணியனும் வேங்கடவன் போன்ம.

Bhagavan's alterations made the verse read:

Upon examination, [it will be discovered that] this elegant *Guru Vachaka Kovai* was not sung by me, a dull-witted fool, through intellectual exertion. It was Venkatavan, divinity in human form, who, without conscious volition, caused me to sing it.

Bhagavan's corrections hint at an important philosophical point. While Muruganar claimed in his original verse that it was Bhagavan himself who wrote the work, presumably using Muruganar as his instrument, Bhagavan makes it clear in his revision that he was merely the impersonal causal agency.

Bhagavan took the position that the Self never performs or initiates any action. However, he also maintained that one who abides motionless and desireless as the Self creates an energy or a presence that takes care of all devotees' desires or needs. Bhagavan used the Sanskrit term '*sannidhi*' to describe this energy field that is generated and sustained by

the *jnani's* Self-abidance.<sup>8</sup> By amending the verse to '...without conscious volition, caused me to write it', Bhagavan was indicating that it was this *sannidhi* which had empowered Muruganar to compose these verses. This authoritative correction clearly indicates that it was Bhagavan himself who subconsciously inspired and prompted Muruganar to embark on this project and to continue with it for many years.

### Verse 7:13

This is the final verse of the prefatory section in which Muruganar described how the work had come into existence, and how he had been inspired to record Bhagavan's teachings. The initial draft of this final verse was not composed by Muruganar himself but by someone who is merely described as 'an anonymous admirer'. This anonymous author wrote:

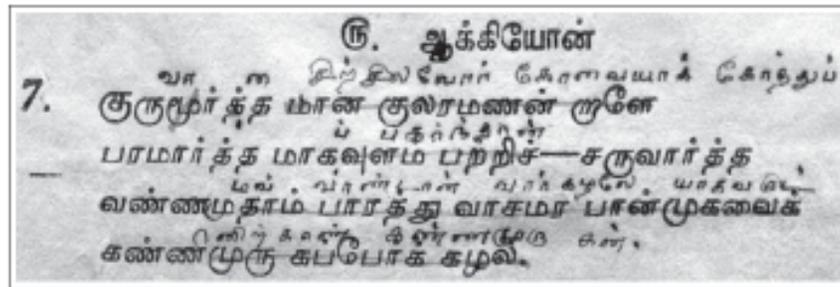
Holding in his heart as the supreme truth the feet of illustrious Ramana, God manifesting in the form of the Guru, [Muruganar revealed] the ambrosial truth of all things. Declare that his name is Mugavai Kanna Murugan of the Bharadwaja lineage.

Mugavai is an alternative rendering of Ramanathapuram, Muruganar's home town, and Kanna is the Tamil version of Krishna, the name of Muruganar's father.

When Bhagavan saw these lines, he crossed out almost all of the original words and replaced them with a verse of his own which read:

He who [recorded and] strung into a garland a few of the Guru's instructions and announced this pre-eminent scripture to the world is Kanna Murugan, who sees through his eye of grace that the essence of all things is only the far-reaching feet of his Lord.

<sup>8</sup> See *The Power of the Presence*, part one, pp. 81-2, for an explanation by Bhagavan of how this process works.



The word rendered as 'pre-eminent scripture' (*paramarttam*) can also be translated as 'Supreme Truth', 'Supreme treasure', or 'Treasure of *jnana*'. Whichever phrase one chooses, it is a supreme accolade given by Bhagavan to this collection of teachings.<sup>9</sup> It is also worth noting that in the final portion of the verse – 'Murugan, who sees through his eye of grace that the essence of all things is only the far-reaching feet of his Lord' – Bhagavan is confirming that Muruganar is having the experience of seeing everything as the Self. Overall, it is a glowing tribute by Bhagavan to Muruganar and the verses that comprise this 'pre-eminent scripture'.

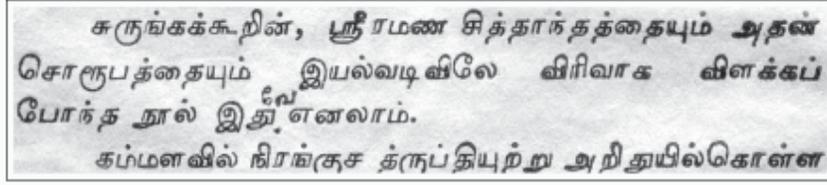
### The Introduction

Bhagavan made a highly significant editing intervention in the introduction that had been written by the editor and compiler, Sadhu Natanananda. Towards the end of this introduction Sadhu Natanananda had written the following sentence:

In summary, it can be said that this is a work that has come into existence to explain in great detail and in a pristine form Sri Ramana's philosophy and its essential nature [*swarupa*].<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The Tamil version given here, with Bhagavan's handwritten corrections, was not the final draft. A further slight amendment was made to the third line prior to publication to make it conform to the rules of Tamil prosody.

<sup>10</sup> *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, 1939 Tamil edition, p. xvi.



After the penultimate word of this sentence, *idu*, Bhagavan inserted the suffix ‘*ay*’. By itself the word ‘*idu*’ means ‘this’, but the addition of this suffix makes a significant difference to the meaning of the verse. In Tamil the addition of this suffix ‘*ay*’ to make the word ‘*iduvay*’ can give two meanings that can be roughly translated as ‘this definitely’ or ‘this alone’.

Let me explain this in more detail because Bhagavan is making an important statement here. If the sentence ‘Out of all the books on the shelf this alone is worth reading’ was translated into Tamil, the words ‘this alone’ would be translated by ‘*iduvay*’. The ‘*ay*’ suffix isolates one item of a group from the rest – here, the one book from the many – and then makes a statement that refers exclusively to that one isolated component. If ‘*iduvay*’ was given the alternative meaning ‘this definitely’ in the sentence I have just given, the meaning would change slightly to ‘this is definitely worth reading’. It is not as absolute and exclusive as ‘this alone’, but the meaning is substantially the same: one particular book has been given a very high recommendation.

Bhagavan’s interpolation of ‘*ay*’ after the word ‘*idu*’ separates *Guru Vachaka Kovai* from all the other books of his teachings (or at least the ones that existed in 1939) and then praises it by saying: ‘[out of all the available books on Sri Ramana’s teachings] this work alone has come into existence to explain in great detail and in a pristine form Sri Ramana’s philosophy and its essential nature’. If the alternative translation of ‘*ay*’ is used, it would mean, ‘this book has most definitely come into existence to explain in great detail and in a pristine form Sri Ramana’s philosophy and its essential nature’.

Whichever of the two options one takes, Bhagavan’s editorial insertion at this point gives an exceptional and unique imprimatur to this collection of teachings.

### The Unique Authority of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* in the Ramana Literature

*Guru Vachaka Kovai* contains the largest collection of Bhagavan’s spoken teachings that was checked and revised by Bhagavan himself during his lifetime. There are other records of his conversations – *Sri Ramana Gita*, *Maharshi’s Gospel*, the talks that precede *Sat Darshana Bhashya* – that Bhagavan went through and edited in some way, but if one adds all these other checked and revised texts together, their total still falls short of the volume of material that appears in *Guru Vachaka Kovai*. Bhagavan was shown the manuscripts that ended up as *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, but he never went through them, pen in hand, as he did with *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, revising the contents to make sure that they conformed to his teachings.

In addition to the sheer volume of the text and the philosophical breadth of its coverage, it is important to note that these *Guru Vachaka Kovai* teachings were recorded in Tamil, the language in which they were originally spoken by Bhagavan. It is an astonishing and little-appreciated fact that while Bhagavan usually spoke Tamil when he answered philosophical questions, virtually all of the people, with the exception of Muruganar, who recorded what he said chose to record his statements in some other language. *Maharshi’s Gospel* and *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, for example, were first published in English, and the Tamil editions that currently exist are translations of these English texts, not original Tamil renderings of the conversations. It was Muruganar alone who succeeded not only in recording a massive corpus of teachings in Tamil, but also inspiring Bhagavan to check, revise, and occasionally completely rewrite the verses.

In an essay he wrote on Muruganar, Sadhu Om made the following remarks about the pre-eminent place of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* in the Ramana literature:

...if anyone wants a single text of Sri Bhagavan’s teachings in which clear expositions of all the various secrets of spiritual wisdom that should be known by the world are gathered together, that one text is *Guru Vachaka Kovai*...

... If we want to verify what the correct teaching of Sri Bhagavan is on any particular subject, the answer will be available in *Ulladu Narpadu*, *Upadesa Undiyar* or *Guru Vachaka Kovai*. Therefore, these three works are the true *Sri Ramana prasthanatraya* [the three fundamental texts of Sri Ramanā's divine revelation] and they are indeed a *prasadam* [blessed gift] of his grace which the world has received through the agency of Sri Muruganar.<sup>11</sup>

This idea, first articulated by Sadhu Om, that *Guru Vachaka Kovai* is a component of the *Sri Ramana prasthanatraya* was endorsed by both Professor K. Swaminathan<sup>12</sup> and by Sri T. N. Venkataraman, the former president of Sri Ramanasramam, in his introduction to Prof. Swaminathan's translation of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*.<sup>13</sup>

The highest and most authoritative endorsement of the book comes from Bhagavan himself. As I mentioned earlier in the article, he rewrote verse thirteen in such a way that it declared *Guru Vachaka Kovai* to be a 'pre-eminent scripture', or a 'supreme treasure', and he made a significant alteration to a sentence in the introduction that either emphasised the greatness or the uniqueness of the work:

'... this work alone has come into existence to explain in great detail and in a pristine form Sri Ramanā's philosophy and its essential nature.'



<sup>11</sup> *Ramanā's Muruganar*, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ramanā's Muruganar*, p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, p. iii. H. Vaidyanathan in his brief article on *Guru Vachaka Kovai* in *Ramanā's Muruganar* (p. 148) makes the same claim.

## HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

# A Magnetic Attraction

K. VITHOBA KAMATH

I was born in 1924 in the remote village of Tirthahalli, Karnataka. I was the youngest of a united family. From boyhood I had an inclination towards spirituality. In high school students were asked to write a composition regarding their aim in life. I wrote that the only aim in my life is to realise God by following the path of renunciation. To add to this, the second language text book was Nag Mahashaya in high school and Lord Buddha in intermediate.

At the time I was pursuing my study at Bangalore Central College, the struggle for freedom of India was at its height under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. I had a great regard for him, more for his saintly life than for other activities in which field he had brought Dharma as a pivot. When I was in final BSc. I wrote a letter to him expressing desire to join his ashram at Sevagram. I never expected a reply from such a great personality. But to my surprise and excitement I got a

letter from him. It ran thus: “Dear Friend, Time enough to join Sevagram after you have passed final exam. It is not all gold that glitters. Let not the glittering of Sevagram deceive you.”

The first time I had the unique opportunity of paying a visit was when I was travelling to join Gandhiji’s ashram in 1946. I had read about Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi from an article by M.S. Kamath, and later, I read a book also written by him about the Maharshi. There rose a magnetic attraction in me to see Bhagavan. There were no easy facilities at that time for transportation as there are nowadays.

I got down at Villupuram railway station from there to Tiruvannamalai. I knew only Kannada and English language, whereas the language spoken there was Tamil. So I went to the station master there and requested him to direct the path to Sri Ramanasramam. He enquired about the place from whence I came. I was astonished by his reply: “Why have you come from such a long distance. It is all a palatial place and not an ashram. The so-called Maharshi is reclining on a sofa with attendants fanning him inside a grand hall. Hot coffee, idlis are served in addition to a palatable diet.” In spite of his remarks to which I paid least importance, I went inside the ashram premises. There was everything the station master told, but when I beheld the Maharshi in the hall, my first impression was that he was aloof and not in any way connected or attached with thing round him. All Gods and saints from time immemorial are criticised for some reason or other from Rama to Paramahansa Ramakrishna. There I saw him unattached to material things, but radiating spiritual splendour to devotees through sublime silence.

I used to sit in the darshan hall in the last row. One day while I was there an idea automatically flashed that I should see Lord Krishna. I intently looked at Bhagavan and saw a dark cloud engulfing him and from within emerged Lord Krishna. I was at my wit’s end. I thought it was a hallucination and a project of my own mind. I wanted to try again. This time I thought of Gandhiji. Ramana was nowhere, but in his place there was Gandhiji. Being bewildered I looked at Bhagavan. There! He was looking straight at me with a

benign smile on his face. Generally he never looks at anyone but was, as I understood always in ‘tratak’ mood, I felt highly blessed.

One Dr. Roy, a blind professor from Bombay visited the ashram when I was there. The postmaster asked me to guide him as I knew English. Dr. Roy told me though blind he has travelled throughout the world and only one thing was necessary was confidence. How can I forget the interview between him and the Maharshi. Bhagavan showed keen interest in Braille script which he had brought with him. In the course of conversation the topic turned towards miracles. Bhagavan said if one is after miracles, one has to seek other saints and he is not the man for it. Dr. Roy asked, “Is God-realisation possible for one who is blind?” The reply of Bhagavan gave still rings in my mind. He said, “For attaining that stage, we in a sense, voluntarily become blind to the external world, hence it is not a hindrance at all.”

In the darshan hall I always used to sit in the last row near the wall. Prior to my departure I took courage to sit near Sri Ramana. As it is the morning hour there were few visitors. I verily felt vibrations emanating from him which thrilled me. I asked Bhagavan with much trepidation as to how to control the tossing of the mind. He looked at me simply but didn’t give a reply. I thought it was not proper on my part, a raw graduate, to have asked him. It also made me to think Bhagavan didn’t appreciate questioning.

Meanwhile a devotee came and sat by my side. Later I came to know he was Devaraja Mudaliar. Bhagavan though he knows English rarely replied in that language and without giving room for my negative thinking, he asked me through Mudaliar as to who is asking this question. “Is it you or your mind?” I replied, “It is my mind.” Bhagavan replied, “Mind is a bundle of thoughts. See who you are, then these oscillations of mind ceases to exist.”<sup>1</sup>

My second enquiry was, “Is God realisation possible through Karma Yoga?” The Maharshi said, “What is Karma Yoga? It is eradication of ego. When ego is gone there is realisation.” After the interview I came

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He was gracious to write about me in his book *Day by Day with Bhagavan*. See 18.10.1946, page 332-3. Sri Ramanasramam 2002.

out of the hall. Devaraja Mudaliar followed me and asked for my credentials.

Sri Ramana Maharshi used to sit for taking food in the dining hall, in the same place where his photo is now. There was a partition where visitors used to take food on either side. Bhagavan could see them all. He used to take a small quantity of food, mashed well by his fingers. He was keenly observing visitors leaves on which food is served and gave instructions to servers to serve to those whose leaves no remnant observed.

I remember well, as if it just happened today, the figure of Sri Bhagavan Ramana returning from a walk with Arunachala hill in the background, with a stick in his hand, radiating spiritual aura, with eyes glittering with live stars emanating bliss. The scene of the uplifting influence is still so fresh and inspiring. I have seen many pictures of Sri Bhagavan. Though there is His Grace in all of them, for me who has seen him personally, that form is ever inspirational.

After the Mahaniravana of the Maharshi, with years passed I visited Ramanasramam several times. On one occasion I have been enquired by an ashram devotee regarding my life and whereabouts. I never thought he was going to publish it in *The Mountain Path*, but was surprised to see an article named *Introducing Vithoba Kamath* in July 1987. Many a new building has been erected there to accommodate increasing numbers of visitors. But the atmosphere of the old darshan hall is unaltered. I used to sit there for considerable time during visits and am experiencing the same calm elevating vibrations which I had the privilege of imbibing during the time when Sri Ramana Maharshi was there in physical form.

With some devotees whenever I went on a pilgrimage to Ramanasramam, I never failed to go on giri pradakshina. During this period I was living with my son at Dharwad, a town in Karnataka. One day while going through the town I saw a merchant shop dealing with cement. There was a big photo of Bhagavan in a prominent place. I was bewildered and entered the shop as if it is an ashram. The proprietor asked me what I wanted. On being told that I had not come for the purchase of cement, but it was a magnetic attraction that

had drawn me to the photo on his wall. He was immensely pleased. He told me that he used to visit Ramanasramam almost every year. He told me about his son who was currently employed in the USA and invited me to the marriage function and reception of his son in one of the Dharwad halls. It was there at the marriage I saw again a big picture of Sri Ramana prominent placed with flower decorations. He introduced me to his relatives and guests and informed them about my darshan and sambashan with the Maharshi. They all showed much respect and regards to me which I concluded was their devotion and love for Bhagavan.

In December 2005 I was in Sri Ramanasramam along with my wife, daughter and grandson. In spite of my advanced age resulting in general weakness, I went with my family members to Skandashram and next day did a circumambulation of Arunachala. Bhagavan was very particular about giri pradakshina and insisted on devotees to go whatever their infirmities.

On the day of departure I saw the present president of the ashram and introduced myself. When he heard from me about darshan of Bhagavan in physical form, he suddenly rose from his chair, took both my hands in great veneration. This vivid scene is fresh in my mind. ▲



# Stories of Bhagavan and Animals

## Sparrows and Other Birds

LLUISOT

*These selections are adapted from an upcoming colour-illustrated Sri Ramanasramam publication for children. The artist is Lluísot, a professional children's book illustrator from Barcelona, Spain.*

### Two Siddha Purushas

One day, two sparrows came and perched on top of the double doors which were then on the south side of the hall. Each sparrow sat on its own door and looked intently at Bhagavan for a whole day. Neither of them showed any fear when visiting devotees walked in and out of the doorway. Normally the doors to the hall would be closed at night, but when the two sparrows refused to leave, even after dark, Bhagavan told his attendants to leave the doors open. They stayed throughout the night and departed early the next morning. After they had flown away Bhagavan told us that two *siddha purushas* (perfected beings) had come in the form of the two sparrows to have his darshan.

### Making a Home in Bhagavan

There were other, less exalted sparrows in the neighbourhood. One of them once repeatedly tried to build a nest over Bhagavan's sofa. It never got very far because Madhava Swami kept destroying the nest with a long stick. After several failed attempts, the sparrow flew to the top of the entrance doors, looked at Bhagavan, and repeatedly chirped at him. To the people in the hall it sounded like ordinary bird noise but Bhagavan realised that it was making a complaint.

He turned to Madhava Swami and asked, 'Who has destroyed her nest? She is complaining to me about it.'

'I did,' replied Madhava Swami. 'If it builds its nest on any of the other beams there will be no problem. But there will always be trouble if it constructs directly over the sofa. Grass will always be falling on Bhagavan's head.'

Bhagavan agreed and arranged for two wooden boards to be nailed to the beams in a different corner of the hall. The sparrow was



somehow persuaded to rebuild its nest on these new boards. In the absence of any further disturbances, the sparrow laid some eggs and raised a family there. As a final postscript to this story I should mention that one of the baby sparrows once fell out of the nest. Bhagavan gave it some milk and then asked one of the devotees to put it back. The sparrow stayed there for a couple of months. When all its children had learned to fly, it took off one day and never returned.

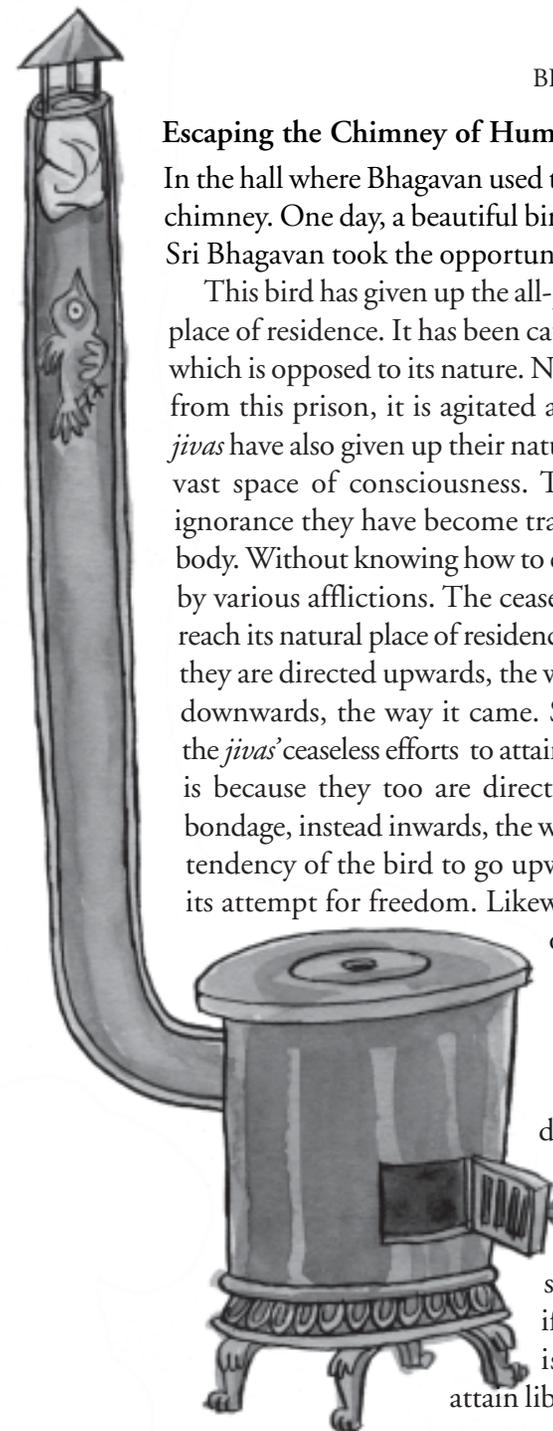
\*The two stories above are taken from *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, pp. 86-87 and the story below from *Sri Ramana Darsanam*, Swami Natanananda, pp. 49-50.

### Escaping the Chimney of Human Bondage

In the hall where Bhagavan used to give darshan there was a chimney. One day, a beautiful bird became trapped inside. Sri Bhagavan took the opportunity to reveal a great truth:

This bird has given up the all-pervasive space, its natural place of residence. It has been caught in this limited space, which is opposed to its nature. Not knowing how to escape from this prison, it is agitated and afraid. Like this bird, *jivas* have also given up their natural place of residence, the vast space of consciousness. Through the delusion of ignorance they have become trapped in the prison of the body. Without knowing how to escape, they are tormented by various afflictions. The ceaseless efforts of this bird to reach its natural place of residence are unsuccessful because they are directed upwards, the way of bondage, instead of downwards, the way it came. Similarly, the reason why the *jivas'* ceaseless efforts to attain freedom are unsuccessful is because they too are directed outwards, the way of bondage, instead inwards, the way they came. The natural tendency of the bird to go upwards asserts itself even in its attempt for freedom. Likewise, the natural tendency

of *jivas* to roam outwards asserts itself even in their attempt at liberation. This is the *jivas'* natural tendency. If, through true discrimination and awareness, the *jiva* is made to turn back from outward-directed sight to inward sight, and if it remains fixed there, it is certain that it would attain liberation in an instant. ▲





# Jnana Yoga

JONATHAN BADER

The qualifications that Sankara prescribes for the aspirant set a standard that appears to be so demanding as to exclude all but the most superior of seekers. One suspects that those who fulfil the requirements would already be on the verge of Self-realisation. Yet Sankara is not unwilling to provide instruction for the pupil who is not so adequately prepared. He speaks of students who have not acted in accord with *dharmā*, who are careless in everyday matters and who are lacking in firm preliminary knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Sankara suggests that such pupils might follow the restraints and observances (*yama-niyama*),<sup>2</sup> which, of course, constitute the first two stages of the *astanga-yoga*. In a similar vein, he utilises the distinction drawn in the YSBh (*Yogasutra-bhasya* of Vyasa) between the indirect means (the first five *arigas*) and the direct means (*samyama*) of yoga practice. In applying this notion

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<sup>1</sup> USG, *Upadesasahasri, gadyabandha* (prose portion), 1.4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

to the Upanisads, he describes ritual action as constituting the remote means (*bahyatara*) to follow the restraints and observances, which, of course, constitute the first two stages of the *astanga-yoga*. In a similar vein, he utilises the distinction drawn in the YSBh between the indirect means and the direct means of yoga practice. In applying this notion to the Upanisads, he describes ritual action as constituting the remote means to knowledge in contrast to those direct (*pratyasanna*) means such as attaining calmness of mind.<sup>3</sup>

One of the themes which runs throughout the whole of Sankara's work is his insistence that ritual action (*karman*) and knowledge (*jnana*) are not to be combined (*samuccaya*) as a means to liberation.<sup>4</sup> Since ritual actions are dependent upon an agent, they are not regarded as the means to the knowledge of Brahman, which is self-established. Even in the context of the *Bhagavadgita*, where *karma-yoga*, the way of disciplined activity, is held in such high esteem, Sankara still maintains his position that the two are not to be combined. In order to diminish the prominent place given in the *Gita* to *karma-yoga*, Sankara emphasises a way of knowledge, *jnana-yoga*, as the means to liberation. But he concedes that *karma-yoga* can be a means to *jnana-yoga*. A series of preliminary disciplines may serve to prepare the aspirant for *jnana-yoga*.

In GBh (*Bhagavadgita-bhasya*) 5.12 and 5.24 Sankara goes so far as to sketch out the stages of spiritual discipline in which this progression would occur. However, he does not fully elaborate upon the way in which such a plan may be carried out. Indeed, he may well have suggested it simply as a device to demonstrate the essential harmony between the techniques advocated in the *Gita* and those of his Advaita Vedanta. Yet judging from the nature of his practical instructions in the *Upadesasahasri*, there is good reason to believe that the method outlined in the GBh may have been followed by his students. Sankara's scheme serves as a useful point of reference for an analysis of the Advaita method of spiritual discipline. Sankara

<sup>3</sup> *Brahmasutra-bhasya* 3.4.27; 4.1.18.

<sup>4</sup> Sankara's frequent discussion of the subject suggests that many Vedantins of his day accepted the validity of combining ritual action and knowledge.

enumerates the following stages: (a) purification of the mind (*sattva-suddhi*); (b) the advent of knowledge (*jnana prapti*); (c) renunciation of all ritual actions (*sarva-karma-samnyasa*); and (d) steadiness in knowledge (*jnana-nistha*).

Of the four functions of ritual action which Sankara describes as production (*utpada*), attainment (*apti*), modification (*vikara*) and purification (*samskara*),<sup>5</sup> only purification has a particular place in *jnana-yoga*. Certainly, it is not Brahman, the eternally pure (*nitya-suddha*) that stands in need of purification. Concerning the aspirant, however, there is something to be purified, so long as there are obstacles that prevent him from engaging in the path of knowledge. It is in order to remove such barriers as an accumulation of demerit that the seeker practises purification of the mind. To this end, he might involve himself in sacrifice, the giving of gifts, study of the Veda, austerity, and fasting.<sup>6</sup> Yet, it is not for the sake of knowledge that these ritual actions are performed, but merely to purify the mind to facilitate the arising of knowledge.

This 'arising' serves to indicate the second stage of the path. Since the first step was a preliminary, it is (b), *jnana-prapti*, which more properly signifies the commencement upon the path of knowledge. Sankara stresses throughout his works that the aspirant must renounce all ritual actions, that is, (c). What exactly is it that the student is expected to do? Sankara's position on the renunciation of ritual action certainly appears problematical. Several scholars are inclined to argue that his views on the subject are wholly contradictory.<sup>6</sup> How indeed can the aspirant embark upon the way of knowledge if he must also renounce all ritual actions?

Sankara's understanding of the nature of the aspirant may well shed some light on this problem. He sets out four preconditions for the aspirant: (1) an ability to distinguish between the temporal and the

<sup>5</sup> USP, *Upadesasahasri, padyabandha* (metrical portion), 17.49.

<sup>6</sup> S. Mayeda for instance, asserts that Sankara contradicts himself in accepting actions such as purification while demanding the renunciation of actions. Sengaku Mayeda, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara*, Tokyo, 1979, p. 88 ff.

eternal; (2) dispassion for the enjoyment of the fruits of one's actions both here and hereafter; (3) attainment of the means of tranquillity, self-restraint and the like; (4) the desire for liberation.<sup>7</sup>

At first glance, all but the fourth of these qualifications might easily be mistaken for indications of Self-realisation.<sup>8</sup> The process of (1), discrimination, involves the ability to distinguish the Self from the non-Self, the rope from the snake. If the aspirant were already able to effect this discrimination, he would immediately understand the meaning of *tat tvam asi*. There would be nothing further for him to do. The qualities designated in (3) raise a similar question. Sankara is undoubtedly referring here to *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad* (BU) 4.4.23. Yet, this passage contains the description of a sage who is *already* a knower of Brahman. There is only one logical explanation for the stipulation of these prerequisites. Although the aspirant is expected to demonstrate such qualities, he would not as yet have fully established them as the sole characteristics of his personality. It is for this reason that Sankara advises the teacher to repeatedly relate the teachings to the student until they are firmly grasped.<sup>9</sup>

It would seem that (4), *mumukṣutva*, is contingent upon (2), renunciation (*viraga*), inasmuch as the harbouring of worldly or even otherworldly desires is incompatible with the desire for liberation.<sup>10</sup> But what is more significant here is that Sankara has not required in (2) that one must renounce all ritual actions as he did in stage (c) of the discipline set out in GBh. Rather, he asks only that one have dispassion (*viraga*) for the results one obtains from his actions. This notion is very close to the idea presented in *Gita* 4.20: "having abandoned attachment to the fruits of action ... though engaged in

karma he does not do anything". But Sankara differs markedly from the *Gita* in his assertion that one should renounce all ritual actions. The *Gita*, on the other hand, insists that one must engage in activity.

If Sankara's statements on renunciation are taken strictly on face value, he would be enmeshed in self-contradiction. For surely the student must engage in ritual activity in approaching the teacher, or even in hearing the sacred word, both of which are essential to the practice of Advaita. It seems unlikely that Sankara could have totally ignored the common-sense argument presented in *Gita* 3.8. The gist of the argument is that without action one could not even maintain the life processes of the body. But Sankara obviously did not want to support this position. He purposely obscures the meaning of the text by suggesting a very different interpretation in his commentary. If it were possible to directly confront Sankara here concerning his stand on renunciation, his response might be that one need not cease the act of respiration but should simply renounce the idea that 'I am breathing'. This is the position he takes in BUBh 1.4.7. He argues that there is no need for injunctions to meditation. For these can only suggest that a meditator is separate from the object of his meditation. Yet, he does not dispute the need for meditation. Sankara's stance becomes still clearer in USP 13.17: "how can concentration, or non-concentration, or anything else which is to be done belong to me?"<sup>11</sup> It is only based on this awareness that he proceeds to uphold the value of meditation: "with concentrated mind one should always know everything as *atman*."<sup>12</sup>

It may be well to summarize here the implications of Sankara's position on renunciation. (i) Engaging in ritual action cannot be conjoined with knowledge as a means of liberation. Since all actions are dependent upon the notion of agency, they are ultimately the effect of ignorance (*avidyāi-kāryatva*). As true knowledge and ignorance are wholly incompatible, it becomes impossibility for the aspirant to continue to perform ritual actions. (ii) Yet ritual action is not wholly rejected, but

<sup>7</sup> BSBh 1.1.1.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Deussen notes this peculiarity but does not elaborate. *The System of the Vedānta*, tr. C. Johnston, Chicago, 1912, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> USG 1.2.

<sup>10</sup> Sankara enumerates three types of desires which are to be abandoned: those relating to this world which can be obtained through sons; those of the realm of the ancestors which are sought through rites; and the world of the gods which can be reached through meditation. See *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad bhāṣya* (BUBh) 3.5.1.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Mayeda, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara*, p. 133.

<sup>12</sup> USP 13.25, in Mayeda, op. cit, p. 134.

rather relegated to the role of an indirect means or preliminary to *jnana-yoga*. (iii) Ritual action is not to be literally abandoned, but all attachment to action based on the notion 'I am the agent' is to be rejected outright.<sup>13</sup> The question remains as to why Sankara urges the aspirant to renounce all ritual action, instead of providing him with more precise and literal instructions. Mayeda's observation that Sankara wished to shock the students into a new awareness may well be on the right track.<sup>14</sup>

Having renounced all ritual actions, the aspirant, desirous of release, enters upon the final stage in the path of knowledge, *jnana-nistha*. Sankara has adopted this expression from the text of *Gita* 18.50 (*nistha jnanasya*) and uses it throughout the GBh to denote the yoga of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> For Sankara, *jnana-nistha* refers to the process by which steadfastness in knowledge is achieved, and designates the culmination of *jnana-yoga*. He explains *jnana-nistha* as "the determined effort of establishing a current of thought concerning the inner Self."<sup>16</sup>

Sankara's reference to a 'current of thought' is certainly suggestive of meditation.<sup>17</sup> But he is careful to point out that the process of *jnana-nistha* is not needed to establish true knowledge. Effort is not required for the sake of knowledge. The current of thought is only maintained with regard to stopping the conception of the Self in terms of what is not-Self.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sankara certainly engaged in a great deal of activity in the course of his short lifetime. His prolific writings and extensive travels point to the fact that he did engage in activity in the spirit of *Gita* 4.20.

<sup>14</sup> S. Mayeda, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, p.91.

<sup>15</sup> Sankara defines *nistha* as 'completion' (*paryavasanna*), in order to suggest that *jnana-yoga* is the culmination of the other types of yoga described in the *Gita*. *Nistha* also signifies 'devotion'. In GBh 18.55 Sankara cites *jnana-yoga* as the equivalent to *ananya-bhakti*, single-minded devotion, which the *Gita* takes as the highest form of *bhakti*. In *Mundaka Upanisad Bhasya* 1.2.12, Sankara states that the expression *brahma-nistha* signifies one who, having abandoned all ritual action is absorbed only in the non-dual Brahman.

<sup>16</sup> GBh 18.55.

<sup>17</sup> Sankara explains meditation in terms of a current, *samtana* in *Prasna Upanisad*, 5.1. and similarly as *samtata* in GBh 13.24. Both terms are synonymous with *pravaha* which he utilizes to describe meditation in BSBh 4.1.8 and GBh 12.3.

<sup>18</sup> GBh 18.50.

At this point, the somewhat hypothetical scheme of *jnana-yoga* must be left aside. The very idea that there can be a progression in a path of knowledge is "merely an antecedent of the true knowledge of the Self in which there can be no successive stages".<sup>19</sup> Ultimately Sankara's teaching on liberation relies upon the concept of two truths. Meditation can only be assigned a place in the lower order of reality. For the practice of meditation entails the notion of multiplicity. There must be a meditator (*sadhaka*), an object upon which the meditation is based (*sadhya*), and an act of meditation (*sadhana*). With his insistence on non-duality Sankara is, in a way, challenging the validity of the scriptures and the teacher. If there is to be no distinction between the guru and his disciple, then what is the point of the teachings? Sankara contends that until true knowledge presents itself, the conventional notion of reality remains valid and that there is indeed an aspirant who follows the teachings.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the aim of the scriptures in prescribing meditation is not to invoke immediate knowledge, but merely to direct the aspirant's attention to it. Meditation, then, will not lead to the highest truth.

If Sankara is to develop a method of liberation that is in conformity with the principles of his Advaita Vedanta, it must function from the standpoint of the highest truth. Insofar as his notion of *jnana-nistha* involves a discriminative awareness of the difference between Self and not-Self, it provides a glimpse of teachings which Sankara presents to the true seekers of liberation. For them, there is nothing to be attained. But they must find a way to remove the misconceptions that cause the Self to appear as not-Self. To this end, Sankara has proposed a process whereby the aspirant cultivates the faculty of discriminative insight, based solely on the assertion of a non-dual reality. ▲

<sup>19</sup> *Brahmasutra-bhasya* BSBh 4.1.3, tr. Thibaut, vol. 11, p. 336.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.1.14.

## VERSE

## In Prayer

SHEELA ARUNDALE

O Lord Almighty!  
 Supreme Being  
 I bow to Thee with folded hands.

In gratitude I pray  
 Thy kindness and blessings bountiful  
 Thy *prasadam* to me!

What is mine  
 That is not yours to offer?  
 This heart full of love pledged to thee at birth.

I am in pursuit of a noble goal  
 Not connected with the world:  
 Make me worthy of Thy Grace.

Let me always be near  
 And dear to Thee  
 take and keep me to Thy Goodness.

Make my mind full of Thee  
 Make my heart wise  
 Make my foolish tongue sing praises of Thee!

Steer me from confusion that will retard me  
 I want not to be lost to Thee  
 But ache in desire for Thee.

In the tranquil hour of dawn Nature's beauty profound  
 I perceive Thy reflection all around  
 My day then begins In Prayer.

Thy thousand Holy Names I chant  
 All senses tuned to Thee to purify my heart  
 I remain in your Paradise!

Peace is what I reap  
 In Prayer  
 this priceless gem so rare.

O Lord you read my mind  
 It's hollow like a bamboo stick  
 You see my heart it's emptied of myself.

Oh how I like to be In Prayer  
 All of me: heart and mind  
 Body and soul simply resting in Thee.

In prayer I feel You O Lord,  
 Closer than my breath I feel  
 I am in Thy sweet embrace.

Within my Self I dwell!  
 The space of infinity, yet  
 Without Prayer I am dull!

Like a magic fountain  
 I spring to life being in Thee  
 In Prayer.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

In dreams I soar and rise in Thee  
I Pray! Let this state  
Be an unending dream.

In prayer I'm neither this nor that  
I am nothing  
But become the Prayer to Thee.

When in distress I turn to Thee  
Without delay Thy goodwill comes  
In response to my distress.

Past fades away In Prayer  
Future not mine to worry  
Present is the gift I offer to thee In Prayer.

Faith is Thy blessing  
It grows more and more  
In Prayer.

I feel the power of Prayer each day of my life  
Moving the unmoving  
This is the Glory of the Divine.

Bless me, Lord! Let my day be full of prayer  
So I remain  
In companionship with Thee.

O Lord! Be praised  
Thy Holy Name on my lips  
Hari Om Hari!

In humble reverence  
I raise my hands and eyes to Thee  
And place this prayer at Thy Feet.



# TMP Mahadevan

JOHN GRIMES

Ramana was a sage without the least touch of worldliness, a saint of matchless purity, a witness to the eternal truth of Vedanta. It is not often that a spiritual genius of the magnitude of Sri Ramana visits the earth. But when such an event occurs, the entire humanity gets benefited and a new era of hope open before it.<sup>1</sup>

**T**MP Mahadevan (1911-1983) was one of India's pre-eminent 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers. In academia the names Mahadevan and Advaita were synonymous. Author of 55 books, almost all of which were on Advaita and two of which were on Ramana Maharshi,<sup>2</sup> Mahadevan was both by training and temperament an Advaitin through

<sup>1</sup> TMP Mahadevan, *Ramana Maharshi and His Philosophy of Existence*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ramana Maharshi and His Philosophy of Existence* and *Ramana Maharshi, the Sage of Arunachala*. Mahadevan also translated three Tamil books on Ramana's writings.

and through. Mahadevan viewed Advaita as the *summum bonum* of life and the paradigm through which he viewed all culture and philosophy. He loved Advaita, he lived for Advaita, and he left behind a legacy of Advaita scholarship. Mahadevan wrote, “Advaita, to the exposition of which I have dedicated my entire life, is not a school of philosophy, nor can it be limited by what we nowadays call “philosophy”. Advaita is a symbolic name for the principle of non-duality . . . both (Ramana Maharshi and Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati) are contemporary witnesses to the experience of non-dual truth, of unity which goes by the name of Advaita. To the understanding and exposition of this experience which is the culmination of all inquiry and research, I have offered all my attention, be it academic, human or spiritual. It is that which sustains me.”<sup>3</sup>

Dear Readers. This cannot be stressed enough and it behooves us to deeply contemplate Mahadevan’s assertion that Advaita is not essentially a school of philosophy; an “ism” (even though there is a philosophy known as Advaita and Mahadevan himself was known as a pre-eminent Advaita philosopher!). In his maturity, Mahadevan was adamant in oft repeating that Advaita is a symbolic name for the principle of non-duality, the “state” of a fully enlightened being.

This reminds me of an incident that happened when I first joined the Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy. I was a young first year M.A. student. By chance I happened to be in the Institute’s office when a group of philosophy students from the Madras Vivekananda College came to invite Mahadevan to be the chief guest and speaker at one of their upcoming functions. Mahadevan politely declined saying, “I have talked of Advaita all my life. Enough talking. Now it is time for me to stop talking about Advaita and immerse myself completely in seeking that non-dual experience.”

One would not be incorrect in stating that the word Advaita may be approached from three perspectives: 1) It denotes a radical non-dual philosophical system which is presented for scholars as a coherent, consistent, conceptual theory; 2) it presents ‘words to live by’ for

<sup>3</sup>TMP Mahadevan, *A Philosopher Looks Back*, p.205-206.



spiritual aspirants who are interested in a direct, personal experience of non-duality; and, first and foremost, 3) it is a symbolic word for the 'thunderous silence', the Unspeakable non-dual Reality.

From his earliest childhood, Mahadevan was always spiritually oriented. His mother died when he was five years old and, coinciding with her death, his father left and set up a family elsewhere. The young Mahadevan was raised by his aunt (mother's elder sister). This aunt used to listen to discourses on spiritual themes and visit temples and holy personages. She would take the young Mahadevan along with her. She introduced the young boy to famous Advaitins like the mystic, Sri Karapatra Sivaprakasa Swami, the sannyasin-scholar Virasekhara Subbiah Swamikal, and to Swami Rajesvarananda, a staunch devotee of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who was to play a major role in the Advaitic formation of Mahadevan.

Swami Rajesvarananda, who shaped Mahadevan's life as his spiritual and academic mentor, played a significant role in introducing Mahadevan to three spiritual giants. In 1929, at the age of eighteen, Swami Rajesvarananda took Mahadevan to Tiruvannamalai for the first time to meet Ramana Maharshi. As Mahadevan was to say, "To meet a sage and be acquainted with him is not an ordinary occurrence. It must be the result of a good stock of merit. I consider myself extremely fortunate, therefore, to have had the privilege of meeting the Master and basking in his glorious presence for three days. To sit before him was itself a deep spiritual education, to look at him was to have one's mind stilled, to fall within the sphere of his beatific vision was to be inwardly elevated."<sup>4</sup> Over the years, Swami Rajesvarananda was to take Mahadevan many times to meet Ramana but as it was not Mahadevan's way to talk of his personal direct encounters with the sages he met, we sadly don't have the good fortune of knowing what they spoke about or of what experiences took place.

Looking back over his life, Mahadevan noted, "The Sage (Ramana) did not found any new school of thought or cult. He taught the ageless truth of Vedanta. This is a universal and non-sectarian teaching. To

<sup>4</sup>TMP Mahadevan, *A Philosopher Looks Back*, p. 29

even call it Advaita (non-duality) is really a concession because of the inherent limitations that language bears with it."<sup>5</sup> Advaita does not profess to formulate conceptually what Reality is for, being non-dual, words cannot adequately do that. Therefore, it is not really a school among schools of philosophy. It seeks to transcend all viewpoints and concepts. This is why Advaita places an emphasis on "not-this, not-this" (*neti neti*), which is given, not so much as to say that appearances are not applicable to the Absolute, as to indicate the impossibility of attributing any conceptualization to It. The Self is beyond description, beyond what the finite mind can fathom. The Self is called "a-dvaita" to point to the fact that there is nothing with which it may be compared to.

Mahadevan found it both interesting and wonderful that Ramana Maharshi both attained the non-dual experience of Advaita and expressed its traditional wisdom without having studied and analyzed and meditated thereon. Ramana only came to know of the concepts and doctrines of Advaita, its illustrations and arguments later. Mahadevan said, "An understanding of the doctrinal side of Advaita is not an end in itself. Sri Ramana spoke about the doctrines only when doubts expressed by scholarly devotees had to be cleared, or questions had to be answered. He himself came to know of these doctrines only long after he had the experience of non-duality."<sup>6</sup>

Swami Rajesvarananda was instrumental in securing the young Mahadevan a place in the Ramakrishna Mission Student's Home and through that contact, Mahadevan came in contact with many Ramakrishna monks. It was through Swami Rajesvarananda's efforts that Mahadevan was to meet and eventually to be initiated by Swami Sri Mahapurushaji Maharaj (Swami Sivananda), a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Mahadevan wrote, "Even though I was too young, I could sense the atmosphere of holiness. Sri Mahapurushaji Maharaj was the very picture of saintliness, his serene and calm countenance reflected the pure and plenary spirituality of the Great Master (Sri

<sup>5</sup>TMP Mahadevan, *A Philosopher Looks Back*, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup>TMP Mahadevan, *Ramana Maharshi, the Sage of Arunachala*, p. 151.

Ramakrishna). His gracious look was full of tenderness, in his presence one felt elevated automatically to a lofty plane of existence. It was an intimate and intensely felt experience whose grandeur I can recall in but very inadequate words. . . I had the good fortune of receiving initiation from Mahapurushaji. This was received in the Ramakrishna shrine at the Math itself. Every detail connected with this solemn ceremony was attended to by Sankara Maharaj, but for whose unbounded affection I would not have had this unique privilege. The experience is still vivid in my memory: the venerable and gracious direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, seated in the shrine in a mood of exaltation imparting the mantra to me, who was just a stripling, and making me repeat it after him.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1932 Mahadevan saw the Sage of Kanci, Sri Candrasekharendra Sarasvati for the first time when the sage came to Madras during his *vijaya-yatra*. It was not until 1953 that Mahadevan had an occasion to meet the sage personally and over his lifetime Mahadevan was to meet the Acarya quite often both alone as well with devotees, dignitaries, scholars, students, and spiritual seekers that he would take with him for *darshan* of the sage.

Mahadevan studied philosophy under the guidance of P.N. Srinivasachari at Pachaiyappa's College (B.A. Honors First Class) and under the guidance of S.S. Suryanarayana Sastri at the University of Madras (PhD). His doctoral thesis was a groundbreaking attempt to present in a systematic way the philosophy of Advaita as expounded by Vidyaranya with special reference to the *Vivarana-prameya-sangraha*. Academically, Mahadevan served as a Lecturer in Logic in Maharaja's College, Pudukkottai (1935-37); as Head of the Department of Philosophy, Pachaiyappa's College (1937-43); as Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of Madras (1943-1976); and as a visiting professor at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York (1948-49). In 1964, under Mahadevan's leadership, the Philosophy Department at the

University of Madras was upgraded into a Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy.

Mahadevan was an Advaitin's Advaitin scholastically. However, probably due to his long associations with sages, there was little difference between his home life and his academic life. He was meticulous in both. He led a life of discipline with a spiritual orientation. His conversation was always brief; he never gossiped; soft, gentle, careful and effective were his ways. He cherished the Vedantic value system. He always made a distinction between the higher and lower values and shaped his life towards Self-realization. He remained a life-long bachelor and led a life of renunciation both inwardly and outwardly, though he never put on the ochre robes. He cultivated the virtues and treated others with dignity and respect. He was systematic in his academic work whether it involved, teaching, research, organization or publishing.

As a scholar, Mahadevan had an unflinching commitment to Advaita. He made no secret of this commitment. Advaita was the paradigm through which he viewed everything. Among Mahadevan's numerous published works, special mention should be made of his *Gaudapada: A Study in Early Advaita*. It is a classic work on Gaudapada. Also, something dear to my own heart was Mahadevan's inspiration and directive to the Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy to concentrate on Suresvara and his legacy vis a vis the Advaita tradition. Over the years this legacy has been carried out.

On a personal note, as a young student at the University of Madras I was always thrilled when hearing Mahadevan speak for, no matter what the theme, he would deal with it from an Advaita point of view. He always spoke softly, very softly and always to the point. He was always dignified in his behaviour, dress, and manners. I was also continually amazed by his ability to quote verses from memory to support his statements. Not only did he have at his fingertips, verses from the *Vedas*, *Upanisads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Brahma Sutra*, and other Sanskrit and Tamil religious and philosophical works, but also verses from Western philosophers, poets, historians, and so on. A student

<sup>7</sup>TMP Mahadevan, *A Philosopher Looks Back*, p. 18-22.

had to be inside the classroom before the Professor arrived or you dare not, could not, enter and upon his arrival, we stood in respect. Even if the bell rang, no one moved until the Professor left the classroom and as he did, again we all stood. Such was the atmosphere of respect for learning that we imbibed. Alas, those bygone days and professors seem to have almost totally disappeared.

What is the use of dilating on this subject? The individual is no other than the Absolute; this whole extended universe is *Brahman* Itself; the scripture persistently urges only *Brahman*, one without a second. It is an indubitable fact that people of enlightened minds who know their identity with *Brahman* and have given up their connection with the objective world, live palpably unified with *Brahman* as eternal Knowledge and Bliss.<sup>8</sup> ▲

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<sup>8</sup> *Vivekachudamani*, v.394.

# Atma Vichara Padhigam

SADHU OM

TRANSLATED BY TANMAYA CHAITANYA

To think is to generate a *vrtti* in the form of a thought (and hence to indulge in an act, and hence *pravrtti*); but ‘*what is*’ is never a *vrtti* (that is the sense of ‘I am’ is never an act of thinking or thought). If one probes keenly with total attention as to who is this ‘I’ which spawns all thoughts, thinking process will automatically cease. Even in the absence of thoughts, Being (the sense of one’s pure Existence) never ceases and there is no doubt about this. To abide unwaveringly in that Source from where all thoughts spring forth, is indeed true *Atma Nishtha*. May you abide thus!

2. The ‘thinker’ alone is *jiva* (the individual who owns up thinking); the one who merely exists (bereft of all thoughts) is *Ivara* (the Godhead or *sakshi chaitanya*). If the thinker *jiva* desires to remain

still by merely focusing the attention on the sense of pure existence in the form of 'I am', such Self-attention will quell all thinking activity (*pravrutti*) and transform itself into the mode of pure Being (*nivrutti*) Consciousness. Such a total resolution of the thinker along with all his thoughts into the Source (ever shining as Existence-Awareness) resulting in a vibrant stillness is alone called *Siva Sayujya* (Abidance in the state of Siva).

3. Among so many countless thoughts that gurgle up from within, the thinker himself (in the form of 'I am so-and-so') is merely one more thought; however, this 'I thought' is the root of all thoughts (and hence the seed of all *samsara*). But it is merely a reflection/image (*pratibimba*) of our true *svarupa*, the Self (that exists as 'I', 'I' without the limitations of any attribute). When we abide as this true Self in utter silence, the spurious 'I-thought' never rears its head.

4. This 'I-thought' does not arise in the deep sleep state devoid of dreams; nor does this 'I-thought' ever arise (for the *jnani* who ever abides) in the true *jnana nishtha*. Only between these states does this 'I-thought' appear as 'I am the body' (in the waking and dream states) and disappears otherwise (in the deep sleep state and the enlightened mode of Being). For this reason alone, this 'I-thought' is said to be a mere thought which comes and goes and hence to be dismissed as false. (Our true nature, by definition, is the ever present Self and never transient like this 'I-thought'.)

5. When this 'I-thought' flourishes, all miseries also flourish (for it is the seed of ignorance and hence of *samsara*); it is this 'I-thought' alone which is called as the 'ego'. It arises and survives only because of lack of self-enquiry. By not leaning on it for one's existence and by intently questioning this 'I am so-and-so' thought with unrelenting attention, it evaporates out of existence without a trace (even as mist vanishes with a rising sun).

6. Because of this 'I-thought' (*aham vrtti*) which pretends as the (grammatical) 'first person', the entire world comes into being as

the 'second and third persons' ('you' and 'it' — *idam vrtti*). If the searchlight of our attention gives up its fancy for the 'second and third persons' and turns itself on this 'I-thought', then this pseudo-'first person' will disappear and the substratum of true Being will flash forth as the ever present 'I', 'I' Consciousness without the adjunct of 'so-and-so'. This undecaying true 'First Person' alone is the real Self and staying aware of the Self is indeed *jnanam* (Enlightenment).<sup>1</sup>

7. To grasp the 'second and third persons' (*idam vrtti*) and pursuing it without a pause is utter foolishness; running after the 'second and third persons' by paying attention to them will fuel the thinking activity ever more. But turning that attention inwards towards the 'first person' (*aham vrtti*) is equivalent to suicide for the ego. Because only by pursuing the inquiry of the *aham vrtti* relentlessly to its logical end, will the ego be exterminated. This is the only way for the annihilation of the ego (*ahamkara nasha* which alone is referred to as *mano nasha*).

8. Without seeking the source of *aham vrtti* shining as 'I am this body' in everyone's awareness but constantly turning the attention of one's mind to the 'second and third persons' which includes our own body is nothing but the play of ignorance; But if you raise the doubt "is not the seeking of *aham vrtti* itself a pursuit of ignorance? Why should I then seek after a false entity in stead of pursuing the truth?," then do listen to my answer!

9. The reason for the progressive attenuation and eventual annihilation of the 'I -thought' by tracing the source of the false '*aham vrtti*' is just this: the 'I -thought' is the scent for finding the true Self as it is nothing but a ray emanating from the Source of our deathless Being; by training the powerful searchlight of our attention and latching it onto this ray without any lapse (*pramada*), the length of this ego-ray progressively diminishes and finally disappears leaving in its wake

<sup>1</sup> Such recognition of our ultimate and only reality is called *pratyabhijana* in *vedanta paribhasha* because it is an ever present and already accomplished fact.

the pure 'I am' shining without any veil of all limiting attributes. (Thus though the 'I thought' is a false entity, it is called a useful "leading error" as by holding on to it one arrives at the *svarupa* of oneself. Bhagavan emphasises that attention on *aham vrtti* leads to *aham sphurti* (or *aham sphurana*) which alone bestows *aham bodha* (or *aparoksha jnana*, Self-Knowledge.)<sup>2</sup>

10. Do not ever take up any work with the egoistic feeling that "this duty has to be performed only by me"; there is nothing in this world that happens by your will power nor are you a truly existent entity (in terms of the ego which has only a phantom existence). Understand this fact right at the outset and weed out the egoistic doership attitude in your daily life. Then you will see that all your duties get carried out by a higher power automatically (using your body-mind complex as a mere instrument of the divine), while your inner peace will always remain full to the brim.

### Epilogue

11. If we investigate carefully, we shall find that there is absolutely no object in this world which is not time-bound and hence imperishable and that the Self shining as 'I,'I' alone is the only *satya vastu* in the entire creation. Discriminating thus, renouncing mentally everything else as ephemeral non-Self, may we ever remain as the un-negatable *Atman* in unswerving abidance. The timeless and immortal Ramana Sadguru has truly ordained this Self-abidance alone as the paramount duty for all of us! ▲

<sup>2</sup> The famous *Pancha Dashi* text deals with this "leading error" concept (*shamvadi bhrama*) in great detail with examples in Chapter 9.

## BOOK REVIEWS



YOU ARE THEREFORE I AM. A Declaration of Dependence by Satish Kumar. Pub: The Viveka Foundation, Delhi. 2002. pp.180, Rs 200/-. india@vivekafoundation.com

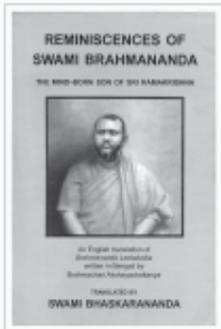
Satish Kumar is an unusual man. He was born into a Jain family in Rajasthan. His father died when he was young and his mother brought him up under great difficulties. She inspired and taught him through her sheer dignity and grace under pressure. She loved the land and showed him how the earth and the elements can teach. At 14 years old he disappointed her by becoming a monk in a Jain order. After reconciling herself to the loss, he then some years later did something unheard of and renounced the ascetic life. He set out on a lonely journey of self-discovery and entered into a dialogue with such luminaries as Vinoba Bhave and J. Krishnamurti. He travelled the world and met Bertrand Russell, Martin Luther King, and finally E.F. Schumacher who made an indelible impression and convinced him to remain in Europe to further the Gandhian message. He became an ecology activist and educator and lives in England. He does not shy from social and political issues. He is fully engaged in the world and is married with a grown-up daughter.

Why I went into these details is to show that we have here a new man who committed himself to the spiritual life at a very early age under the guidance of his wise and devout mother. Though he began in a conventional religious way he soon left the trodden path and fearlessly opened up a new way to engage with the world and oneself. It required great faith and integrity to face the inevitable back-lash from within his own Jain community. There is a depth to his writing which indicates great reserves of strength and a profound dedication to what he believes is true.

The first section concentrates on his childhood, particularly his mother and his first teacher, Tulsi, a judicious monk in a Jain monastic

order. There is a charm in the naïve wisdom he imbibes at his mother's feet and a reader can easily empathise with him and his loving mother. We follow the story fascinated by the gritty reality of it for such a story is rarely told, especially by one who is now so well educated and urbane. The second tells of his meetings with various wise men and while interesting it really tells us more about Satish because it is not so much a faithful record of the conversations as a reconstruction. One hears his 'voice' even as the other speaks. It is a kind voice, an enquiring restless voice. The third section tells of his return to India after years of travel and is interesting because it shows how his view point has shifted towards India and what his purpose is in life.

The fourth part gives us the summation of his philosophy which evolved gradually over the years of his sojourn in and away from beloved India. The title of the book is explained in reference to Descartes' famous statement: 'I think therefore I am'. Satish challenges this assertion saying it has divided soul and body, mind and matter as a result the world is regarded as a collection of objects to be 'analyzed, compartmentalised, classified and controlled'. He says, 'There is no separate, isolated, disconnected self', and calls for 'a radical shift in our thinking and act accordingly ...let us declare our utter dependence on the Earth, and on each other: You are, therefore I am.' — Peter Pichelmann



REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA. The Mind-Born Son of Sri Ramakrishna. An English translation of *Brahmananda Leelakatha* written in Bengali by Brahmachari Akshayachaitanya. Translated by Swami Bhaskarananda. 2006 Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. Rs.75., 265 pp. srkmath@vsnl.com

The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* gave us an insight into the spirit, mind and activities of the great saint.

The reminiscences in this book give us an insight into the activities of Ramakrishna's 'mind-born' son: his character, the way he taught and how he interacted with his fellow *guru-bhais*. It is refreshing to read memories that still have the rough edge of everyday life. Too often we read sanitized histories by writers who think that to be human is to err and desire as a result, that the saint be so perfect as to be beyond emulation. None of the saints lived in a perfect world; they all had to

face difficult and testing times. The fates of the young followers of Ramakrishna were no different. After the *mahasamadhi* of their master they had to dig deep within themselves. They faced adversity, poverty, the short-comings of temperament, and uncertainty as to what they should do with their lives. Their deep faith, humour and whole-hearted commitment, bolstered by the grace of their guru saw them through — but it was never easy and we see in these pages how Brahmananda showed the way forward by the way he conducted himself, taught, laughed and handled smoothly the most delicate of situations in sometimes quite unconventional ways.

Most of the stories are too long for inclusion in this book review but here is a taste: 'One morning some monks were in the Belur Math kitchen busy peeling potatoes. Swami Brahmananda told them: "Each of you peel a potato and bring all of them to me. By checking them I'll be able to tell who among you can really meditate." Accordingly, they peeled the potatoes, put them on a platter, and brought them to him. Glancing at the potatoes, he picked one up and said, "The one who has peeled this potato alone can truly meditate." The potato had been peeled by Sudhir Maharaj (Swami Shuddhananda).'

INSIGHTS INTO VEDANTA: TATTVABODHA by Swami Sunirmalananda 2005 Pub: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai 600 004. pp. 355, Rs 80.

*Insights into Vedanta: Tattvabodha* uses the traditional text ascribed to AdiSankara in a thoroughgoing enquiry into the tenets of Vedanta using stories and teachings from Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to illustrate the teachings. The intention of the original text was to train the minds of those who wanted to tread the path of sanyasa. Swami Sunirmalananda was an archarya at the Belur Math and it is obvious he is a skilled communicator and educator. He has deftly outlined the canon of Vedanta for modern, well-educated people. Though the book is slanted towards renunciation of the world I would recommend this book particularly to non-resident Indian families who want their children to learn the doctrine of their religion in an intelligent and clear presentation. It would be a wonderful learning process for all. Considerable thought has gone into this reader-friendly book and even for those who have some knowledge of Vedanta the comprehensive step by step commentary is illuminating. — T.V.Ramamurthy

LIFE: THE EXQUISITE ART OF MEANINGFULNESS by Robert Powell. AuthorHouse, Bloomington, Indiana and Milton Keynes, UK. 2006. www.authorhouse.com pp.146, price not stated.

Robert Powell writes for those who have already gained some insight into their own identity. He is learned and displays his considerable intelligence lightly. The advantage in reading Mr. Powell is apart from the obvious sincerity, an ease of deliberation and compact logic expression. There is a sanity and to use an old world expression, good manners, which makes for lively reading.

The chapters speak for themselves: Realization of the Emptiness and its Impact upon One's Life; Emptiness and Human Identity. Emptiness and Lifestyle; Body-Mind Aspects in Self-realization etc. One can see from the titles that the author has focused on the sense of emptiness which is at the core of our existence and the difference between our so-called ego and the Self whose realization is the purpose of our existence.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is the question of death and how, given the choice, we avoid contemplating it. Like one of his mentors, J. Krishnamurti, he characteristically invites us to explore with him an idea and in this case, that one day, we will inevitably cease to exist in this present body of ours. The beauty of Mr Powell's investigation is that he shows us without fuss or fear the certainty of this experience. He questions the idea of nothingness and our expectations of it. It is a conception like any other notion we harbour and as such, is subject to ignorance. We are reliant on our own limited frame of reference. What the author attempts is to gently with reason lead us to the observation that who we think we are is misguided and the Void, the Emptiness at the heart of our condition is liberation and not a dragon to be feared and repelled.

— Amit Ray



BHAGWATAMRIT. The Elixir Of The Bhagwat. Discourses by Swami Akhandananda Saraswati. Translated from Hindi. 2005 Published by Satsahitya Prakashan Trust, 'Vipul' 28/16 B.G. Kher Marg, Malabar Hill, Mumbai 110006. 333pp, Rs110.

Srimad Bhagwata is the magnum opus on bhakti, accepted as authoritative by all schools of Vaishnavism

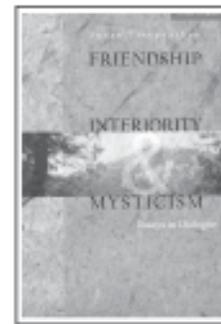
and held in high esteem because of the harmony it effects between bhakti and jnana. This ancient devotional epic consists of 18,000 verses in Sanskrit and was written by sage Vyasa author of the Mahabharata. The main question raised in this scripture is *Dharma kam saranam gathab?* Where can we find righteousness today? Who protects it? The answer is that God Himself is the instigator, protector and reward of Dharma.

Swami Akhandananda's discourses on Bhagwat Purana in Hindi stirred the devotional attitude of the audience and drew attention so much so over time there came to be a great demand for an English translation of these talks. This task was successfully carried out by Srimathi Poornima Toolsidass who presented the English version skilfully and competently. Her translation is lucid and captivating.

The theme, devotion to the Supreme Being Vishnu, is expounded through stirring stories such as i) How Ajamila, the learned Brahmin who became a debauched libertine was saved from the clutches of Yama, the god of death; ii) Prince Prhlad who in defiance of his father king Hiranya Kasipu retained devotion to Vishnu; iii) Sage Dadhichi's sacrificial offer of his bones to help Indra kill the demon god Vruthrasura. All these serve to highlight the significance of the puranic classic.

This English version is profusely cited with Sanskrit quotations transliterated with precise corresponding commentary. In the glossary (38 pages!) relevant English meanings are given for Sanskrit words which would enable the reader to be familiar with Hindi mythological terms. I would recommend this devotional work to spiritual aspirants, as well as scholars.

— V. Radhakrishnan



FRIENDSHIP, INTERIORITY AND MYSTICISM: ESSAYS IN DIALOGUE by Susan Visvanathan. Published by Orient Longman Private Limited, 2007, 1/24 Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi.110002. 253pp, Rs595. delgeneral@orientlongman.com

In *Friendship, Interiority and Mysticism*, the author looks at dialogue as a way of dealing with difference and making meaning through the lives and writings of Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, Simone Weil and Dom Henri le Saux (Abishektananda) the French Benedictine monk who came to India in

1948. The chapters on Gandhiji, Principal Rudra and C. F. Andrews explore an interreligious friendship at the heart of the freedom movement and look at dialogue not only in its political and religious dimensions but very practically through correspondence and conversations between close friends in pivotal roles in Indian history. The author sheds new light on the India Freedom Movement during the 1920s and the part played by a Christian mission college (St. Stephens in Delhi) headed by S. K. Rudra.

The book as a whole “poses dialogue as a hopeful alternative to violent civilisational clashes” and empathically orients the reader to the relevant historical and cultural contexts of the actors in scenes from recent Indian and European history (as well as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of ideas). While the reader might yearn for a more adequate articulation of the author’s intentions with respect to blending such a vast range of seemingly disparate topics and themes in a single volume, one can equally appreciate the book’s variety and its dialogical tack: subtitled “Essays in Dialogue”, this collection celebrates a polyphony of voices where voices need not necessarily echo or even cohere with one another but only be heard. The articles in *Friendship, Interiority and Mysticism* are well-considered, finely worded, thoughtful and engaging.

Dr. Visvanathan is Professor of Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, where she teaches Gender Studies, Historical Method in Sociology and Culture Studies.  
—M.S. Balasubramanian

## BOOKS RECEIVED

HANUMAN, THE MOST SAGACIOUS. K.N. Subramaniam, Jagadamba Trust, Chennai. 2003. Rs125.

SRI BHAJA GOVINDAM by K.N. Subramanian. Sura Books, Chennai. 2005. 1620 ‘I’ Block, 16th Main Road, Anna Nagar, Chennai 600040. 69pp.,Rs50.

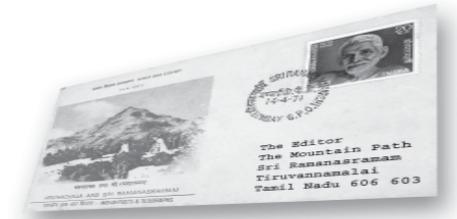
THE LIGHT THAT AWAKENS. A Guidebook to Higher Consciousness by Swami Amar Jyoti. Truth Consciousness/Sacred Mountain Ashram, Boulder, Colorado USA. 2007. 146pp, US\$12.95. truthconsciousness.org

COUNSELLING What, Why and How by Meera Ravi. Viva Books, New Delhi. 2007. 165pp., Rs100. vivadelhi@vivagroupindia.net

THE EYE OF THE I. From Which Nothing is Hidden by David R. Hawkins, M.D. 2001 Pub: Veritas, Sedona, USA. 346pp., \$16.95.

TALES FROM THE RAM CHARIT MANAS by Rana Bahadur Singh. Rupa & Co., Delhi, 2001. pp.221, Rs95. ▲

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



### Destruction of the Ego and Transformation

I write this to heartily commend a number of excellent articles in the April issue of MP. However in the critique on Neo-Advaita by Swartz, there are a couple of blemishes marring an otherwise excellent piece. He writes: ‘One of the most common Neo-Advaitic misconceptions is the idea that the ego must be surrendered or destroyed for enlightenment to happen’! One wonders if Bhagavan Ramana himself is thus labelled as a Neo-Advaitin? For Bhagavan consistently denied the survival of ego upon realization and never conceded even a vestige of the ‘I am the body alone’ idea to remain in the consciousness of a *jnani*. The functional personality of the *jnani* in the transactional realm is never to be confused with the *dehatma buddhi*, the hallmark of *mula avidya*. Swartz further says that based on *his understanding and experience* ‘realization of one’s self as non-dual awareness does not destroy the ego’ etc. If this is to be valid, then such ‘enlightenment’ does not destroy ignorance at all! From the viewpoint of the onlookers, the *jnani* appears to function with individuality and so the *shastras* use the word *badhita ahankara* (falsified ego) which cannot bind the sage similar to a burnt rope, in order to reconcile the seeming paradox, for the sake of the unenlightened. Bhagavan always emphasised that this is purely a concession made for the onlookers in order to demystify the state of enlightenment as an unnatural existence and that for the *jnani* himself no such confusion exists and hence does not need such allowances!

Secondly, Swartz also claims that ‘no experience (including an experience of non-duality) can change one’s thinking patterns’. This again goes contrary to the sayings of all sages who have said *nirvikalpa*

## MOUNTAIN PATH

*samadhi* is an invaluable leap for gaining *aparoksha jnana* (direct, immediate knowledge). History is replete with instances where *samadhi* experiences have irrevocably changed thinking patterns and transformed lives. Bhagavan's life itself is in incontrovertible proof in this regard.

— K. Swaminathan, Chennai

**Modern Advaita: Its Lures and Snares**

This recent article interested me very much and I read it again and again. When I began to read and understand Advaita on my own, I came across many difficulties and I have run after many 'messiahs' and 'Advaitic Scholars', and to my dismay, neither my doubts were cleared nor I had a clear vision in front of me. One of Bhagavan's devotees took me to Ramanasramam and by Bhagavan's Grace many issues were clarified!

The author is very bold to warn the serious minded students of Advaita about the 'lures and snares'. Advaita is not just an 'intellectual jugglery'. It is easy to talk about Advaita and the characteristics of terms like 'vairagya'. I myself have felt that we end up in confusion, when we listen to most of 'modern gurus'. Philosophy, as it is understood in the West is certainly an 'intellectual exercise' as opposed to the Eastern view that it is a way of life with very definite ultimate purpose.

I congratulate you for having mustered courage to publish this article as I could recollect, this is the first time that this kind of article is appearing in the Mountain Path.

— M. V. Satyanarayana, IIT Chennai

Why not a story titled "Traditional Advaita: Its Lure and Snares"? It is precisely because rigidity and dogmatism are so hard to self-diagnose that many traditional teachers—and students—feel deeply sceptical of Advaita cut loose from authority. No doubt there are a number of deluded teachers casually tossing Advaita terminology around and capitalizing on some flash-in-the-pan mystical experiences. Should they be considered representative of "modern Advaita"? Rather, they are the same old misguided "believers" that crop up in every age and faith, and should not be confused with those who know the nature of time because they are living that truth, not just repeating it from scripture.

— Girija Nair, Tiruvannamalai and Cochin





### Salem Ramana Maiyam

Following the Ramana Ratha Yatra 2004, numerous Ramana centres have sprung up around Tamil Nadu, among them Salem Ramana Maiyam. For three years now, the Salem Centre has been observing Jayanti and Aradhana as well as conducting daily meditation and chanting. Year after year the number of devotees attending the programmes is growing and available space is now inadequate. Hence, in accordance with the wishes of devotees at the Maiyam, members have decided to expand the facility and construct a Ramana mandiram at Salem Ponnammappet. To this end, with the blessings of Sri Ramanasramam, the President of the Salem Ramana Maiyam has purchased land and donated it to the Maiyam. Plans have been drafted for erecting a ground floor temple with a meditation hall on the first floor. The bhoomi puja was performed on Punarvasu Day, 14 July, 2007, with representatives of various Ramana centres, including Mr. T. R. Kannan of Arupukootai (Tiruchuli). Work is in progress.



### Oddanchatram Ramana Kendra

Ramana Kendra, *Atma Jnana Vichara Sabhai*, was inaugurated 2 May, 2007 in the district of Dindigul in Oddanchatram. Devotees from Madurai, Palani and Pollachi Ramana Kendras were in attendance. Punarvasu celebrations, daily chanting of *Aksharamanamalai* and Sunday satsangs are now being regularly conducted. The address is 146 G/17.3, Naaganam Patti Rd., Old Oddanchatram 624 619.

### Siva Prakashamam Pillai Memorial Inuaguration

With construction to be completed in October, Kumbhabishekam of the new Siva Prakashamam Pillai Memorial is set for 1st November at Idayan Palchori village, 8 km from Chidambaramon bus route 14 and 34 of Chidambaram Sethiyathoppa via Kilnatham-Kannagudi.

### Guru Poornima

Guru Poornima celebrates reverence to gurus and renunciates who restrict their movements and pilgrimages during the four months of the monsoon season (called *Chatramasya*). For honouring sannyasis at the Ashram, devotees paid their respects to Swami Ramanananda and Swami Shantananda in a ceremony in the New Hall, 29 July.

### Kunjuswami Samadhi Day

Tuesday, 7 August brought the annual remembrance of Sri Kunjuswami's Samadhi (in 1992). Devotees from as far as Kerala, birth place of this beloved devotee, gathered for puja at his shrine at the rear of the Ashram. Chanting of *Aksharamanamalai* and the Malayalam works of Bhagvan began around 8 am with final arati at 11 am.

### 111th Anniversary of Sri Bhagavan's Advent to Arunachala

The 1st of September, 1896 was the historical day young Venkataraman made his epic journey. Celebrations of this event in 2007 were held on Saturday, 1st September, with the traditional morning Mahanyasa puja, special abhishekam at the big temple, and the Ramana Mandiram group (Madurai) reenacting Bhagavan's journey from Madurai to Arunachala.

### Muruganar Samadhi Day

Chanting his *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, devotees celebrated Sri Muruganar's Samadhi day 11 September, New Moon day of Avani.



### Sri Adi Kamakshi Temple Kumbhabishekam

The Puranas are an aid to realise the divinity within us. Parvati's tapas is explained in the *Arunachala Purana* and the *Skanda Purana*. Parvati came to earth on the pretext of expiating her sins and gaining the hand of her beloved Lord Siva. As Annapurana at Varanasi she performed charity; at Kanchipuram she did tapas, and, as mother Kamakshi at Arunachala, while the seven divine virgins, eight bhairavas, Ganesh and Karthikeyan stood guard around her, she completed her tapas and attained union with Lord Siva.

Adjacent to the Sri Durga Amman temple on the eastern slopes of Arunachala, Sri Adi Kamakshi temple commemorates these events. Kamakshi's attainment is proof that if we follow her and remain one-pointed in our devotion, we are assured union with Arunachala Siva. "Making her hair a matted lock, wearing tree barks as cloth in place of silk and vibhuti, and rudrakshas as garlands, fixing the mind on the Lord day and night, she did the rare penance." V. 330.

Under the auspices of Sri Ramanasramam, over the past two years, major renovation of this ancient shrine was carried out by an Ashram devotee, the civil contractor Sri Anjaneylu, with devotees' financial support. Kumbhabishekam is to take place 12-13 September.