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## Ramana Ashtottaram

50. ओं दक्षिणाभिमुखाय नमः

Om dakṣiṇābhimukhāya namaḥ

Prostration to the one who faces south.

Dakshinamurti is the name of Lord Siva as the guru of gurus who taught in Silence.

The reason Dakshinamurti faces south is the notion that Yama, the lord of Death who faces north, cannot stand, that is, exist, in the presence of that supreme jnana which has no beginning or end. Dakshina here means south; murti, form. The implication is that Dakshinamurti is immortal, free of all actions and limitations.

Dakshina can also mean the right side, and hence skilful, active, powerful. The spiritual heart which is on the right side is the home of God, Guru and Self. As the Master faces south and the disciple faces north, the two hearts meet, the flow of Grace is quickened and time and space dissolve in non-dual bliss.

51. ओं स्वराजे नमः

Om svarāje namaḥ

Prostration to the autonomous, self-luminous one.

He is the sole Being, hence emperor of the realm of Being. *Swaraj* is self-reliance, self-awareness, self-control, the inner or organic self-rule the Vedas proclaim as the human ideal and which Gandhiji pleads for in his '*Hind Swaraj*'. It is not mere freedom from control by others or freedom to control others. It is freedom from the sense of duality. ▲

## EDITORIAL

# Mountaineers

Mountains hold a special attraction. They can rise up dramatically, seize our attention and overawe us by their power to the point where they freeze the activity of the mind by their implacable, irresistible presence. They make us realise how puny our man-made conceptions are. For those who have travelled in the Himalayas the range of peaks can seem endless and overwhelming, particularly when one traverses a narrow road in a vulnerable vehicle between a solid mountain and a sheer drop. Luckily mountains are slow and forgiving but they do occasionally murmur, much to our consternation and horror if we happen to be in the way of their displeasure. Mountains are not to be taken lightly.

Arunachala is considered a mountain though by the standards of the Himalayas at little less than one thousand metres, it is a negligible hill. But it is a mountain compared to the flat plains stretching away from it and it is a mountain in the hearts and minds of those who revere this holy site. Like Krishna's Govardhana hill at Vrindavan which

now is a small pile of rocks but is nevertheless huge in the hearts and imaginations of Krishna bhaktas, Arunachala assumes a towering presence in the hearts of Siva bhaktas and the devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

It is interesting to observe the differing responses of people who are drawn to Arunachala when they first arrive at its feet. Most Indian devotees want to circumambulate it in the time honoured ritual of *giri-pradakshina*. Given the opportunity some climb a little way up to Skandashram and some aspire to reach the summit. There are some very traditional Siva bhaktas who will not even set foot on the hill as they believe literally the legend that Arunachala is Siva incarnate. Among the Westerners who arrive at Arunachala for the first time there is for many the burning wish to climb to the summit as soon as possible, and some are so impatient they climb straight to the top directly from Sri Ramanasramam, encountering to their dismay, the deceptively steep slope and the obstructive crags. They generally return successful in their desire, but with their clothes dirty and perhaps torn and ambition chastened.

In recent years a sadhu has encamped near the peak and each day people trek up either to feed him or gain a blessing. This is all very well but Arunachala is not meant for permanent human habitation. There are still great mountains such as Kangchenjunga in the Himalayas which are forbidden to mountaineers because the summit is sacred as a goddess. So also Arunachala is sacred and we can pay our respects whilst standing with our heads in the sky and the world at our feet but we should perhaps not make a habit of it. If we do, it is with a respectful intention and not out of any lust for conquest.

During his days at Virupaksha Cave and Skandasramam Bhagavan would frequently walk about the slopes of Arunachala. He said once that he was familiar with every niche and outcrop of the hill. Like a loving son he trod gently among the rocks. It was not with any sense of invasion but rather one of awe and worship. He so identified with Arunachala that his feet were not so much vehicles of transportation as sensors holding on and feeling the sacredness of his father and mother. His destiny was to heed the call of Arunachala. His calling was to

reveal a new path of self-discovery but also to alert us and invite us to share in the bounty of this precious gift, Arunachala.

In the ancient traditions, which include the *sanatana dharma*, mankind saw itself as a partner with Nature. It was an attitude of co-existence and respect. One of the most ancient groups of people still existent, the Australian aboriginals, regarded themselves as custodians of the land of their birth. Their duty is to guard the landscape from desecration. They do this in part by remembrance of the legends of the 'dreamtime' when the land was originally created and by protecting sacred sites against the uninitiated. There is a delicate balance here between Nature and Man. The concept that the land is there to be exploited is unimaginable.

In modern spirituality we see a trend of conquest and exploitation. Whether it is good or deleterious is not the point — it is simply an observation. People accumulate spiritual experiences, gurus, temples and books in an ultimately unfulfilling quest to fill an aching hole in their sense of well-being. This is called spiritual materialism.

Like the seasons there is a time for everything. The question for us is: how are we to act and be in accord with the rhythm of life?

It is generally recognised among professional mountaineers that Reinhold Messner is arguably the greatest mountaineer ever. His three day, solo ascent and descent of the formidable north face of Mount Everest in 1980 without the aid of sherpas, crevasse ladders or supplemental oxygen, is the single most astonishing recorded achievement by a mountaineer. If ever there was a primordial ordeal of man against the Earth, arguably this is it. It has been said that, "After Messner, the mystery of possibility was gone; there remained only the mystery of whether you could do it."

The singularity of Reinhold Messner is based on a variant of selfishness — a single-mindedness that became transcendent. His challenge with the world's highest mountains has been about measuring his own skill, endurance and will power against the implacable. He wrote, "I am Sisyphus and the stone which I push up the mountain is my own psyche." This is a profound statement. What Messner means is that the battle is not with the mountain but rather with his own mind.

He has been described as arrogant and abrasive, and yet there is courage and audacity in his lone-wolf attitude; he does not ask for assistance nor answer to anyone. He obeys a higher calling. His achievements inspire all dreamers who seek to test their mettle against the seemingly unattainable.

He has been quoted as saying something which is in tune with *atma-vichara*: “There are moments in difficult situations far away, that there is no more doubt. There the questions are gone. And I think these are the important moments. If the question is gone, I have not to answer. Myself living — I am the answer.”<sup>1</sup>

His remark, while verging on the spiritual, nonetheless is the comment of someone who feeds off the physical challenge of conquest. Mountaineers who scale the heights are on a quest and though they may be successful they leave the peak wistfully. They are rooted in the identification of their sense of well-being with an external object. In attitude and action, one could not ask for a greater contrast with Bhagavan and his gentle love of Arunachala. While Messner may have seen mountains as dangerous objects against which to pit his skills, Bhagavan saw Arunachala not as an inert mass but as a compassionate being, both conscious and receptive. For him, Arunachala was not a challenge but a divine mystery which cannot be conquered but only welcomed. In many of his devotional poems he speaks of the heart’s longing for union with this sacred presence. He saw Arunachala as a living reality, a being of unsurpassed majesty. Each day he walked its slopes in the spirit of reverence and never tired of its spartan, unalleviated rockiness. For Arunachala is neither reasonable nor unreasonable, it is just there, conspicuous by its serenity.

Bhagavan’s graceful existence contrasts sharply with our contemporary urgency. We have never been so safe as today with advanced medical care and in most countries, stable political governance. But with safety, comes the ennui of routine. Danger makes us feel intensely alive. When we climb knowing that one mistake can mean death or grievous injury, we become wonderfully alert. But all too

<sup>1</sup> *National Geographic*, November 2006, p.66.

often we live comparatively drab lives and the movies we watch for the vicarious pleasure of identification with the hero or heroine, the hobbies that occupy us with their hazards and thrills, the objects we buy or the risks at the gambling table are not about money or acquisition but about that momentary, special feeling of aliveness.

Experienced mountaineers revere the mountains they climb; the perils they face fuel the elation they feel at the summit. True mountaineering is a means of exultation, not of conquest. In the words of another great hero of Mount Everest, George Leigh Mallory, mountaineering as an activity has no use in that it offers not the slightest prospect of gain. Yes, we may learn a little about behaviour but climbing a summit brings no reward of tangible gold. For Mallory the struggle was the response in man to a challenge and the quest to climb ever-upward is a joy. “What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. And joy is, after all, the end of life. We do not live to eat and make money. We eat and make money to be able to enjoy life. That is what life means and what life is for.”

Human limitation being what it is, there is regret when inevitably we come down to earth and forfeit those intense emotions. However, if we can climb our spiritual mountain — walking along Bhagavan’s mountain path — we can retain that special feeling of joyous freedom and cease to be slaves. This subtle mountain is always with us.

The rishis in the beautiful language of the Vedas worshipped in song the dawn sun whose first red rays appeared on the razor-edged horizon. That splinter of red light is Aruna the goddess who offers the initial glimmer of revelation. If you have ever stood on Arunachala at first light, you will see that with its arrival comes a momentary unearthly calm, a promise of salvation after the dark night.

As morning light-gatherers we can collect those splinters of red rays if we stand still, *achala*, rooted in the firm conviction that beneath our feet and above our eyes that one same light pervades all we experience. We lift our eyes in praise and thanksgiving for when the morning light ascends above the rim of perception it clears away the blind night. That is why we climb the mountains of our mind. ▲



# No Inner, No Outer

## Transcending Mind through the Power of Enquiry

ASHRAM DEVOTEE

One day at the Ashram noontime lunch we overheard a lady referring to Bhagavan saying, “In *Forty Verses*, Ramana tells us we should abide in the formless, but how do we actually go about doing that?”<sup>1</sup> Two of us inadvertently listening-in chuckled to ourselves and pondered the imponderability of this statement. What was Bhagavan talking about? And what could any of us say to this lady? Neither we nor she had any idea what *abiding in the formless* would look like in practical terms.

Bhagavan made statements like these with such casual certitude that one instinctively senses the truth in them. And yet, how extraordinary

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<sup>1</sup> This devotee was likely paraphrasing verse 8 of *Ulladu Narpadu*: “Under whatever name or form we worship It, It leads us on to knowledge of the nameless, formless Absolute. Yet, to see one’s true Self in the [formless] Absolute, to subside into It and be one with It, this is the true knowledge of the truth.”

they are. *To abide in the formless* — what can that mean? How can one even begin to understand, much less implement, such a notion?

I took myself to task, perceiving there was something important here. What could *dwelling in formlessness* ever be? For that matter, *what is formlessness*? I bemoaned my ignorance and spoke to myself in this vein: “All these years at Bhagavan’s feet and I have yet to understand even basic, oft-repeated pronouncements, not to mention putting them into practice — how disheartening.”

In the days that followed, I took up this phrase in the Old Hall and searched for clues in *Talks*, *Who Am I?*, *Forty Verses* and other of Bhagavan’s works. Almost immediately my search yielded fruit in the following line from *Self-Enquiry*: “[T]he distinction between inner and outer is only with reference to the body; in truth, there is neither inner nor outer.”<sup>2</sup>

This statement struck me forcibly. What could it mean? What would it take to see directly the truth of it? If there is neither inner nor outer, then where is this text before me appearing? If there is neither inside nor outside, then *where* am I? And *where* is this world that appears before my eyes?

No doubt the chief obstacle to understanding Bhagavan’s teaching is this root illusion of an ‘I’ *in here* and a world *out there*. If this be so, then by what insight can one ever hope to see through it? If the incomprehensibility of the phrase *abiding in the formless* is based on a core misconception we have about ourselves — as belonging to a body — then by what lever can one wrest oneself free of such notions? If the mind is incurably attached to form — ‘external’ forms that appear as sky, trees, buildings, other people, and one’s own body, and ‘internal’ forms such as thoughts, concepts, images, ideas, emotions, and opinions — then by what power could one ever hope to go beyond such attachments once for all?

Of course Bhagavan gives us a clear and unequivocal answer — by *the power of enquiry*<sup>3</sup>. In fact, all attachment and delusion, he tells us, can be brought to an end by the sharp, penetrating wedge of vichara. He puts it this way: “To enquire ‘Who am I?’ is the only remedy for all the ills of the world.” By virtue of its capacity to “sift Reality from

unreality” ..., “the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ is the principal means [for] the removal of all misery and the attainment of the supreme bliss”. And “so long as ...duality lasts, enquiry must be continued.”<sup>4</sup>

But how is one to put enquiry into practice? How is one to make it come alive on a day to day basis? How does one avoid making it just another technique? These are the questions that will occupy us presently.

The following is not definitive but merely an introduction for those who, like the author, want to learn to practise self-enquiry. In the absence of Bhagavan’s physical teaching presence, we who are struggling to get a handle on enquiry find ourselves searching for clues as to how to proceed. What follows is a look at Bhagavan’s works and other enquiry traditions to see what advice they offer us in taking up the practice of vichara.

### The First Steps

After Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana, devotees found themselves without the benefit of Bhagavan’s physical presence and some may have imagined that making genuine use of vichara would no longer be possible. Compelled to seek Bhagavan’s intervention through his silent presence in the context of devotion, those of us practising vichara will want to regularly pray for Bhagavan’s grace. This is a worthwhile first step.

The next step is, in an attitude of humility, to grant ourselves permission to attempt vichara. Acknowledging our lack of preparedness and taking sober inventory of our limited abilities, we respectfully concede the sheer, utterly impassable, perhaps even impossible, terrain enquiry poses us with. But in spite of the slender odds, we accept on faith that Sri Ramana would not have exhorted us to vichara if it were not possible for us to practise it. We recall his admonitions and trust that it was also as he was speaking to when he said: “Atma-vichara is the way.”<sup>5</sup>

So these first steps consist in acknowledging Bhagavan’s personal invitation to take up this most urgent of sadhanas. But his is not merely an offer: Bhagavan compels each one of us to it: “Until you realise that state of pure being, you should pursue enquiry.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Self-Enquiry: Vichara Sangraham of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, § 8.

<sup>3</sup> “In order to gain that happiness which is one’s nature... enquiry [in] the form [of] ‘Who am I?’ is the principal means.” (*Who am I?*, ‘Introduction’)

<sup>4</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §532, §298, *Self-Enquiry*, §12, and *Talks*, §454, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> *Talks*, §430.

<sup>6</sup> *Talks*, §596.

### The Importance of Questioning in Other Traditions

So now let us appreciate that, for Bhagavan, enquiry is not merely an asset in spiritual life, it is the primordial first spiritual discipline, the very basis for making headway in the work of becoming disciples. Bhagavan is not alone in emphasizing vichara's primacy among disciplines: since ancient times teachers in other traditions have drummed into their disciples the necessity of enquiry, compelling them to take it up with all vigour and intensity. In Tang dynasty China, for example, Ch'an masters advised monks to question with the urgency of discovering one's *head was on fire*; vichara<sup>7</sup>, they said, should be taken up with the gravity of heart that one might have if both one's parents had suddenly just died. In Japan, the great 12<sup>th</sup> century Zen master Dogen emphasized the urgency of enquiry by regularly reminding his monks of the harsh existential reality we all face: *the certainty of our death and the uncertainty of the time of our death*.<sup>8</sup>

These ancient voices anticipate Bhagavan's own words: "The essential point is...enquiry into the Self." "In order to give up the sense of doership, one must seek to find out who the doer is. Enquire within [and] the sense of doership will vanish. Vichara is the method."<sup>9</sup>

We will do well to reflect on Bhagavan's words and the precious opportunity his method affords us. We will want to be wary of taking vichara for granted, imagining that the option to practise it will be there indefinitely<sup>10</sup>. To wait for some imagined future moment when we are better prepared or to lose precious time in lesser spiritual endeavours is tragic and foolish. The fact is, Bhagavan says, "there are no [other] adequate means."<sup>11</sup> Never speaking arbitrarily, what Bhagavan says has power because what he says is true. If vichara is the only means, then

<sup>7</sup> In the Ch'an tradition, enquiry is not referred to as 'vichara' but variously as 'koan practice', 'working with the question', 'critical phrase', 'key phrase', 'turning word', etc.

<sup>8</sup> "Death is fast closing in. The body is like morning dew.... Although we are alive today, there is no assurance about tomorrow." (12th cent. Korean Son Master Chinul) See *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul*, trans. by Robert Buswell, p. 206.

<sup>9</sup> *Talks*, §596 and §429, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> "Human birth is as rare as a mustard seed falling onto the point of a needle." (*Chinul*, p. 206)

<sup>11</sup> *Who Am I?*, §12.

how can we reasonably put it off any longer? Let us take these words to heart and allow them to serve as our initiation into actual practice.

### Internal Readying

Now we will want to consider the following question: are we prepared to undergo the kind of changes that questioning will bring about in us?

It is a foregone conclusion that probing with 'Who am I?' and other phrase-questions will alter our lives. A vast psychic broom, vichara sweeps away the mental, psychological, and emotional dust that clogs and befouls us. While most of us long for such cleansing, dream of ridding ourselves of the mind's interminable, frenetic chatter, we will want to be conscious and intentional about unleashing vichara's diamond-sharp potency; we will want to acknowledge in advance the possibility of losing heart when the uncertainty and doubt that enquiry engenders upset long-cherished views and opinions.

In short, vichara presents us with a genuine possibility for change. So internal readying means committing ourselves to growth; it means taking responsibility for the occasional unease that recurring states of uncertainty and bewilderment arouse in us; it is summoning our courage in the face of vichara's awesome capacity to reshape us.

### Asking the Question

Having made the determination and set our minds to it, now we can approach actual questioning. But where do we begin?

At root, Bhagavan tells us, enquiry has no mechanics. It simply entails *asking the question*. Though uncomplicated, questioning is not easy. In the beginning we may have to rely on sheer will-power in virtue of the mind's brick-wall resistance and the frustration that comes with repeated failure. The key word here is perseverance; the mind thwarts us at every turn, continually finding ways to fortify its defences and deflect the quandaries generated by questioning. By its nature, the mind resists doubt; hence vichara's efficacy resides precisely in the uncertainty it activates. When the mind insists on concrete 'answers', continually reasserting itself with its insights and analyses, the requisite antidote, Bhagavan tells us, is simply to recognise their futility and resume questioning by asking, "To whom has this thought arisen?". As thoughts arise, even if

## MOUNTAIN PATH

insightful or convincingly worded, Bhagavan urges that they simply “be destroyed then and there in the very place of their origin through enquiry”. And the same applies to other activities: “So long as you think ‘I am walking,’ ‘I am writing,’ enquire who does it.”<sup>12</sup>

Why such rigour, one might ask? Because vichara’s virtue does not lie in generating solutions — inferring or deducing facts— but in *leaving the false behind*<sup>13</sup>. What is left behind? A Zen proverb says: *all we have to lose are our chains*, i.e., the mind’s labels, concepts and positions.

### Cultivating Vibrant Questioning

Now thus far we have discussed the necessity of vichara and some preliminary steps for practising it. But the next step is crucial because, once taken, all the headache that burdened starting practice vanishes and we find ourselves not only not at odds with questioning but drawn to it like a moth to a flame. This pivotal step hinges on one thing: making our questioning potent, vital and alive, making it intriguing and compelling.

At first, questioning may feel unnatural, out of place. It’s like landing up at a funeral of someone unknown to you: you don’t share the family’s grief. But hearing their loud wails, by and by, tinges of sadness well up within you and before you know it, you are fighting back tears as their grief becomes your own. Likewise, the perplexity of vichara is at first unknown to you, but as you follow the train of questioning, the mystery that underlies it begins to rise up on its own and capture your heart; what was at first mechanical becomes spontaneous and self-activating. Now you are questioning not because you want to deepen your sadhana or to learn to practise vichara but because you *want to know*. Crossing this threshold, tradition tells us, is essential to any viable enquiry practice.

So how can one make this critical step? One tip given by adepts is landing on a question that grips one’s interest, a question that one finds captivating. To do this, we might go on a search, consult the scriptures, peruse *Talks* or Bhagavan’s other works, and look for an ineffable word or phrase, whose meaning is unclear, that strikes us as

<sup>12</sup> Quotes in this paragraph from *Who Am I?*, §11, §15, and *Talks*, §596, respectively.

<sup>13</sup> “To leave behind the false is called *true*. (*The Korean Approach to Zen*, p. 40)

And *Talks*, §251: By enquiry, “this false identity must go and there remains the Self”.



Ireno Guerci

important, but baffles us, while simultaneously beckoning us to the seemingly impossible task of plunging its depths.

‘Who am I?’ is a time-honoured question, reliably stimulating perplexity in its user. ‘I’ is the ultimate mystery. Its secret power is owing in part to the fact that all our lives we have regularly used the word without having any real idea what it refers to. However, some who have made sincere attempts at ‘Who am I?’ feel stonewalled by their past ‘failures’. For such persons, jump-starting questioning may involve seeking fresh formulations.

A classical variant from the Korean and Japanese koan traditions is ‘What is It?’. Immediately, one can see that this question is simply ‘Who am I?’ in different words. ‘It’ is nothing other than the Self. But *what is* this Self? Paraphrasing Bhagavan, we could say that the Self is simply Pure Awareness.<sup>14</sup> But what is Pure Awareness? If we say “It is the vast formless field of subjectivity in which all things appear”, then we can ask: What is this field in which all things appear?

Here we have a beautiful entry into vichara. Now we simply meditate upon it in a thoroughgoing manner and, at every available opportunity, activate it and relish in its ineffability. We avoid despairing that ordinary ‘answers’ are not forthcoming; rather we simply inundate ourselves with vichara’s probing action and allow ourselves to be engulfed in uncertainty, making a truce for the first time with not-knowing.

### Vichara’s Double-Bind

Now let us go a little further, into what may look to some like the realm of the absurd. Indeed, vichara is a strange world.

After only a little probing in this vibrant way we come to see that our house is not in order: this ‘I’ we’ve been speaking of all our lives is not what we took it to be. When we look closely and honestly, we see that we have no idea who or what we are. An increasing desperation compels us to follow the questioning further, to seek with ever-renewed vigour that which eludes us. But here is the thing: the further we pursue it, the more ground we seem to forfeit; as enquiry chews up old assumptions, our quandary becomes more and more precipitous and we find ourselves straddling two worlds. This is what ancient Ch’an masters called *balancing atop a hundred-foot pole*<sup>15</sup>: one is neither able to go forward nor backward. The predicament is unsettling and engenders further uncertainty within us. While this is aimed-for in enquiry, at such moments we would be happy simply to forget the

<sup>14</sup> See *Who am I?* §2: “[T]hat Awareness which alone remains — that I am”. See also *Ulladu Narpadu Supplement*, v. 22 and v. 40.

<sup>15</sup> In ancient Chinese and Japanese texts, vichara is likened to a *mosquito boring into an iron bull* or *climbing a mile-high wall*. These and other similar phrases emphasizing vichara’s deadlock-effect on the mind are sprinkled throughout the literature.

whole thing and go back to doing whatever we were doing before we started. But that may not be possible. As former identifications begin to dissipate, efforts at filling the gap prove futile in the face of enquiry’s laser-like power. At a loss, we find ourselves bewildered by the not-knowingness that questioning faces us with. While this is true, something very unexpected happens now: an accompanying peacefulness emerges within us. As the mind begins to let go a little, old patterns begin to give way and the mind accustoms itself to a new way of working. Ordinary ways of knowing become refined and we get a growing sense that knowledge does not consist in *content* but is rather rooted in *function*; it is not static or formulaic but dynamic and organic; it is not a thing but a process.<sup>16</sup> As questioning continues to loosen the reifying tendencies of the mind, making it supple, pliant and receptive, the vast potential of the mind’s authentic functioning — a formless awareness beyond fixed notions and labels — is made available to us.

Once in vicharaland, we become saturated with questioning: ‘What is the inside and outside of clear empty space?’ ‘What is the sound of a single hand?’ ‘Where do seeing and hearing come from?’

Each of these classic queries<sup>17</sup> points to It. Even a simple phrase-question like ‘What is the Self?’ abounds with the double-bind: the Self cannot be imaged, it is not a *thing*, has no form, shape or colour. If we say it is vast formlessness, then the question follows: ‘What is this formlessness?’ Automatically the mind is thrown into doubt, turned back on itself. In its effort to formulate a picture, it becomes further confused and frustrated. And so much the better: this is vichara’s centrifugal, transformative action at work within us.

<sup>16</sup> By putting everything up for grabs, vichara exposes the inherent limitations of human knowledge and preserves us from the trap of fundamentalism. Disordered ontologies that absolutise metaphysical presuppositions about the nature of reality, e.g., a subjective knower *within a body* observing an objective *real* world *out there* — ultimately preclude spiritual (and intellectual) growth. Great sages such as Bhagavan Ramana recognize the ultimate *unreality* and *unknowability* of the world and give primacy to knowledge as process. Self-enquiry leads to living Truth by grounding knowledge in direct experience and loosening our dependence on static, formulaic ‘truths’.

<sup>17</sup> From Masters Keizan Jokin (13th century Japan), Hakuin Zenji (17th century Japan) and Master Yuan Wu (12th century China), respectively.

### Inner, Outer, Formlessness and Form

Thus far we have described the mechanism of vichara. But how does all this relate to our starting point, *formlessness and abiding in it*? What can formlessness teach us about enquiry?

Actually, the direction is clear: Enquiry is the road to formlessness. In fact, enquiry *is itself* formlessness, the counter-force that dissolves all forms in the mind. But if it dissolves all forms in the mind, then all forms are dissolved because in reality, Bhagavan tells us, forms arise nowhere else.

And so, we might ask, is there really such a thing as form? Could it be that, while having the appearance of form, at root, all forms are actually formless? Could this be what Bhagavan meant when he referred to the *dreamlike* nature of the world?

If “all that appear outside are in reality inside”<sup>18</sup>, then all forms are mental and have no enduring substance. This seems clear enough but now we are confronted with the following vichara conundrum: If “all that appear[s] outside [is] in reality inside”, then where and what is this thing we call ‘inside’? If within and without have no boundary separating them, then — right now — where is this written page appearing? If all that appears outside is actually inside, then ‘outsideness’ must also be *inside*; if this be so, then how can we even talk about an ‘inside’?<sup>19</sup> Fundamentally there can only be *This*. But what is *This*?<sup>20</sup> And to *whom* does It appear?

<sup>18</sup> *Self-Enquiry*, §8.

<sup>19</sup> As linguists and philosophers of language (Labov, Whorf, Saussure and Wittgenstein, among others) have pointed to language as the basis of (human) reality, polarities such as ‘inside and outside’, ‘self and other’, may be anchored in semantics and the root structures of grammar. In classical Greek, for example, the word for ‘inside’ or ‘within’ also signifies ‘in between’. To such a speaker, the inner/outer dichotomy might not be so fixed. Among the Amazonian languages of Brazil, such as Shoklang, the distinction between ‘self and other’ is not appreciable owing to the simple fact that agency is not emphasized. In what linguists call *ergative-absolutive* grammatics, action is expressed without reference to an actor: “There was eating”, “there was sleeping”, etc. Though subjective personal pronouns exist in Shoklang, regular usage is only made of the first person plural, *we*. (*University of Texas, Austin, Dept. of Anthropology*)

<sup>20</sup> “All mountains and rivers, grasses, trees and forest groves, all phenomena in creation, and all [things], tainted and pure, appear from within It.” (Master Heze from *Chinul*, p. 127) See *Who Am I?*, §16: “The world, the individual soul and God are appearances in It”.



### Bhagavan's Pure Light of Awareness

Now questioning in this way starts to sound like enquiry. But still we are at the level of theory. What would spontaneous questioning on a more personal level look like? What might deeply engaged questioning be like?

Suppose you are sitting at the Sri Chakra puja in the Ashram just before final arati. Suppose you are sitting opposite the icon of Dakshinamurthi in the Mother's Shrine, say, at the garland-making station. Echoing in the distance you can hear the ceremony's concluding litany of prayers: *ya devi sarva bhutesu santirupena samsthita namastasyai, namastasyai, namastasyai, namo namah...*<sup>21</sup>. You might look up and see

<sup>21</sup> “Salutations again and again to the Devi who abides in all beings in the form of peace.” *Devi Mahatmyam* (Pancamo'dhyayah 47-49), trans. Swami Jagadiswarananda.

Dakshinamurthi gazing down at you only a few metres away. You might stretch out your hand and lightly press the iron grill in front of you, noticing how solid it feels, noticing how solid your own hand feels, and how tangible your surroundings are. You might ask yourself: Where are these impressions appearing? Where is this feeling of solidity taking place? Where are the sensations of the grill and the hand arising?

In the spirit of enquiry, you might probe more closely. After a time, you might find that your questioning begins to be in earnest; doubt arises within you and willy-nilly a sense of not-knowing the nature or source of what you are experiencing grips you. In time, you are no longer self-conscious about your probing; you are just probing. As your investigation intensifies, you might be startled by the feeling that all the sensations — the multiple sights and sounds around you — are actually only impressions on the ‘screen’ of your own mind. You might be further caught off guard when, spontaneously enquiring into the nature of this ‘screen’, you have the bizarre suspicion that the ‘screen’ and the ‘viewer’ are not two separate things. What if the viewer, you ask, were not a person or thing but the *container* of things, giving them their form? What if ‘things’ were the necessary backdrop against which It comes to know Itself, the ‘two’ but a single Reality?<sup>22</sup>

As you notice *seer* and *seen* meld into *just seeing*,<sup>23</sup> you might wonder what *just seeing* is and where It takes place. Absorbed in doubt, you study more closely. The question is not obvious anymore but rather, implicit, diffuse and silent, and you find yourself astonished, though at ease. Periodic questions and key phrases arise, punctuating and refreshing your wordless wonderment.<sup>24</sup> Bhagavan’s apt words echo in your mind: “Before knowing the far-off God, let me know the more immediate and intimate ‘I’”<sup>25</sup>; you then recognise that all your questions till now have at root been one question — and a mere preparation for — the very same question he had urged you to all along.

<sup>22</sup> “Even walls, tiles and pebbles expound the true teaching.” (*Ch’an proverb*)

<sup>23</sup> “The whole universe is but a pointer.” (*Famous saying of Chinese Master Hsuan-tse*)

<sup>24</sup> “When there is proper and persistent enquiry, the ‘I’-thought also ceases and there is the wordless illumination of the form ‘I’-‘I’ which is pure consciousness.” *SE*, p. iv.

<sup>25</sup> *Talks*, §154.

## True Vichara

‘Who am I?’, you discover, is the preeminent question, the starting point and ending point. It is abiding in the formless by virtue of not allowing the mind a place to abide. It is the shining ground of awareness whose light penetrates and illumines all dualities and discriminations. If you ask by what route you can free yourself of the mind’s turmoil, Bhagavan is emphatic: “Vichara is the ultimate route.” (*Talks*, §251)

True vichara does not consist in asking an endless variety of questions but in asking only *one* question, even a *one-word* question, like ‘what?’ or ‘who?’; even a *no-word* question: It is the silent perplexity that undergirds questioning that is essential. This is true vichara. Ideally you would keep it, whatever the formulation, for long months, or even years.

## Conclusion

Taking the path of vichara does not mean waiting until we have renounced: eliminating thoughts in the mind is the greatest renunciation. It does not mean waiting until our minds are pure: we come to vichara as we are, trusting in its vast potential to steadily scour and eventually do away with whatever demon or defilement may lurk within. It does not mean waiting until we have extra time in the meditation hall or get caught up in our domestic and professional duties: that time may never come. If obligations to family, friends and career seem to preclude setting our minds on enquiry, let us remind ourselves how preoccupied our minds are anyway, all the time, with idle chatter and aimless mental static. Is it not time to win back a share of the time spent on mental fretting, chronic anxiety and perpetual worry, and put that toward doing the practice Sri Ramana gave us?

If our determination is strong, we can question right in the midst of ordinary daily activities — while brushing our teeth, while taking a bath, while getting dressed, while sitting down for a meal, or while at work. All these instances provide opportunities to turn the mundane into the sublime and bring our attention back to questioning.

Truly, Bhagavan tells us, vichara is the royal road. Even if, as beginners, we don’t know where that road will lead, it doesn’t matter, the Master stands at its head, beckoning us, “This way! This way!”

What more could we ask for? He is showing us the way out.

Now it’s up to us. ▲



# Mind and Consciousness

DAVID FRAWLEY

**W**hat is the nature of the mind? How is it related to our deeper consciousness? And, above all, who are we in our real being? What is our true identity or true Self behind the endless stream of thoughts going on inside us?

These have always been the prime questions that we must ask in order to discover the ultimate meaning and purpose of our existence. They are the basis of the seeking of liberation and Self-realization in the Yoga tradition. In Yoga, the Divine is defined mainly as the essence of consciousness. The yogic spiritual quest is a practice of meditation in order to discover that.

## **Looking at the Mind**

Today, we usually look at the mind according to the approaches of modern psychology. We focus on the subconscious mind, memory

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and past experiences as the measure of our mental state, the ground out of which our thought and emotion develops. Examination of the mind usually consists of trying to understand our personal history, including uncovering hidden or repressed traumatic experiences that may inhibit our functioning in life. In most of current psychology, the personal mind is our real consciousness and somewhere in it our true self or identity can be found.

Modern science similarly identifies mind and consciousness, equating the faculty of thinking with the power of awareness. It takes us back to the basic Cartesian dictum, “I think therefore I am”. It regards consciousness as primarily self-consciousness, the activity of the personal self as, for example, the ability to recognize ourselves in a mirror, which capacity animals, except possibly for some primates, do not seem to have.

On this basis, modern science identifies consciousness with the mind and the mind with the brain. This identification has resulted in seeking to improve our mental and emotional functioning through altering brain chemistry with pharmaceutical preparations. Mainstream science usually does not recognize consciousness as a spiritual or cosmic principle apart from the mind, though some trends in the new physics are beginning to suggest this. It is still a largely physical view of the mind that we find in medicine today.

The yogic view of the mind, however, is very different. It is based on meditation and inner experience, rather than outer experimentation. It tries to understand the mind through introspection or turning our awareness within, rather than by analyzing outer mental patterns. It encourages us to observe the mind rather than follow its reactions. It teaches us to understand the process of perception and how it conditions us, rather than to merely examine our memories.

The Yoga tradition also classifies the mind in a different manner. It defines mind in the broadest sense, what is called *chitta* in Sanskrit, as all aspects of conditioned consciousness. Under the concept of chitta is included reason, emotion, sensation, memory, the instinctual part of the mind, and the ego; all that we ordinarily consider to possess some degree of consciousness within us. Yet under the concept of chitta

is also a higher creativity and intuition beyond the ordinary mind and physical consciousness, which a few people may develop in a significant manner. Chitta moreover extends beyond the personal mind, to collective and cosmic aspects of mind. Chitta is mind as a cosmic principle, not simply the human mind.

### **Mind and Consciousness: Two Different Powers**

Even more significantly, Yoga radically distinguishes between mind and consciousness, which it regards as two separate but related powers. Yoga regards consciousness, called *Chit* as something other than the mind or Chitta. This is very different from modern science but also from most of the world’s philosophies, which generally identify mind and consciousness.

The mind is an instrument of thinking and sensing on various levels. Mind is called the ‘inner instrument’ or *antahkarana* in Sanskrit, related to the body which is our outer instrument. The mind is looked upon as the sixth sense after the five bodily senses and is regarded as an organ, not our true being or the basis of our sense of self.

Chit is pure consciousness unmodified by any mental activity. Chit is awareness of what is called the *Purusha*, the inner Being, for which the mind is but a tool of perception and expression. Yoga similarly regards mind and brain as different though related. The brain is the physical vehicle for the mind, but not the mind itself.

The Purusha is our inner Self while the mind, we could say, is like our computer and the body is like the car we drive. Mind and body are our internal and external instruments but not our real identity. Just as you are not your computer, so too, your true Self and Being is not the mind. The light that allows the mind to function comes from the Purusha. The mind does not have any light of its own. Your sense of self-being, that you are a unique, whole and continuous centre of awareness, derives from the inner consciousness, not from the mind.

### **Mind and Psychology**

How we seek to heal the mind depends upon how we look at the mind. The yogic view of psychology, with its emphasis on consciousness rather than mind as our real being, is also different.

Psychology belongs to the mind and the mind can have psychological diseases and imbalances, just as the body can have physical diseases and imbalances. A person's psychology reflects the condition of his mind, its tendencies, and qualities. The mind always has a psychology because it is a product of time and outer experiences, which leave their characteristic marks upon it. They are classified in Ayurveda and Yogic psychology according to the *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), *doshas* (*vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*), the five elements and other energetic factors.

Our true Self or Purusha, however, does not have a psychology because it is unconditioned consciousness, the witness outside of time and the mind. It is beyond all form and qualities. While the mind has mental activity, the inner Being consists of pure unmodified awareness only, like a mirror. This means that if we can go deeply into our awareness to our inner being and light of consciousness, we can move beyond all psychological suffering. The ultimate yogic solution to psychological problems is to raise our awareness to the inner consciousness beyond the mind and its dualities. Though many outer factors of diet, behaviour, the breath and the senses can help, it ultimately requires a revolution in our awareness itself from a mind-based consciousness to pure consciousness itself, from Chitta to Chit.

### The Question of Self-knowledge

In Yoga, knowledge alone is said to bring about the liberation of consciousness, specifically self-knowledge or the knowledge of our true nature in the Purusha. When we speak of self-knowledge for the personal mind, we are mainly referring to knowledge of one's personal history, habits and inclinations. Self-knowledge for the inner Being, however, consists of understanding the essence of awareness beyond thought and personal history. Though our thoughts are constantly changing, our inner Being remains the same.

True Self-knowledge is a matter of Being, not of thought or emotion. It is a state of Being, not of events, experiences or ideas known. Our inner Being has no conceptual content, nor is it conditioned by time and action. It is a state of openness, surrender and presence like a steady thread through all our experiences. Contacting it brings us into a state of peace in which the mind and its psychology

are naturally put to rest. To reach our inner Being requires a different orientation of our consciousness, a willingness to let go of our personal history and dive into the great Unknown within.

From the standpoint of the Purusha or true Self, one could say that you cannot know yourself. There is no self or personal history to be known which could define you. From the standpoint of the true Self, you can only be your Self. But in being yourself, you become one with all Being. You come to know all things within yourself, in which the mind becomes but an instrument to be used at will or put to rest.

Our inner Being exists beyond time and space, birth and death, mind and body. Yet it is present within us as the ground of consciousness and present all around us as the ground of Being. To truly know one's Self is to know that inner Being which is the same in all. In that awareness, the mind becomes quiet and passive and the personal self loses its relevance.

In that inner Reality, the mind loses its importance. This is just as when the Sun is shining, one no longer notices the Moon. The reality is self-evident. Nothing needs to be said, discussed or argued about. And the reality is so vast it can never be described. One merges into the experience only.

### Self-Realization

The yogic dictum is "I am that I am", "I am that which is, that which was and that which will be." "I am therefore I can think." Yet this 'I' is neither me nor you, nor anyone else. One could say that it is God, but it is not the God of any belief, theology or philosophy. It is the Divine Being that is the being of all. It is the Self of existence, the Self-being that is the ocean of which all creatures and all worlds are but waves. In that Self is the resolution of all our problems, conflicts, stress, anxiety and agitation. When one has gone home to one's true nature, there are no more issues left to resolve.

Yoga defines its supreme goal of liberation as the realization of the inner Self or Purusha. "Only by knowing the Purusha can one go beyond death. There is no other path to transcendence." So knowledge of the Purusha or inner Being is the most important thing in life, not just a knowledge of our mental and emotional tendencies, however valuable these may be for dealing with psychological diseases.

Unless we know our inner Being, we cannot find lasting peace. Knowledge of our being depends upon being, not upon mental activity. The problem is that instead of seeking to know our inner Being, we get caught in our outer becoming. We run after the mental, emotional or physical self and lose the Being Self within. This process is Samsara or the turning of the wheel of sorrow.

Usually we think of Self-realization as the realization of our hidden personal potentials, some special abilities or talents we might not have yet developed. However, yogic Self-realization is the understanding that our true Self is beyond body and mind, which also means beyond psychology, culture and conditioning. It is the dissolution of the personal psychological self into the Being Self that is not born and does not die.

True consciousness is not the embodied mind, which is a conditioned consciousness, a mere collection of tendencies and activities from our various births. True consciousness is a universal principle and power like space. It cannot be limited to any body or mind. The mind can at best reflect it, which requires that the mind be still, subtle and sensitive within. We must learn to move from embodied consciousness or mind, to the non-embodied universal consciousness, in which we transcend our personal self to the universal Self. This occurs when we go to the root of the mind and discover the light of awareness that radiates through it.

### **Mind and Self-Realization**

For such higher Self-realization, the mind plays a crucial role. The mind can be the instrument for either bondage or liberation, ignorance or enlightenment. If we turn the mind towards the external world as the reality, it becomes a force of attachment and sorrow. If we turn the mind within to the inner Being as the reality, it slows down and comes to reflect that higher reality. The mind becomes a mirror for the light of the Self to shine.

So turning the mind within is the essence of Yoga and meditation. For this the mind must be first brought to a one-pointed state. A fragmented or distracted mind cannot turn within. This inward turning process can be looked upon very simply as immersing the mind in the deeper consciousness of the inner Being that dwells within the heart.

The mind's knowledge is conceptual or thought based. It results in facts, data, information, ideals, theories, opinions, concepts or formulas. Our inner Being has a higher kind of knowledge, which is radically different from what the mind can know. Our inner Being has a special 'knowledge by identity', which is not coloured by thought and its preconceptions.

Through one's inner Being, one can merge into the inner Being of all that one comes in contact with through the body and senses. For most of us, this is a very difficult condition to imagine. But whenever the mind becomes totally concentrated, it experiences a quantum leap in awareness and a special knowledge arises through the inner unity of the seer and the seen. This inner knowledge through identity is the real yogic knowledge that frees us from all bondage and suffering.

All that the mind knows is simply thought, all of which is simply composed of name and form. True knowledge is knowledge of the Being, which arises through pure consciousness when mental activity comes to rest, when the mind becomes cool, calm and silent.

### **From Mind to Consciousness**

We must learn to move beyond the mind to pure consciousness, which is to return to our true nature, our inner Being. It is to rest in the silence and peace within that no thought, opinion, belief or conclusion can touch. It is to enter into the realm of Being and direct experience, where no words can go, which leaves no outer trace, where one becomes everything and nothing.

The mind is an excellent tool and instrument for consciousness. It has a wonderful capacity for action, expression, memory and coordination of our outer actions. But if we try to understand consciousness through the mind, we fall into spiritual ignorance and confusion. We wrongly identify our true Self and Being with our outer being. However, if we abide in pure consciousness, then the mind has its place to help us function in life. But the mind no longer throws its tendencies and impulses upon us as our real motivation.

Learn to discriminate between mind and consciousness. Learn to witness the mind. Dwell as the seer of the mind and its modifications. This is the Yoga of meditation that empties the mind of its conditioning and allows us to rest in our true nature, to see Reality, and to go beyond death. ▲



## VIDEO INTERVIEWS

# Bhagavan and My Family

M.V. RAMANACHALAM

*The author was the son of Venkatarama Iyer and the brother of M.V. Sabhapathy whose life story appeared in the Aradhana Issue of Mountain Path, April 2006. Sri M.V. Ramanachalam was absorbed at the lotus feet of Bhagavan on the 3rd September, 2003 with Bhagavan's name on his lips. See The Mountain Path, Aradhana 2004. This video interview was conducted in 2001.*

**I**n the 1890s, Bhagavan's uncle (*chittappa*, that is, his father's younger brother), Subbaier, and my grandfather were living in the same building on the northern side of Meenakshi Temple in Madurai. It was a big house built in the traditional style near the river Vaigai<sup>1</sup> where the Gopala Krishnakonar bookshop is now located. My father and Bhagavan, both whose given name was Venkataraman,<sup>2</sup> were

<sup>1</sup> Later Subbaier shifted to the south side of the temple where the present Ramana Mandiram lies. Bhagavan says: "The Vaigai river is at a long distance from Chokkanatha Street. It used to be very near to the house where we first stayed. When we were there, we used to bathe in the Vaigai River every day." *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 15 Jan. 1950.

<sup>2</sup> My father's name was Venkatarama Iyer. See his photograph on opposite page.

playmates though there was a four year's age difference between them. In those days, elders and ladies would sleep indoors and the youngsters would sleep in the open on raised platforms at the front of the house near the street. As both of them were living in the same house, they saw a lot of each other and could be seen together much of the time, at play, swimming, or engaged in the pursuits young boys indulge in, such as pranks and mischief-making. Bhagavan, my father and other friends would slip out in the night for amusement. Once they stuffed pillows under the sheets to give the appearance of being fast asleep in their beds and sneaked off to the river. Sometime after midnight on returning from their adventure, my grandfather was waiting to greet them, and caught them red-handed. At the front of the house was a small tree. Taking one branch to bind my father's legs and another to serve as a switch to whip him, my grandfather lashed him severely. Bhagavan witnessed the event and even many years later when my father came to prostrate before Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave, Bhagavan asked him whether that same tree was still standing. My father, overwhelmed at finding his old friend as a Swami, stood dumbfounded.

### My Father's Love for Bhagavan

My father considered Bhagavan the Supreme Eternal and kept many photos of Bhagavan in our house. Whenever the topic of Bhagavan was raised or Bhagavan's name was even mentioned, my father, like Ramanapadananda, would simply shed tears. As he was unable to refrain from weeping in Bhagavan's presence, Bhagavan gave him the name *azhugani siddhar* — the one who attains siddhi by weeping for God.<sup>3</sup>

Working at the District Board office at Madurai enabled my father to visit the Ashram regularly. He would run away from the office to Tiruvannamalai and stay with Bhagavan for several days at a time. On several occasions, he even sent letters of resignation to his employers in the hope of being able to remain with Bhagavan forever. But his employers fully appreciating his abilities and honesty, never accepted them. In this way, he was able to maintain his position in order to support our family.

<sup>3</sup> *Siddhi*, that is, liberation.

In the Ashram my father undertook tasks voluntarily. Once Bhagavan advised him to quit his job at the Ashram but my father somehow understood it to mean that he was to resign his position in Madras. Fortunately this resignation letter was not accepted either and when he understood Bhagavan's true intent, he continued his professional obligations. In general my father consulted the Ashram on family matters and only after he received advice from Bhagavan or Chinna-swami, would he take action.

Once when my father was sitting before Bhagavan in the hall, Bhagavan fondly recollected his days at Alagar Kovil near Madurai and casually mentioned the tasty dosas offered there as *prasadam*.<sup>4</sup> My father quietly slipped out of the hall and set off immediately for Alagar Kovil, only to return two days later with an armful of dosas. He offered them to Bhagavan who then distributed them as *prasadam* to the devotees gathered in the hall.

### My Mother's Early Visits to Bhagavan

My mother Parvatham was also an ardent devotee and started visiting Bhagavan right from the days at Virupaksha Cave. She learned many songs<sup>5</sup> from Bhagavan's mother, Alagammal, who showed my mother every kindness. My mother would sing them to Bhagavan who invariably showed his delight. Alagammal advised my mother who lost her first seven children shortly after birth, to go with Bhagavan for giripradakshina in order to protect her remaining children. It must have been effective because we three further children born to her, survived.

Bhagavan's mother and mine became close friends. They used to sing *avadai-akka's* and other devotional songs and Bhagavan would

<sup>4</sup> Bhagavan used to frequent this temple in his youth. See *Letters From Sri Ramanasramam*, 15 Jan. 1950.

<sup>5</sup> *Day by Day* 1-1-47: A Brahmin widow was "talking to Bhagavan in the hall, recollecting various incidents connected with her family and Bhagavan, during Bhagavan's stay in Virupakshi Cave and Skandasramam. Thereupon I asked T. S. R. who the lady was. He said she was the widow of one Mr. Venkatramier of Madurai who stayed with Bhagavan for a long time and was greatly attached to Bhagavan... The lady began singing some Tamil songs. Among them were *Ramana Stuti Panchakam* songs..."

commend my mother's voice. In the kitchen my mother would grind flour with Bhagavan. Once, while at work, their heads accidentally collided and Bhagavan declared his head pained in sympathy.

This close association with Bhagavan made my mother feel well-protected and whenever my father left on work assignments, she did not worry, asserting that there was nothing to worry about.

### **Climbing the Hill with Bhagavan**

Once some ladies wanted to go to the top of the hill with Bhagavan. My father and Ramanatha Brahmachari carried the cooked food and went ahead but lost their way. Strangely, now and again, a young boy would appear before them and guide them toward the right path but just as soon disappear again. After reaching the summit, they got word that Bhagavan and the ladies had stayed back at Seven Springs. Then they realized that it had been Bhagavan's miracle that they were able to find their way to the top. When they later reached Seven Springs, my father, looking at Bhagavan, shouted in excitement, "You mischievous chap! You are here, you are there, you are everywhere! How long will you go on hiding from us your real form?"

My mother, unaware of the mysterious boy who had repeatedly appeared and guided my father on the journey up, prayed to Bhagavan not to heed my father's prattle.

### **Early Visits to the Ashram**

I was born in 1922 and my first birthday was celebrated at the feet of Bhagavan. It was the custom in our home for children to be tonsured first at Tirupathi, the temple of Lord Venkateswara, our family deity. But my father declared that there was no God other than Bhagavan, so on my first birthday my head was shaved at Ramanasramam.

During our many visits, many things happened some of which I was too young to remember. One of the first visits to the Ashram that I can remember was when, while travelling from Madurai by train, at Thanjavur station, my father purchased some cashew nuts and placed them in my coat pocket telling me that they were for Bhagavan. When we reached the Ashram I saw 'somebody' sitting on the sofa near the mother's temple which was covered by a thatched roof. My father did

namaskaram to Bhagavan and asked me to prostrate and to present Bhagavan with the cashews. Before I made a namaskaram, I could see only a brilliant light. Only after some time could I see the figure of Bhagavan. I found a few pieces of cashew nut still in my pocket which I then gave him. He received them with joy but I was taken aback to see that I had consumed most of them during the journey.

One day, near the window behind the Old Hall, I lay down to sleep but, as these were new surroundings, my sleep was fitful and sporadic and I would periodically lift my head and peer about. Bhagavan noticing my unease said some reassuring words to me and only then was I able to sleep in earnest.

Once around this same time, I expressed my desire to have a walking stick like Bhagavan Thatha's. Bhagavan himself procured a small branch of a tree and fashioned it into a walking stick, whittling its shape and smoothing its surfaces. About two feet long, it suited my small stature at the time, and I treasured it so much that I still have it in my possession today, keeping it safely in my puja room at home.

Another event I can remember is the time we were about to return to Madurai after the Ashram meal, when my mother and father, wanting to take leave of Bhagavan, waited for him. I began to cry telling my mother I didn't want to leave Bhagavan Thatha. On hearing this, Bhagavan told me sweetly to go for now, and that when I was grown up at twenty one years of age, I could return to stay.

### **A Later Childhood Visit**

The families of Professor N. R. Krishnamurthy Iyer, and P. R. S. Mani, the Ashram photographer,<sup>6</sup> were all close to my family. One day while doing giripradakshina together, I saw a bright light and pointed it out to N. R. K. but he was unable to see it. When reaching Pachaiaimman Temple, we stopped for breakfast near the tank. I took delight in sharing some of my tiffin with the fish but my father was none too pleased and struck me so hard I fell to the ground. Everybody disapproved of his undue harshness to me. On reaching the Ashram, I

<sup>6</sup> P. R. S. Mani was N.R. Krishnamurthy's student. Among his many photos, the 'Mani bust' is a favourite among devotees. (See frontispiece this issue.)

wept before Bhagavan, blurting out all that had happened. When I told him about the light I had seen, Bhagavan said that Arunachaleswara had indeed given me darshan. My father scolded me again for recounting to Bhagavan his having hit me. I didn't say anything, but felt justified.

### The Death of My Father

In 1940 after the death of my father, my mother had her hair cropped short and began wearing a saffron sari according to the custom for widows. Once she entered the hall, simply bowed to Bhagavan, and sat in a corner thinking he had not noticed her. But in the next instant Bhagavan said, "Are you not Parvatham? Only the dress has changed". In this way, he made her forget her sorrows.

My father died in my seventeenth year. The following year, I got a job. Later, in 1941-42, I had worked in the District Board office but one day, when I received a posting order from the Deputy Superintendent of Schools at Polur (near Tiruvannamalai), I immediately resigned. At Polur, I was now in close proximity to the Ashram and had the opportunity to spend time with Bhagavan. This was 1942-43, and I was just turning 21: Bhagavan's prediction that I would come back had come true.

I came to the Ashram every Saturday and Sunday to be with Bhagavan. My salary was Rs. 35/- out of which I sent Rs. 26/- to my mother, Rs. 3/- for monthly meals, Rs. 2/- for room rent and kept Rs. 2/- for the to- and-fro bus fare. The balance of Rs. 2/- was given to ChinnaSwami as a donation to the Ashram though many times he refused to take this donation as he knew about our poor financial position.

During this period, after taking a bath in the tank near the Ashram, I would mount the hill half way and do japa for a long time forgetting breakfast and coffee. On seeing this, ChinnaSwami told me I should take care of my health and eat food regularly. But I did not heed his advice. Once I came across Bhagavan coming down the hill and when he asked me whether I had taken breakfast, I said no. He then told me to do japa only after taking breakfast, affirming ChinnaSwami's earlier admonition.

### On Top of Arunachala

During this period I saw a number of people going to the top of Arunachala and I too wanted to do likewise. But a thought disturbed me: Arunachala is Lord Siva Himself and climbing to the top would be like sitting on the Lord's head, which could well be a sin. So I was afraid to climb up. Later a devotee from Karur asked me to accompany him up. As it was customary to get permission from Bhagavan first, I mustered the strength and when I found him returning from the gosala, I asked for his permission which he readily granted. We therefore proceeded via Skandasramam and reached a place where the foot path split and led to two different sides of the hill. We were puzzled as neither of us knew the way. Then I remembered Bhagavan and prayed to him to show us the way; in a short time, we reached the top.

Once there, we found remnants of ghee from the Deepam celebration a week earlier, which, mixed with the mist, made for slippery and grimy surfaces. I prostrated anyway as if I was doing namaskaram before Bhagavan. In between some rocks were clots of ghee which we took as prasadam. We returned to the Ashram as fast as possible in order to reach it before dark. Almost all including Bhagavan had entered the dining hall by the time we got there. On seeing us, ChinnaSwami shouted for us to go in as Bhagavan was waiting for us to return from the hill. When we both sat for food, Bhagavan nodded his head and we started eating.

An equally pleasant experience occurred later the same evening. I noticed that KrishnaSwami,<sup>7</sup> whom I found intimidating and who generally did not allow anyone to approach Bhagavan, was not there. So I took the opportunity to go straight up to Bhagavan and present him the ghee I had collected from the hilltop. He held my hand and took a little ghee from it and applied it to his forehead. He said, "How blessed you've been!" The accompanying touch of his fingers on mine was an inexplicable and memorable experience.

<sup>7</sup> KrishnaSwami was an attendant of Bhagavan at the time.

## Marriage

When I was working for the Deputy Inspector of Schools, we had a number of books to distribute to various schools. I would invariably read those on saints. I had the strong urge to remain in Tiruvannamalai forever and let my brothers look after the family. At that time coming across a book on *Chinmudra Rahasyam*, I became attracted by it. I came to the Ashram, prostrated before Bhagavan, and sat near the barricade. Amazingly Bhagavan was just then explaining the significance of the Chinmudra. As he sat on the sofa facing south, I was sure this was Dakshinamurthi himself. Traditionally we point toward God with the forefinger and, by the thrust of our other three fingers, we invariably indicate our egos in the form of the three gunas. Bhagavan said that the forefinger indicated God and thumb indicated the Self and that we should therefore join these two together so that sat-chit might be realised. I could not contain my elation at hearing Bhagavan's discussion of Chinmudra.

During this time I very much wanted to be a brahmachari or sannyasi rather than get married and enter family life. As I was at Polur and could come regularly to be with Bhagavan, I didn't want to do anything else.

One day my mother wrote a letter to Bhagavan conveying her concern regarding me. At about two o'clock one day, I came to the Ashram and did the customary namaskaram to Bhagavan, but Bhagavan then asked in a critical tone: "Oy, did you see your mother's letter?" I was stunned by this 'Oy' which Bhagavan had never used with me before, and in such a disapproving voice and came away weeping.<sup>8</sup> Chinnaswami showed me the letter my mother had written in which she complained that I had refused to consider marriage and that Bhagavan should see a way out of this dilemma for my mother. Seeing the writing on the wall, not long after that I got married.

That was early 1950. Father was not alive then so I printed the invitation with a bust size photo of Bhagavan on the front, invoking his blessings. The first invitation I gave to Bhagavan, in contravention of family custom. In the last week of February or first week of March, I

<sup>8</sup> 'Oy' is a very polite and formal term of address — the author was 'stunned' by Bhagavan's formality.

brought my wife to pay our respects to Bhagavan and at once Bhagavan started speaking to her in her mother tongue, Malayalam, though it was her first darshan. That was during Bhagavan's most physically painful days when he was staying in what is now known as the Nirvana Room.

## Additional Remembrances

Once I met Bhagavan near the old bathroom, and prostrated (*namaskaram*). I followed him at a distance and when Bhagavan suddenly looked back, I prostrated once again. The same thing happened a third time. Then Bhagavan turned and told me one namaskaram would have been more than enough.

On another occasion I happened to be following Bhagavan while we were walking past the canal. After passing the crow's samadhi, he suddenly stopped and I prostrated to him. Bhagavan then waved his kamandalam towards the Hill and asked me to do namaskaram to Arunachala and to have faith in Him.

In the old hall, I sometimes pulled the punkah for Bhagavan. In a small printed book of *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, there was a small printing mistake. Bhagavan wrote the correct letter on a bit of paper and pasted it in each copy of the book.

## Conclusion

One evening in the 1940s in the town where I was employed, while sitting at home, I overheard a tent-cinema in one of the nearby streets. It was broadcasting by loudspeaker its repertoire of popular songs as a run-up to the show. One of the songs was on Bhagavan. So I stepped outside to listen and while standing there, enrapt in Bhagavan's beautiful poetry, a gentleman approached me and asked me why I was standing in the street like that, elated as I was. I told him I was a Ramana devotee and was enjoying the song. It turned out that he too was a Bhagavan devotee. From that moment on, the world around us disappeared from sight as we engaged ourselves in heart-rending remembrances of Bhagavan. Before long, we noticed ladies sprinkling the sidewalks with water and painting rangoli, and only then realized we had passed the entire night standing on the sidewalk. Such is the rapture and joy that comes with remembering Bhagavan. ▲

## KEYWORD

# Mithya

**Sanskrit:** false appearance, illusion, dependent reality, phenomenal reality, name and form.

The entire essence of Vedanta is contained in half a verse: *Brahma satyam, jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva na aparah*.<sup>1</sup> Thus the key to understanding Vedanta lies in grasping the significance of the two terms, *mithya* vis-à-vis *satyam*. The word 'satyam' points to 'that which is not sublated<sup>2</sup> (or negated) in all the three periods of time, i.e. past, present and future'. Any illusory appearance needs a substratum on which it can be successfully projected. It is this base (*adhisthanam*) alone which qualifies to be termed as ultimately real, *satyam*. The process of inadvertent superimposition (*adhyasa*) arises from the lack of right knowledge of an object 'as it is'. *Mithya* refers to the object wrongly superimposed upon the substratum, which effectively veils the latter from our vision.

<sup>1</sup> 'Brahman alone is absolutely real, this world is an illusory appearance. The individual soul in essence is none other than Brahman'. *Brahma Jnanavalih*, verse 18.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'sublate' is used in Vedanta to indicate knowledge which has been denied, disaffirmed or discredited. A new knowledge of a higher unity replaces it without a lingering trace of the previous knowledge now understood to be deficient.



Mithya has two meanings, which are interlinked; one is 'false or unreal' and the other is 'that which is dependent on something else for its existence'. In Vedanta, the 'rope-snake' analogy illustrates this. On a dimly lit night, a rope seen at a distance is mistaken for a snake, which triggers the consequent panic reaction. This is purely a subjective experience confined only to the person who, under the sway of ignorance, commits the mistake. In this example, the rope is the substratum required for superimposing the illusory snake upon it and qualifies as satyam; the 'snake' is called mithya as it is merely an erroneous perception. Without a satyam basis, mithya cannot be experienced at all.

Suppose one says, "Alright, this world is mithya but where is satyam, the underlying Reality? I don't see it, unlike the 'rope' given in the analogy." In order to appreciate the world as mithya, we are not to expect a new object to emerge mysteriously answering to the name Brahman. The saving grace about mithya (for all its deluding capacity) is that you do not need to look anywhere else for satyam other than the wrongly superimposed object. The 'snake' alone has to be given a 'hard look' (literally in this case!) to understand that it is just a harmless rope. In the same way, this 'world' alone has to be given a 'hard look' with the help of 'a better light' namely verbal testimony (*shruti pramana*), to appreciate that Brahman alone 'appears' as the world. Brahman is that limitless and formless Consciousness (which is satyam) seamlessly pervading the world of myriad forms (which are mithya) and sustaining it. The scriptures say, 'Make your vision full of jnana and see this world as filled with Brahman' (*drshitim jnanamayim krtva, pasyet brahmamayam jagat*).<sup>2</sup> The same physical perception will continue with all its teeming plurality but now the understanding is entirely transformed. The mirage water continues to appear but having understood it, one is no more deluded.

Can we define mithya? Sri Madhusudhana Saraswati in his celebrated treatise *Advaita Siddhi* gives three crisp pointers:

<sup>2</sup> *Aparokshanubhuti*, verse 116; also, *Isavasya Upanishad*, verse 1.

(1) The illusory object which even though it never truly existed at any point of time appears to exist under certain conditions upon a substratum, is termed mithya. The 'snake' was never truly present upon the 'rope'; it was merely imagined due to ignorance of the rope. The power of ignorance (*avidya*) effectively conceals the rope and at the same time projects 'snakeness' upon it. Cosmically Maya, the inseparable power of Brahman, conceals the vision of Brahman and superimposes the world of infinite diversity upon the truly non-dual Brahman.

(2) That which is falsified totally, along with all its consequences and does not leave any residue with the arising of right knowledge is mithya. Once the 'snake vision' has been negated by 'rope knowledge', is it possible to feign all over again the fear of the snake and its attendant reaction of shock?

(3) Further mithya is something which cannot be categorised as either real or absolutely unreal (*anirvachaniya*). If it were altogether inexplicable, we would not attempt this examination. Now if the world was *absolutely real*, it could not be negated in deep sleep or dream states. Also, it should not be subject to creation, dissolution or mutation. Above all, it should not be sublated in the vision of Brahman. Since it fails these criteria, the world cannot be satyam. But it is not totally non-real either, like the 'hare's horns' or the 'son of a barren woman', for it is positively 'experienced' by all. Therefore, it enjoys a peculiar status that is intermediate between *sat* (pure existence) and *asat* (non-existence). Mithya is the ontological term to describe this unique status of the world.

To solve this baffling conundrum, Vedanta employs the 'pot-clay' example which illumines this line of reasoning, not apparent in the 'rope-snake' analogy. When a pot is made out of clay, what is newly added to clay? Only a form (with a corresponding name) has been added to lend utility in everyday life. It is not entirely false like the 'snake' imagined on the rope. It does hold water and clearly is *not* an illusory pot. However, in Vedantic 'grammar', a pot is not a 'noun' but only an 'adjective' to the object, which is clay because a pot is not an object existing by itself, but needs the substantive clay to exist. It is the pot which qualifies the clay, not the other way round. We should

strictly speaking, refer to all clay products as ‘pot-ty clay’, ‘cup-py clay’, etc. rather than clay-pot, clay-cup, etc. Vedanta reverses our very linguistic orientation while appreciating mithya.

A pot is one among the many forms that clay can assume without sacrificing its intrinsic nature. In engineering parlance, it is called a ‘value-added product’. For example, when a metal sheet is formed into a vessel, it is just ‘*a value addition*’. It is purely a conversion of form, not a material addition or creation. Similarly, when a lump of gold weighing a few hundred grams is fashioned into an exotic necklace, it costs more, for the *same* weight of gold. Any ornament is an utterly *weightless addition* to the raw gold used. The weight of the necklace belongs to the gold alone. What is the reality of the necklace *without* the gold? It is impossible to even *imagine* a golden necklace without gold, a pot without clay and a cloth without a corresponding fabric. In all these examples, the *product* with a name and form has only a *dependent existence* upon its material *cause* that can exist independently in its own right. Clay can exist as clay in the absence of a pot and gold can exist without manifesting as an ornament. However, the material cause contains the *potential existence* of all the forms that can possibly be shaped out of it. The scriptures declare ‘*all transformations are merely names (and forms), resting on the tip of the tongue*’<sup>3</sup>; all such *effects* are mithya, for they enjoy only a *dependent and false existence* upon the satyam cause which exists independently.

Vedanta says this world is nothing but Brahman *plus* name and form which are not substantial additions. A mithya addition does not truly count. One *plus* any number of zeroes is still only one. Clay is one, in the world of all clay-forms. So too Brahman *plus* a myriad forms is still non-dual and preserves Advaita intact. Sages have gone further and said that this world is indeed a *valueless addition*(!) to Brahman. They gently whisper a secret counsel to ripe seekers blessed with detachment (*vairagya*) to treat this mithya world as a mere dream without substance. Such a paradigm shift in our world view helps the mind to turn within and dwell on the Self, the sole Reality! ▲

<sup>3</sup> Chandogya Upanisad, 6.1.4-6.

# Ulladu Narpadu

## Based on Lakshmana Sarma’s Commentary

### Verse Seventeen

S. RAM MOHAN

17. The body is regarded as ‘I’ by both; by those who have not realized the Self and by those who have realized. To those who have not realized the ‘I’ it indicates the body only; to those who have realized the Self within, the ‘Self’ shines as the infinite ‘I’. Such is the difference between the two; thus should you know.

#### Commentary

The jnani or Self-realized person also, like everybody else, refers to the body as ‘I’. You may wonder, ‘What is the difference between the jnani and ajnani?’ The difference is fundamental and radical. When the ordinary man refers to the ‘I’, he limits the ‘I’ to the

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flesh and body, its material complex. The jnani takes his 'I' to be the life-force that pervades his body, as well as the limitless universe and space outside.

When the ignorant man speaks of the body as 'I', he looks upon the real Self and the body as perfectly identical; for him, the Self does not exist apart from the body. For him, the Self has all the attributes and limitations of the body. In his worldly activities, he acts accordingly.

According to Sri Sankara, the primary requirement for the one who begins to walk on the path of Self-enquiry, is *nitya-anitya vastu viveka* — the ability to discriminate between the eternal and the transient. The totally ignorant person confounds the body and the Self; he mistakes the non-self for the Self. The aspirant (*sadhaka*) who has started the quest but not yet reached his goal needs to speak of the body as 'this'. The jnani has no need to do this. He directly uses the term 'I' for the body. So, what is the distinction between the realised one (*jnani*), the *sadhaka* and the ignorant one?

The ignorant person limits the 'I' to the body. The *sadhaka* needs to practise discrimination between the eternal and non-eternal; hence he seeks to distinguish the body and the Self. The jnani is the one who has completed the journey and has gained *jnana* (wisdom). He realizes that the Self alone exists. The reference for 'I' now takes on a universal meaning. What was previously called as 'I' by the *sadhaka* is now an appearance of the Self. It is not erroneous, at this stage, to say "the body is 'I'" because all things, including the body, must fall within the ambit of 'I'.

The sage, while referring to the body as 'I', is fully aware that the Self is the only Reality, the substratum, existence-consciousness-bliss. The body is only an appearance superimposed on that substratum. It is nothing other than the Self. Nothing exists apart from the Self. The body is not the non-self for the jnani. He sees it as the Self — as the formless substratum of all appearances. There is no delusion in him.

We should understand the body as an appearance of 'I', like a wave upon the ocean. Those who are ignorant do not realize this truth. They think that the frontiers of the 'I' are the periphery of their body. Pointing to their body, they say, "I am this alone and nothing beyond

this; this is 'I' and this is 'you' and that is 'it'. For those who have realised the truth, however, there is nothing but 'I' namely, 'the Self'. The Self shines without limit."<sup>1</sup>

Bhagavan says that self-realisation is not something to be newly acquired. The Self is revealed the moment the veil of ignorance is removed. We need not wait for the body to die. Self-realisation is not an experience after the death of the body. Even while being in this body one can succeed in removing the veil through discrimination and grace (*anugraha*) and in realizing the Self. To such a one, the Self shines as the limitless Reality.

We see that even though both — the ignorant person and the sage — speak the same words, what they mean is different. The ignorant person has no awareness of the substratum and therefore thinks the world to be real as such. The sage sees only the substratum and all appearances as itself. This is explained in the next verse. ▲

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<sup>1</sup> *Ramana Maharshi and His Philosophy of Existence* by T.M.P Mahadevan. Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 1999, pp. 62-3.



# Lessons from the Brahma-Vishnu Tussle

S. RAMAN

The *Sri Arunachala Puranam* mentions, as the mythological origin of Arunachala, the Tiruvannamalai hill, the tussle that took place between Brahma and Vishnu on ‘who was the greatest?’. This argument lasted from *Arudra Darshan* to *Maha Sivarathri*. It has always fascinated me, not the least for the numerous lessons that it contains. In this article, I venture to suggest that there is more to it than meets the eye, especially when it is looked at against the vast background of mythology. For the benefit of those who do not know the story, let us retell it.

Once there was a tussle between the Lord of Creation, Brahma, and the Lord of Protection, Vishnu. Brahma maintained that since he

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was the creator, without him there would be nothing to protect, therefore he was the mightiest. Vishnu contested this, saying that since nothing created could remain without his acts of protection, he indeed was the greatest. This developed into a heated argument. As the situation deteriorated, the Lord Supreme (*Maheswara*) decided to intervene and he decided to appear before them as an infinite column of light. Bhagavan elsewhere described this as being accompanied by a thunderous explosion. *Maheswara* suggested to the contenders that they might resolve their argument by taking part in a contest of trying to find either end of the column of light, and that whosoever succeeded could indeed be declared the winner. Since both of them were, in their own minds, superior to all others neither of them could identify the newcomer, and so agreed to this fair way of settling the issue. Vishnu took the form of a boar and went digging down in the earth to trace the bottom end of the column, and Brahma took the form of a swan and flew up to seek the top end of the column. Even after a long time neither was successful. Vishnu got tired of the venture and realized that the new entrant was obviously mightier than himself and therefore he was not in a position to boast of being the mightiest. Having learnt his lesson, he retired from the contest.

Meanwhile during the flight upwards, Brahma saw a cactus flower (*thazhambu*) floating down from above, and invited it to be a witness as to his having sighted the top of the column, after convincing it with the argument that “if something comes from above, there is a top and it had been seen.” When Brahma went down along with the flower, *Maheswara* realized the trick being played by Brahma and cursed him, saying that he would never be worthy of worship and that there would therefore be no temples dedicated to him. It was also ordained that, for having been a false witness, the ‘*thazhambu*’ would be prohibited from use in Siva pujas. Thus both the gods were shown that they were not the mightiest. The column of light had appeared on an *Arudhra* darshan day (usually the day ahead of Ramana Jayanthi day), and it cooled itself down in the form of a hill on a *Maha Sivarathri* day. The cooling down was in response to the

earnest pleadings by all the devas led by Vishnu as no one could stand the heat and light of the column, which was at its peak especially after the trick played by Brahma. This event is depicted in all Siva temples, in the form of *Lingodbhavar*, installed on the peripheral pradakshina route directly secure to the wall behind the temple of the main idol of Siva in a temple complex. Also, that is the main deity traditionally worshipped on the night of annual *Maha Sivarathri* day.

The lesson from this story is that, in a given situation, one is expected to play one’s role and to respect the responsibilities that others have. That is, there is as much independence as there is interdependence. Realization of these moral precepts benefits any community. Now, what about the possibilities of other lessons? Also, suppose that there is a reversal of roles of the two gods in the above event. For instance, could Vishnu have gone upward instead of Brahma, and Brahma downward in place of Vishnu? This is most unlikely and quite unnatural, as I will explain.

Why so? Just like any person is driven by their own vasanas so it would be natural to presume that the gods too have their own tendencies, as long as they see different gods instead of the only One. Our mythological descriptions of the gods attribute protection qualities to Vishnu, and that includes creation of wealth. That is the reason for the goddess Lakshmi being his consort. Likewise, the generation or procreation aspect of Brahma include ideas and the learning of new methods and procedures. Is this why the goddess of learning Saraswathi is Brahma’s consort? Against this background, let us consider the process and the result of the tussle.

Protection of anything or anyone presumes material stability. It starts with having some infrastructure including land, buildings, etc., and proceeds further with the creation of wealth in some form or other in order to engender a feeling of security. Businessmen tend to understand this better than others; although when taken to its extreme ends by the avaricious, it can lead to the exploitation of people. Lakshmi, also known as Sridevi, being one consort of Vishnu the other one is known to be Bhudevi, who has a direct relationship with the earth and thus the world. Thus, anything worldly, wealth-related,

down-to-earth tends to be related to the source of wealth, so it is no wonder that Vishnu went digging through the earth to find the base of the column of light.

Likewise, creation not only belongs to the realm of physical growth but also to that of the development of ideas which generate the seeds of thinking, contemplation, and such similar traits. They generally tend to elevate a person. Ideas form the core of learning, and are characteristic of some thing essentially nebulous and fuzzy like thought, which can take shape only when given physical form. Until then it has a cloud-like character, with no specifically definable form or shape. This aspect has more to do with the logical nature of things. That is why we describe a person as being in a cloud when engaged in thinking. Thus, anything that is related to knowledge or learning, and associated with being up-in-the-clouds, is the purview of Brahma who, being the consort of the goddess of learning, went up towards the sky in order to establish his supremacy. Hence reversal of the roles of these two gods would not have been natural. Now, let us look at the progress and the fruits of the efforts of these two gods.

Vishnu persisted with his efforts, and at some point he realized the futility of his work. He was able to see clearly that there was a greater power than his. He returned and surrendered as a loser to the infinite. Is not surrender what is expected of anyone who is able to see clearly the finiteness of oneself? What is the general experience of any person who is very wealthy, but is struck by a tragedy? He not only learns that all his wealth cannot get him what he needs, much less the happiness that he desires so much. He begins to see the futility of belongings and eventually develops detachment from things that are not ultimately useful.

On the other hand, what was the experience of Brahma? He saw a flower falling from above, his intellect started working in a very logical way, and he coached the flower to be a false witness buttressed by a convincing argument. He returned with this witness and strived to get himself declared the winner. How could it ever have happened to the consort of the goddess of learning? Obviously, there is a lesson here for us. If the pursuit of knowledge is not undertaken in the right spirit

and is confined to ephemeral things, there is always the danger of it becoming a double-edged sword. Intelligence can become perverted, in Sanskrit '*yukthi* becoming *kuyukthi*',<sup>1</sup> and that marks the fall of a person. Knowledge usually picked up through worldly senses and things must progressively and ultimately graduate to that of knowing oneself. If that does not happen, then there is always potential for trouble. It will make a person argumentative and cunning, ready to coax others into colluding in what is believed to be the only right way of behaviour, but actually is immoral. This is what possibly has been illustrated by Brahma's experience.

Action is needed to develop one's wellbeing. It starts with the development of comfort for living, initially in order to meet the basic needs and later on, develops into a yearning for more comforts and luxuries. Even when this goes unchecked and may develop into avaricious ways, a sudden shock may come to the person in the form of some event, usually in the nature of a tragedy. At that point, the futility of all the material things acquired thus will become apparent. For the majority of people, this seems to be the way; except that it may take a long time to reach that stage of maturity and the acquisition of real knowledge. But that is the safest path, as it starts with certain ground realities. In the pursuit of that path, knowledge and understanding develop and the mind is prepared for the ultimate action of surrender. The path taken by Vishnu is representative of this trajectory.

However, knowledge of the finite and the infinite, if not properly backed up by maturity of mind, can be dangerous. When that knowledge develops in a person having the right state of mind, there is the possibility of instant realization of the Self, as they say, by the time the second leg is placed after the first one while mounting a horse, as in the example of King Janaka. In spite of this quick result, knowledge can work like a double-edged sword, as has been shown in the case of Brahma. Further, it must be realized that this type of

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<sup>1</sup> In this context *yukthi* means what is proper and good; and *kuyukthi* means what is improper and bad.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

knowledge is only at the intellectual level and, at that level, one can only ask questions of oneself. The answers that are received must again be regarded as intellectual and hence ephemeral. The right answers will evolve by themselves to the questioner, as and when he is ready to receive them as experiences. At that point, it is said by seers that there may neither be Brahma nor Vishnu!

In this context, we may recall how Bhagavan when he relatively ranked the karma and jnana paths, stated that the latter was more direct than the former. In ranking the other methods in between, he showed how all of them are nothing but the variants of the karma path, differing only in the ways of practice.

It may not be out of place to point out that following the grossest method can lead a person to the more subtle methods, finally resulting in the realization of the ultimate knowledge.

Has the Brahma-Vishnu tussle then got one more lesson for us? Vishnu, symbolic of the path of karma, and Brahma, symbolic of the jnana path, both start with a handicap, namely their individual egos. During the competition, Vishnu realizes this, and ultimately surrenders. Does it mean that the karma path, however arduous and long, has the benefit of mellowing and maturing a person even when he is not so ready to begin with? The subtler method of the jnana path is more direct, but one must be aware of the consequences of wrong leads that the self-assumed or arrogant intellect may provide. Does a fall such as the one that happened to Brahma await a person, who continues to look for answers on the intellectual plane?

All these show that the mythological descriptions and associations have packed in them a lot of associative information. When earnestly tapped with the right state of mind, they can offer new perspectives on spiritual endeavours. ▲



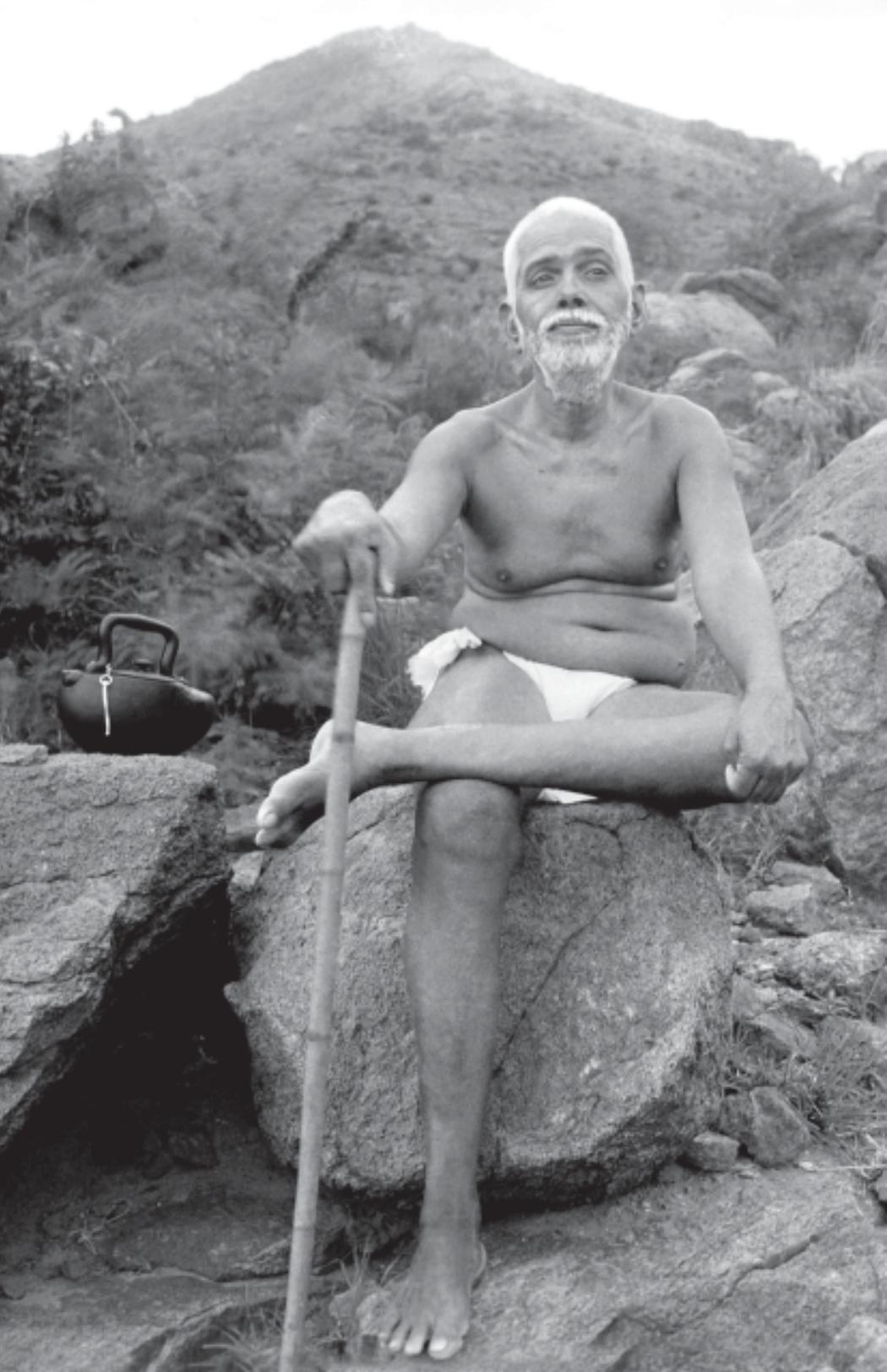
## The Eye(I) That Isn't

DWARAKNATH REDDY

This winged visitor was reposing in my garden, evidently convinced that his pretentious eyes would scare away any predator.

Guiltily I thought: The ego-I(eye) in me is not more authentic. I believe my painted-I gives me power and self-protection. This insect seeks to fool others, but I fool myself! ▲

Dwaraknath Reddy is an ashramite, author and keen photographer.



# Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam

SRI MURUGANAR

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

From the time Muruganar, a gifted poet in his own right, came to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and devoted himself to his service, he dedicated his literary output entirely to works which embodied Ramana's teachings, or sang of his greatness and of the effect that the momentous meeting with his guru had upon him. Of the works composed by him, the only ones which have been published in English, apart from occasional small excerpts, are those which embody Sri Ramana's directly expressed teachings, his quoted words. These are *Sri Guru Vachaka Kovai* and excerpts from *Padamalai*, a work that appears

Robert Butler is a devotee of Bhagavan who wants to share his experience with others through the medium of translation. He has dedicated his life to the understanding and translation of Tamil spiritual texts.

in volume 9 of *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, a portmanteau collection which includes the bulk of Muruganar's otherwise unpublished Tamil output. The only major exception to this is the first part of *Sri Ramana Anubhuti*, translated by Robert Butler, a purely devotional work, which was published in 1998 under the title: *Non-Dual Consciousness, the Flood Tide of Bliss, Sri Ramana Anubhuti*.

In 1960 *Sri Ramana Anubhuti* Part I was first published in Tamil by Sri Ramanasramam. It consisted of 755 verses in the main body of the work, and a Supplement consisting of a further 244 verses. Subsequently, with the help of Sadhu Om, Muruganar arranged the verses into a new order, adding titles for the various sections, incorporating the verses of the Supplement, and adding a further 40 verses that had not appeared in the original. This new edition, now containing 1039 verses, was finally published in 2004 under Muruganar's chosen title *Sri Guru Ramana Prasadam*.

The publication in Tamil of the fully revised Tamil version provided an opportunity for Robert, with assistance from T. V. Venkatasubramanian, a leading authority on the works of Sri Muruganar, to revise the translation, incorporate all the missing material, and add many new notes. The excerpt given here is section 8 of Chapter One, *The Prasad of the Guru's Grace*, entitled: *The glorious power of his holy feet*. The book will be available for purchase from online bookstores in early 2008.

### The Glorious Power of His Holy Feet

188. When I sought his holy feet within my own heart, I gained the *true knowledge* that is the experience of the Self, the sea of grace in which it is delightful to bathe. If we merge with them, the holy feet of the guru will become a boat to ferry us across the desolate void and bring us to salvation, the state of the real.

189. Ocean of compassion, he took pity on this poor ignorant fool and through his grace, cleansing the evil from my heart, he established the supreme reality there. Even the final cataclysm at the universe's end could not dislodge his radiant feet from that place.

190. When I see them shining in all their fullness as my eternal nature, manifesting inwardly as the enfolding expanse of grace that is the pure state of being awake, the victorious feet of reality, the form of *true knowledge* that ruled me through their grace, will flourish as the truth that never fails and deserts me.

191. Shining as the supreme means for the removal of false understanding, as the inner awareness *I-I*, gained through subsiding into the Heart, and as the life that is free of the humiliating subjugation to the canker of the ego, they are his noble feet, the treasure of grace.

192. Bringing me, his devotee, to salvation through his ambrosial being, so that even as I languished in the dark night of my mind's deadly delusion, I was saved from death's annihilation, my holy Master's feet of pure gold, bestowing grace in *holy silence*, shine out, irremovably established within my heart as true spiritual practice.

193. In *divine silence* the holy feet of the guru caused the realm of grace to blossom within my heart, and through the experience of their deeply peaceful nature, I gained them for myself in the form of a life lived, as it were, on a cool mountainside.<sup>1</sup> Within my own heart I attained the state of the real, the pure space of bliss for which my longing never ends.

194. The state in which one attains and becomes permanently established in limitless peace, the pure state of grace, the exquisite supreme bliss whose nature is delight, is none other than the holy feet of the guru, the tender flame of *true knowledge* that ever watches over those devotees whose love is true.

<sup>1</sup> *tan paruppata vaazhvu* — 'a cool mountain existence.' Being in the shelter of Bhagavan's grace is compared to living in a cool hill-tation, in stark contrast to the heat of the Indian plains.

195. When I became united with the feet of the sadguru, my worldly ties were cut away through the practice of absorption in his abiding Selfhood, with no longer any need to acquire empirical knowledge, and the lofty knowledge of *Sivam* ripened within me as the vast Supreme.

196. A column of pure light, sweet nectar to our minds, holy Mount Annamalai towers on high. And there, enthroned in holy majesty, filling my eyes with his blissful sight dwells my divine guru. Dwelling without thought upon my Master's holy feet, I have merged with the open sky of bliss.

197. Sipping the sweet nectar of Lord Siva's bliss from the bright red lotuses of his feet that flourished within my understanding, dispelling my deep sorrow, I was filled with the light of my own inner realization, that blessed ocean of *divine silence*, so long desired.

198. My natural duty, as I perceive it, is to dwell without thought upon those feet that abide in *holy silence*, flooding my consciousness with bliss. This is the state of liberation, the *holy silence* in which the ego that thrives on the mind's confusion is rendered powerless and disappears completely.<sup>2</sup>

199. Dispelling my suffering, the Lord of Siva's heaven revealed himself to me and became my master. Lovingly I abandoned all my worldly activities at his ruddy and gracious feet, for in this devotee's heart such things could no longer find a place.

200. As the clinging bonds of false association fell away, I came to dwell at Lord Siva's noble feet whose measure cannot be told. Holding on with an unrelenting grip, neither grasping nor letting go, I came

<sup>2</sup> In the 1960 edition, v.161, the final two lines, after the word 'bliss' read: "...as the mind, which is full of distress and sorrow, along with the ego that thrives on the mind's confusion, is extinguished and disappears in the state of pure consciousness."

to know as the true reality the feet of my wise Master that shine in my heart.

201. The Lord renewed my existence and made it complete as suddenly the bliss of Lord Siva flooded through me, and I rejoiced as I drank in the intoxicating liquor of supreme bliss that welled up and overflowed from the lotuses of his feet.

202. At the golden feet of the Divine One, where the peace of blissful union with Lord Siva prevails, dispelling the torment of the lustful mind and granting liberation, I have attained the experience of *true knowledge* that shines as my Master's very self, so that the *I am the body* awareness is no more.

203. His holy feet are the treasure that exists within the Heart as the life that is free of the suffering caused by the humiliating bonds of the world and the soul. This life at the feet of the Lord, where the ruinous seeds of our actions are consumed like cotton in a flame, is for my soul the life of supernal bliss.

204. He caused a flower of light to unfold in the state of pure consciousness, so that the disastrous error of a body-bound ego faded. That radiance grew ever brighter with my love until I realized the flawless knowledge of the Self manifesting as the unbroken awareness *I-I* within my heart.

205. Destroying the dark void of base ignorance, the light of the grace-bestowing feet of my Guru and Master, whose nature is of the form of shining self-knowledge, revealed to me my true self, driving out entirely the degrading confusion of that false, delusional state, in which I wandered weeping and fretting over 'I' and 'mine'.

206. Languishing in the slough of my soul's defilement, I knew not a single moment of clear understanding, until my Lord revealed to me my own self as Brahman. His fair feet, which in grace bestow the

delight of blissful *divine silence*, shone out brightly, ennobling my body, mind and speech.

207. The Lord bathed me in the light of my own inner realization so that the mental trickery which bound me to a world of illusion was exposed as false. Then, as all desires and the thoughts which gave rise to them fell away, the light of his holy feet was all that remained, radiating everywhere the peace that in grace bestows the consciousness of the real.

208. The wise Lord graciously granted me *true knowledge*, bringing to me a clarity that dispelled my mind's confusion. In the beautiful sun-like radiance of his golden feet, my threefold body,<sup>3</sup> the source of my deluded awareness, was revealed as false and disappeared and all that remained was the pure, transcendent Self.

209. Light of lights, his holy feet plunged me into the ocean of divine love, so that I tasted the sweetness of final bliss with which I could not be sated, then merged with me in the Heart as my own nature, as the light of true awareness that flourishes as the origin and source of my understanding flooded forth in all directions.

210. Thinking yet beyond the realm of thought, I nurtured in my heart the realisation that his holy feet, dwelling in *holy silence*, free of guile, were the very Self. And as the distress caused by the deluding mind that exists in *maya* faded, its falsehood revealed, the pure ambrosial flood of grace, the life of absolute consciousness, became one with me.

211. The grace-bestowing feet of my Lord assumed so absolutely the right of possession over me that there remained nothing that I had to read, or put into practice after reading and understanding. It is those

<sup>3</sup>The gross, subtle and causal bodies.

feet that remain in the hearts of those who have fully understood [and rooted out]<sup>4</sup> the way of *neti*, It is not this.

212. The holy feet of the guru shine in my heart as the knowledge bestowed in grace by the Self, which embraces me in the form of final liberation. Taking those feet as my *siddhi* [supernatural power], I have attained strength and clarity of mind, so that the false desires which held me in the illusion of worldly bondage have vanished like a dream.

213. Drawn by his magnetic charm I have sought shelter at the lotus feet of Sri Ramana whose teaching is eternal, so that the murky twilight of the illusory world, created by the trickery of the senses, has faded in the clear light of dawn like turmeric left out in the sun.<sup>5</sup>

214. Whether fate decrees that I should suffer through seven births or seven thousand, whatever worlds I may inhabit, his gracious feet, the light of life within my heart, will be united with my soul, enfolding me so that for my fortunate self all those appearances will be as a dream.

215. Beneath my guru's gaze my heart was emptied of guile so that the false understanding which had usurped my heart disappeared completely, and there, in silence at his holy feet, the pure ocean of the Self, which nothing can contain, swept me up into the deep bliss of the absolute Godhead.

<sup>4</sup> The meaning here is clarified by the Preamble to the verse which states: 'The grace-bestowing feet of the Lord are the reality that remains in the hearts of those who have rooted out [the concept of] *neti*'. Those who are established in the Heart through Self-enquiry, where all is the Self, have no need to seek out the truth by rejecting the false, through the technique of *neti, neti*, I am not this! I am not this!

<sup>5</sup> Turmeric loses its colour when exposed to sunlight. See also *Guru Vachaka Kovai* v.38: 'Just as yellow turmeric powder loses its colour and becomes white under sunlight, this wholly mental world perishes before the sunlight of the knowledge of reality.'

216. To remain with the mind destroyed through dedication to the Lord is one's glorious natural state, the reality of the Self. In that state of delight that is the company of the guru's holy feet, there exists nothing else to excite my desire other than him.

217. If the impetuosity of the deluded mind that drives us on is destroyed by our Lord, before whom even the Gods bow down, singing paeans of praise, and then, if we cling to those fair feet, the grace-consciousness that abolishes desire, all other clinging will be destroyed.<sup>6</sup>

218. Performing menial service to that treasure house of compassion, whose true wisdom is praised in the four corners of the earth, I perceived and embraced final emancipation. For the devotees of our gracious Creator, there is no more exalted service – for that indeed is the true spiritual practice of the wise. ▲

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<sup>6</sup>This verse is a reworking of verse 94 of the 1960 edition, which is as follows: He is the God whom it is fitting that we should worship, bowing down in the four directions. He is our Lord before whom even the Gods prostrate themselves, singing paeans of praise. If the impetuosity of the deluded mind that drives us on is destroyed by him, his pure form of wisdom and grace will banish our desires.

# My Reminiscences of Sri Bhagavan

SWAMI RAMANANANDA

*Sri Ramana Kendra, Hyderabad, will publish a second edition of the popular Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi. It will include additional reminiscences among which is an article about Swami Ramanananda who as T.N. Venkataraman, was president of the ashram for forty years. The following is an abridgement.*

I was blessed with the very first *upadesam* (instruction) of Sri Bhagavan when I was all of five years old. That was in 1920 at Skandashram. A plate of fruit and sweets had been put aside for the monkey 'Nondy' but when nobody was looking I went to the plate, took a sweet and put it in my mouth. All of a sudden a monkey appeared, limped towards me, slapped me and grabbed the plate.

Swami Ramanananda is 93 years old and leads a retired life in the ashram. He regularly attends Tamil Parayana in the evening.

My grandmother Alagammal pleaded with Nondy not to harm me. Then Bhagavan Ramana came into the room and said, "This is a lesson for you; now understand that we should not desire things which belong to others." I fully understood the profound meaning of that upadesam long afterwards when I was President of Sri Ramanasramam.

My grandmother Alagammal also came to Bhagavan once and asked for his blessing on her daughter-in-law Mangalam in order that she should have a son to continue the family line as none of her siblings had borne any children. Bhagavan smiled graciously and she took this as His blessing. I was born a year later and everyone was sure that it was due to Sri Bhagavan's grace.

My mother Mangalam passed away when I was not yet three and my father Nagasundaram, who later became Swami Niranjanananda and was called ChinnaSwami by everybody in Sri Ramanasramam, left me at the house of my aunt Alamelu and her husband Pichu Iyer at Kunrakudi and went away. They brought me up with great love.

In 1916, when Nellaiappa Iyer, Bhagavan's uncle, in whose house Alagammal was living, passed away, she decided to spend the rest of her life with Sri Bhagavan at Tiruvannamalai and joined him at Virupaksha cave that same year. Sri Bhagavan graciously accepted her as one of the inmates of the Ashram.

My Aunt Alamelu and Uncle Pichu Iyer would go to Tiruvannamalai at least once a year along with me, stay in the town and visit Skandashram for Sri Bhagavan's darshan. I vividly remember some incidents which I saw as a boy of four and five.

With the exception of saffron-robed grandma Alagammal, no other woman could stay at night at Skandashram. So my aunt and uncle would return to the town taking me along with them in the evening. As they had to carry me in their arms, on some days, they would leave me at Skandashram. On those days Bhagavan would put me to bed by his side and see that I slept comfortably. In the morning he would brush my teeth and bathe me. He would sit outside on the stone couch and ask me to sit beside him. He would say "What are the pranks that you play back home?" When my aunt and uncle would come up the hill from the town, He would point His finger at them and tell me "See

there, your aunt is coming" and would get up, saying with a laugh, "Now you are her responsibility, it's between her and you." On days when aunt Alamelu was late in coming He would ask Perumalswami to take care of me. He was a faithful devotee of Sri Bhagavan in those days. Later, he became a source of great bother to the Ashram but how infinitely patient and forgiving Bhagavan was with him.

My aunt and uncle and I were staying at a devotee's house in Tiruvannamalai. At night, my uncle and I would sleep outside on the veranda. One early morning, before dawn, Karuppan, the Ashram dog, which would on some days accompany us to the town, barked softly by my side waking me up alone. Then he ran a little distance, stopped and looked back. I thought he wanted me to follow him, which I did. We reached the hill and then climbed on till we reached Skandashram. Bhagavan, who was surprised to see us, called Kunju Swami and asked him to go down to the town and inform my aunt and uncle that I was safe on the hill at the Ashram.

These and other incidents are fresh in my memory. I knew Bhagavan loved me dearly but I was too young then to realize His greatness.

Another incident which is very green in my memory is the laying of the Samadhi to grandmother Alagammal in May 1922. She was in her last moments and was asking to see me, her only grandchild. I was 7 then. A telegram was sent to my uncle at Kunrakudi. We arrived only the day after Alagammal had left the body which, by then, had been carried down the hill to be buried near the tank, Pali Teertham. We went there straight from the Tiruvannamalai Railway Station as arranged by Bhagavan. Bhagavan's devotees wished that I should perform the final obsequies and lay the Samadhi. It fell to my lucky lot to lay to rest the blessed mother who gave birth to a great jnani.

In the days I was at Kunrakudi, which was a small village, with my aunt and uncle, there was no school there. So I was sent to nearby Tirupattur where my uncle's brother was manager of the local temple. There I went to the primary school for two years. Then, as he passed away, I was sent to Manamadurai, a neighbouring town, where another brother of my uncle's, Srinivasa Iyer, lived. I finished my third year in the primary school there. When he moved to Pasalai village, I shifted

## MOUNTAIN PATH

to the house of Nagu Iyer, son of Nellaiappa Iyer, Bhagavan's uncle. That was the house in which I was born and there I completed my sixth standard. When Nagu Iyer too passed away, I moved to the house of Vakil Sundarama Iyer, a relative of my father, and passed the fourth form (9<sup>th</sup> class) from O.V.C High School. That was the last year of school education for me.

I was taken to Tiruvannamalai every year, since 1922, during Bhagavan's Jayanti and the Maha Puja of Alagammal. I can be seen standing next to Bhagavan and behind Nayana Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni in the group photo taken on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1928 during Bhagavan's Jayanti. How lucky I was!

Another incident which is indelibly imprinted on my memory is the Mahasamadhi of Sri Seshadri Swamigal, a great contemporary of Sri Bhagavan. He left his body on January 14, 1929. He was interred the same day and a Samadhi was laid on the spot of interment. That was a ground adjacent to the Sri Ramanasramam complex. Sri Bhagavan attended the ceremony taking me along with Him. I was 15 years old then and felt thrilled to participate in the rites of passage of a very great soul. In the month of May of the same year I tied the knot at Vetriyur. The bride was Nagalakshmi, affectionately called Nagu, who was 13, two years younger than me. This marriage was blessed by Sri Bhagavan in the following manner.

Nagu was the third daughter of a maternal uncle of Sri Bhagavan. My own maternal uncle, Venkatarama Iyer, wanted to marry off his daughter Lakshmi to me. Learning that talks were going on for Nagu's marriage to me, he rushed to Tiruvannamalai along with a relative of Sri Bhagavan seeking His Blessings for Lakshmi's marriage to me. However, Sri Bhagavan told them, "But they have decided that Venkitoo should marry Nagu, isn't it?" Was this not His full blessing for my marriage with Nagu?

In this connection, I cannot help but refer to the first upadesa of Sri Bhagavan to newly married Nagu which set the tone for her entire life.

Soon after our marriage, Aunt Alamelu and Uncle Pichu Iyer took Nagu to Sri Bhagavan for His Blessings. When she came out of the old hall after Sri Bhagavan's darshan, she saw a young woman, who



had come from Madras with her parents. Nagu was impressed by the sari worn by that young lady, Mangalam by name and told her “How beautiful is your sari!” Mangalam had later mentioned this to her father. On returning to Madras, he purchased two saris similar to the one admired by Nagu and sent them by parcel to Sri Ramanasramam with a request that the packet be given to Nagu.

All letters addressed to the Ashram were invariably placed before Sri Bhagavan and so was this packet and the covering letter.

Next day, when Bhagavan saw Nagu at the Ashram kitchen, he said, “Nagu, when you see someone wearing nice ornaments or a nice sari, you should think that you are wearing them.” Nagu, with her eyes moist and voice tremulous, said, “Bhagavan, I did not ask for the sari, I only said that the sari was beautiful.” But Sri Bhagavan repeated His upadesa and moved on.

From that day onward till her last moment 55 years later, Nagu never asked for anything from anybody. She found contentment to be the best of riches, thanks to Bhagavan’s gracious upadesa.

It was Sri Bhagavan who named every one of my three sons and four daughters. He would choose an apt name and explain the reason for the choice.

Sometime in 1944, Bhagavan broke His clavicle (collarbone) when He fell down when trying to save a squirrel chased by a dog. The doctor put a bandage round His arm. The next day when I went to the Ashram with my children, my third son Mani prostrated before Bhagavan. He noticed the bandage and started giving vent to his annoyance with Bhagavan’s attendants: “Devotees walk behind Bhagavan, what were they doing? Ought they not to see that Bhagavan does not fall down?” On hearing this Bhagavan put His right index finger on His nose and said, “*Mani manippayal thaan.* (Mani is real smart), *Manimaniyaa pesaraane!* (He talks so well!)”.

The other incident which occurred a week before Sri Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana is deeply moving. The cancerous growth near Bhagavan’s left elbow had swollen to a big size and there was a bandage around it. A number of doctors were in attendance on Bhagavan and there were many important people in the large gathering. Aunt Alamelu

took my last child Saraswati, who was barely 11 months old, near Bhagavan and the child started prattling ‘Inga, inga’ as usual but unusually loudly this time. Aunt took the child far from Bhagavan but her prattle was audible to Sri Bhagavan. Those were the days when the smallest movement of any part of His body would entail excruciating pain for Him. But He turned His face in all directions and said, “I hear the voice of ‘Inga’ baby. Is she here? Poor child if she raises her voice, she is carried far away!”

Some one ran to Aunt Alamelu and brought her and the child to Bhagavan who looked at her with compassion saying ‘inga’. The child shouted ‘inga’ and Bhagavan’s face was wreathed in smiles.

I have no words to describe Bhagavan’s love for me. He graced me in many, many ways. Could I have run His Ashram for nearly 40 years but for His Grace? Even in the years before 1938 when I finally moved to Tiruvannamalai with my family and started performing Ashram duties assigned by my father who was the Ashram Sarvadhikari, Bhagavan was sending me spiritual nourishment, directly and indirectly.

I worked with the Bank of Chettinad from 1932 to 1937. My flair for accountancy was acknowledged and appreciated. It was to my Bank address that Sri Ramanasramam was regularly sending me clippings from the Tamil paper *Swadesamithran*. What was special about those clippings?

*Ellam Onre* (All are One) was a little book written by one Subramanyan from the Advaitic view-point. Sri Bhagavan read this Tamil book, gave chapter titles and told one of His devotees, “If you want *moksha* read this book.” The contents of this book were serialized in the Tamil daily *Swadesamithran*. Bhagavan would personally cut the article from the paper and ask the Ashram office to send it to me.

When I was the President of Sri Ramanasramam I had to tackle many administrative problems. There were a series of court cases. I had to brief the lawyers and be present in the courts, from the lower courts up to the Madras High Court. All this left me little time for study of Sri Bhagavan’s teachings and to pursue Self-enquiry vigorously. I heartily agreed with those who said that I did not know an *akshara* (letter) of Bhagavan’s *Aksharamanamalai* (Marital Garland of Letters).

However I always felt that Sri Bhagavan was guiding me all the time. I felt His Presence around me protecting me and the Ashram. The kind of work that I had to do as Ashram President demanded tremendous patience, tenacity and courage and Sri Bhagavan had blessed me with these traits.

My wife Nagu never turned away a beggar empty-handed for she had heard Sri Bhagavan once say in the Ashram kitchen: “When a beggar comes, give him whatever you can, be it even an Indian gooseberry. Who knows who comes in the form of the beggar?”

I started working at Sri Ramanasramam from 1938. Yogi Ramaiah and the advocate Sri Sambasiva Rao wrote to me and requested that I resign from the Bank of Chettinad and come to the Ashram and help run the administration. Upon arrival at the Ashram I was in a dilemma. I was a householder, the family consisting of myself, Nagu, two sons, Aunt Alamelu and Uncle Pichu Iyer. My father, the Ashram Sarvadhikari was fiercely strict and would not permit a family to live within the Ashram. Feeling it would not be possible to accept any responsibility in the Ashram without Bhagavan’s approval, I sent a family friend to the Ashram to obtain Bhagavan’s approval in the matter.

After discussing the matter with Yogi Ramaiah, my friend mentioned the subject to Bhagavan when he was alone near the hill. It seems that Sri Bhagavan said straightaway, “Venkitoo is a family man. So what? The needs of the family can be met by the Ashram.” This solved the problem. I would go there in the morning and return after dusk to our family home outside the Ashram.

As I said earlier, my father was a stern administrator. From the day I started serving at the Ashram till his last days, he never said a kind word to me which would smack of paternal affection. Being a renunciate, he kept his relationship with me at the most impersonal level. He would object to my leaving town even for a day or two. If I left with my family to attend a marriage in a neighbouring village, he would complain to Bhagavan. Bhagavan would pacify him saying that it was not proper to object to Venkitoo fulfilling his social obligations as a householder.

My father would occasionally be absent and I would then attend to his work. If Ashram people approached Bhagavan for any approval, he would say, “Why not ask Venkitoo, the little Sarvadhikari?” In this way He upheld my authority whenever it was questioned.

Another incident which I remember with a thrill of pride is when I stood by the side of Sri Bhagavan in 1949, received the Sri Chakra Meru blessed by Him from His hands and fixed it over the Samadhi of Mother Alagammal. I had also the good fortune of installing the Matrubhuteswara Lingam in the sanctum of the Temple.

I recall with great joy meeting Mahatma Gandhi at Madras in January 1946 and presenting him with a photo of Sri Bhagavan and some Ashram publications. Gandhiji kept looking at the photo and saying in Hindi, “What a great Sage!”

During His last months the Sarvadhikari would not allow anyone to enter Bhagavan’s room, later called the Mahanirvana Room. I would however go in flouting his orders. Arguments would ensue. Once I said in a firm tone, “Bhagavan is bed-ridden and either of us two should always be by His side. In your absence, I will be with Him.” Bhagavan, who was lying down, turned His head towards us with effort and slightly nodded His head in approval.

On 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1950, the day after the Mahasamadhi, in the presence of Swami Niranjanananda, and surrounded by a huge gathering of devotees, I poured a large quantity of milk, curds, fruit juice, coconut water etc. on Bhagavan’s divine head. Then, rosewater, scent, oils, etc. were poured. Numerous garlands were offered to His body. By 6.30 in the evening, His body was carried to the Samadhi pit. I offered a large quantity of camphor, sacred ash, salt, etc into the pit. His divine body was worshipped and then lowered into the pit in the Padmasana posture. The Samadhi bricks were laid and cemented. The Mahasamadhi was completed. ▲



# Sri Matrubhuteswara Ashtottaram

## Selected Verses

*Sri Matrubhuteswara Ashtottaram contains the 108 names of the Divine Mother of the Sri Matrubhuteswara<sup>1</sup> where Bhagavan's mother is interred. This recently composed litany of prayers (by Sri Swami Shantananda Puri) has now become part of the daily liturgical cycle and is recited each morning during the archana prior to puja in the Mother's Shrine. The complete collection is soon to come out in booklet form for the benefit of devotees.*

The end came at Skandasramam on May 19th, 1922, on Bahula Navami. About sunset a meal was prepared and Bhagavan asked the others to go and eat, but he himself did not. That evening devotees sat chanting the Vedas beside his mother while others invoked the name of Rama. For more than two hours she lay there, her chest heaving and her breath coming in loud gasps, and all this while Bhagavan sat beside her, his right hand on her heart and his left on her head. This time there was no question of prolonging life but only of quieting the mind so that death could be *Mahasamadhi* — absorption in the Self.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sivalinga in the Mother's Shrine.

At eight o'clock in the evening she was finally released from the body. Bhagavan immediately rose, quite cheerful. "Now we can eat," he said; "come along, there is no pollution."

There was deep meaning in this. A Hindu death entails ritual pollution calling for purificatory rites, but this had not been a death but reabsorption. There was no disembodied soul but perfect union with the Self and therefore no purificatory rites were needed.

Describing the process afterwards, he said: "Innate tendencies and the subtle memory of past experiences leading to future possibilities became very active. Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness, the outer senses having already gone. The soul was passing through a series of experiences, thus avoiding the need for rebirth and making possible union with the Spirit. The soul was at last disrobed of the subtle sheaths before it reached the final destination, the Supreme Peace of liberation from which there is no return to ignorance."<sup>2</sup>

When the question of the disposal of the body came up, it was Ganapathi Muni who decided the issue. He cited verses from *Sri Ramana Gita* to show that women had as much right to *sannyasa* as men. Even in the case of an ordinary ochre-robed *sannyasi*, people *bury* the body and do not cremate it. Here Bhagvan's mother had the good fortune of being actively assisted in her last journey by the Maharshi himself and she shed her mortal frame as a perfectly liberated being. Therefore it would be improper to cremate her, argued the Muni. At the foot of the hill, in the south east corner, a spot was chosen for the Samadhi. It was scorching summer at the time and there was absolutely no sign of water in the vicinity. But when the Maharshi pointed out a place and the people dug, lo! water gushed forth in a stream and that became the sacred *tirtha* for the Samadhi. To commemorate the event, the Muni sang a few verses:

"It was the year *dundubhi*, the sixth day of the month of Taurus, the ninth day of the dark fortnight in the spring and a Friday. In the first quarter of that night when the sky was spangled with a hundred stars, Saundaryamba became the Effulgence! Hailing from the clan of Bharadwaja, she was wedded to Sundara, who was born in the clan of

<sup>2</sup> *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, Arthur Osbourne, Sri Ramanasramam, 2004, pp. 86-7.

Parasaras. Spotless in character, she was the mother of Ramana Maharshi, an *amsa* of the God Guru Guha. Washing away her sins by her devotion to the feet of Siva, abandoning her mental attachments, her Prana controlled by the force in the hand of Guha (Ramana), she cast away all distractions at that very moment and became liberated.

"Saundaryamba became the Effulgence proclaimed by the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, the Effulgence that has pervaded all the worlds, the Effulgence that manifested through the gaze of her son, Guha (Ramana).

"Here is the new Tirtha, remover of all blemishes, at the Samadhi of Mother Saundaryamba, like the stream of pollen from the two lotus hands of Ramana Maharshi.

"May the holy mother of the Maharshi shine forth! May her Samadhi shine forth! May the Lingam installed on it by the Maharshi shine forth! May the new Tirtha shine forth as the remover of all imperfections!"

About six months later, Bhagavan came and settled down at his Mother's Samadhi and Sri Ramanasramam was born. For the son of Sakti, that constant vivifying presence of Sakti was appropriate to his mission and this was supplied by his mother in her Samadhi. The Supreme became the mother, *Matrubhuteswara*.<sup>3</sup>

## Sri Matrubhuteswara Ashtottaram Selected Verses

1. ओं श्री मातृभूतेश्वर रूपिण्यै नमः ॥१॥

om śrī mātr̥bhūteśvara rūpiṇyai namaḥ ||1||

Salutations to the one who is of the form of Matrubhuteswara.

2. ओं रमण जनन्यै नमः ॥२॥

om ramaṇa jananyai namaḥ ||2||

Salutations to the mother of Sri Ramana.

<sup>3</sup> This introduction adapted from *Bhagavan and Nayana*, S. Sankaranarayanan, Sri Ramanasramam, 2000, pp. 23-6 and Osbourne, pp. 86-7.

4. ओं अलगम्मा नाम्न्यै नमः ॥४॥  
om alagammā nāmnyai namaḥ ॥4॥  
Salutations to the one named Alagamma.
25. ओं पुत्रोपदेशप्राप्त स्वरूप ज्ञानायै नमः ॥२५॥  
om putropadeśaprāpta svarūpa jñānāyāi namaḥ ॥25॥  
Salutations to the one who gained Self-Knowledge through her son's teachings.
32. ओं रमण कृपास्पदायै नमः ॥३२॥  
om ramaṇa kṛpāspadāyāi namaḥ ॥32॥  
Salutations to the beneficiary of Sri Ramana's Grace<sup>4</sup>.
36. ओं रमणोपदेश श्रवण शुद्धीकृत चित्तायै नमः ॥३६॥  
om ramaṇopadeśa śravaṇa śuddhikṛta cittāyāi namaḥ ॥36॥  
Salutations to the one whose mind became purified on hearing Sri Ramana's teachings.
37. ओं रमणहस्त प्रापित मोक्ष साम्राज्यायै नमः ॥३७॥  
om ramaṇahasta prāpita mokṣa sāmrajyāyāi namaḥ ॥37॥  
Salutations to the one who attained the realm of moksha at the hands of Sri Ramana.
39. ओं रमणहस्त प्रतिष्ठापित महा मेरुयन्त्र स्वरूपिण्यै नमः ॥३९॥  
om ramaṇahasta pratiṣṭhāpita mahā meruyantra svarūpiṇyāi namaḥ ॥39॥

<sup>4</sup> Alagamma's leaving home and seeking refuge at her son's feet; Bhagavan's constant efforts to make his mother a mature jnani by correcting her earlier conditioning; and finally, Bhagavan's sitting with her in the last moments of her life with his hands placed on her head and heart to assure her release: these are instances of his extraordinary Grace.

Salutations to the one who is in the form of the Maha Meru Yantra<sup>4</sup> installed with Sri Ramana's own hands.

107. ओं निरञ्जनानन्दस्वामिकृत-श्रद्धा युक्त-प्रयत्न बहुल-फलस्वरूप-निर्मित मातृभूतेश्वराधिष्ठित-समाधि मन्दिरायै नमः ॥१०७॥  
om nirañjanānandasvāmikṛta-śraddhā yukta-prayatna bahula-phalasvarūpa-nirmita mātṛbhūteśvarādhiṣṭhita-samādhi mandirāyāi namaḥ ॥107॥  
Salutations to the one whose Samadhi Temple, presided over by Matrubhuteswara, came into existence as the fruit of the sincere efforts of Swami Niranjanananda<sup>6</sup>.
108. ओं भगवद् रमण ज्योति लीनायै नमः ॥१०८॥  
om bhagavad ramaṇa jyoti lināyāi namaḥ ॥108॥  
Salutations to the one who was absorbed in the flame of effulgence of Bhagavan Ramana. ▲

<sup>5</sup> A yantra is a geometrical diagram believed to have mystical power, engraved on a thin piece of copper plating or etched on paper or canvas. All deities have such geometrical representations. The Maha Meru Yantra is the three-dimensional yantra of the Sri Chakra on a rectangular base. Various triangles and lotus petals represent waves of energy which invoke the dynamic energy of the Divine Mother. By meditating on this form, a devotee is purified of afflictions and receives the merits and strengths of the deity. This yantra was consecrated by Bhagavan prior to and subsequent to its installation.

<sup>6</sup> Bhagavan's younger brother, Chinnaśwami. In spite of being directed by Bhagavan not to solicit funds directly but only accept voluntary donations for the Shrine's construction, Chinnaśwami worked for ten years to bring it about, during which time, by sustained and steady efforts, the Shrine came into being.



# Yogi Ramaiah and the Magician

## and Other Stories

T. R. KANAKAMMAL

One day Yogi Ramaiah came to the hall and sitting before Bhagavan told him the following story:

“Bhagavan, recently while travelling, I saw a public performance of a magician. There was a big crowd gathered around him, each requesting that he materialise one or another item before them. No sooner had they declared their wish than the item appeared right before our eyes. Watching this and having doubts about what I was seeing, I wondered what the ruse could be. So I asked the performer to produce a packet of hot pakkodas<sup>1</sup>. This, I thought, would not be such an easy feat if he were a charlatan.

“Immediately the magician waved his hand in the air and, to my utter amazement, in that instant, a packet of hot, freshly-fried pakkodas appeared in his hands. He passed the package to me and indeed, when I tasted them, I found that not only were they real pakkodas but they

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<sup>1</sup> A deep-fried Indian snack food made from dhal flour and spices.

were among the best I had ever tasted. I was stunned and wondered how he could accomplish such feats.

“When the show was over, the magician extended a rusty, beat-up container and went around, asking for donations from each of those gathered around. We all responded by dropping a few coins into the can. Seeing that he truly had magical powers, I wondered why he had to resort to begging. After everyone had dispersed, I pulled him aside and inquired of him: ‘You have the ability to produce whatever you want at the mere wave of a hand, including food, so why do you waste your time begging for money? Why don’t you simply fulfil every need, food or otherwise, with your magic?’

“He then told me his sad story: ‘I did penance in order to win the favour of a spirit that could perform whatever I desired. But my wish was granted with one stiff condition: I could never materialise anything for myself or my family. Therefore I have to beg for my survival.’

“I then asked him why he should agree to such terms, wasting his life as a beggar, when he could get no real benefit from his magic. He said that the spirit had made it clear to him that the karma of his penance was inexorable and would reap its ‘reward’; if he opted out, the spirit would instantly kill him. ‘So,’ he said, ‘I am destined to beg like this for the rest of my life.’”

When Bhagavan heard the story, he made the following remark: “The fate of all who run after *siddhis* is the same as that of this poor man.”

### **Bhatt Swami**

Bhatt Swami was known by this name as no one knew his real name. He was residing in Palakkoththu in a make-shift hut adjacent to Muruganar’s. It was roughly improvised with coconut fronds that barely held together. The so-called door was always ajar revealing to any passerby a bare, spartan interior. The only things that the hut contained were a water pot and an old Glaxo tin which was left hanging by twine just inside the door. If people felt like offering him something, they would just place it this old tin.

Bhatt Swami was a great tapasvin and could be seen seated, ever absorbed in meditation inside his room. He was tall, slim and golden-hued. His mien was that of a *rishi kumara* of yore, with dark, flowing unkempt hair, and a full black beard hanging down his front. He was ever in mouna, clad only in a dhoti up to his knee, without shirt or shawl. He remained unadorned with the traditional kumkum or vibhuthi on his forehead and wore no chappals. Whatever was dropped into the offering tin was his bhiksha for the day as he never went into town for begging rounds as did other sadhus.

He always walked erect with his back ramrod straight and his eyes always riveted in a purposeful manner, never deflecting here and there. Though hardly thirty, his face beamed with the radiance of great tapas.

Most days, he would unobtrusively slip into the hall from the hillside. The way he bore himself reminded one of a driverless vehicle that was driven by the force of the wind. A light suffused his entire body and people would long for his benign look, which they perceived as a blessing. He would be seen in the hall only during the 5am morning Upanishad parayana and evening Rudra parayana. Since he never went out for bhiksha, some people like Komutti Lakshmi Amma would periodically drop eatables into his hanging bowl. But it was never certain that he actually got them as monkeys had ready access.

After Bhagavan’s Mahanirvana, the distressed devotees experienced a void. Some resident devotees took upon themselves the duty of feeding tapasvi sadhus. One lady started sending food in an elaborate way through a servant to Bhatt Swami but it was regularly left outside untouched. Though her repeated offerings remained untouched, this good Samaritan was undeterred and did not take the cue to stop.

One day, Bhatt Swami disappeared, never to return. The mission of basking in the glorious, grace-soaked presence of Bhagavan having been fruitfully accomplished, his departure was as sudden and unannounced as his arrival.

### **Everything is Pure**

A devotee once asked why the impure world of maya came forth from pure Brahman. Bhagavan said, “Everything is pure. It is only the mind that comes in between that is impure”. ▲



# Stories of Bhagavan and Animals

## Part Three

### The Tiger of Pachaimman Kovil

One day while at Pachiamman Kovil, Rangaswami Iyengar went to answer the call of nature and saw a tiger in a bush. His body shook with terror and getting up involuntarily from where he sat, he began running towards me, gasping for breath, and shouting at the top of his voice, 'Oh, Bhagavan! Ramana! Ramana!' When I asked him what all the fright was about, he said imploringly 'Ayyo, tiger, tiger! Come, Swami, we must go into the temple and lock the doors, otherwise she will come in.' Pointing towards the bush he said, 'There it is, in that bush.' I said, 'You wait here. I'll go and see.' When I went to have a look, the tiger was gone. Still, Rangaswami could not overcome his fear. I assured him that it was harmless but he didn't believe me. Another day, while sitting on the edge of the tank opposite the temple, the same tiger came for water, and without any fear, roamed about looking at me, and then went its way. Iyengar, however, observed all this hiding himself in the temple, afraid of what might happen to me. After she left, I went into the temple and relieved him of his fear saying, 'Look! See what a mild animal it is! If we threaten it, it will attack us. But not otherwise.' Thus I dispelled his fears. — Bhagavan

### Lakshmi in Samadhi

Lakshmi came to the ashram each day, had her meals, grazed on the Ashram land, entered the hall and sat contentedly near Bhagavan. In the evening she would go back to town with the women. One afternoon after lunch, when Lakshmi was pregnant for the third time, she came to the hall while Bhagavan was reading the newspaper. She stood near him and started licking the newspaper. Bhagavan looked up and said, 'Wait a little, Lakshmi,' but Lakshmi went on licking. Finally, when his mild protests went unheeded, Bhagavan laid the paper aside and put his hands behind her horns and rested his head against hers. Remaining like this for awhile, Lakshmi became motionless. After about ten minutes, Bhagavan looked up at a devotee nearby, and in a soft voice, asked, "Do you know what Lakshmi is doing?" The devotee shook her head. "She is in nirvikalpa samadhi!" Tears were flowing in streams down her broad cheeks and her breathing had stopped, her eyes fixed on Bhagavan.<sup>1</sup> ▲

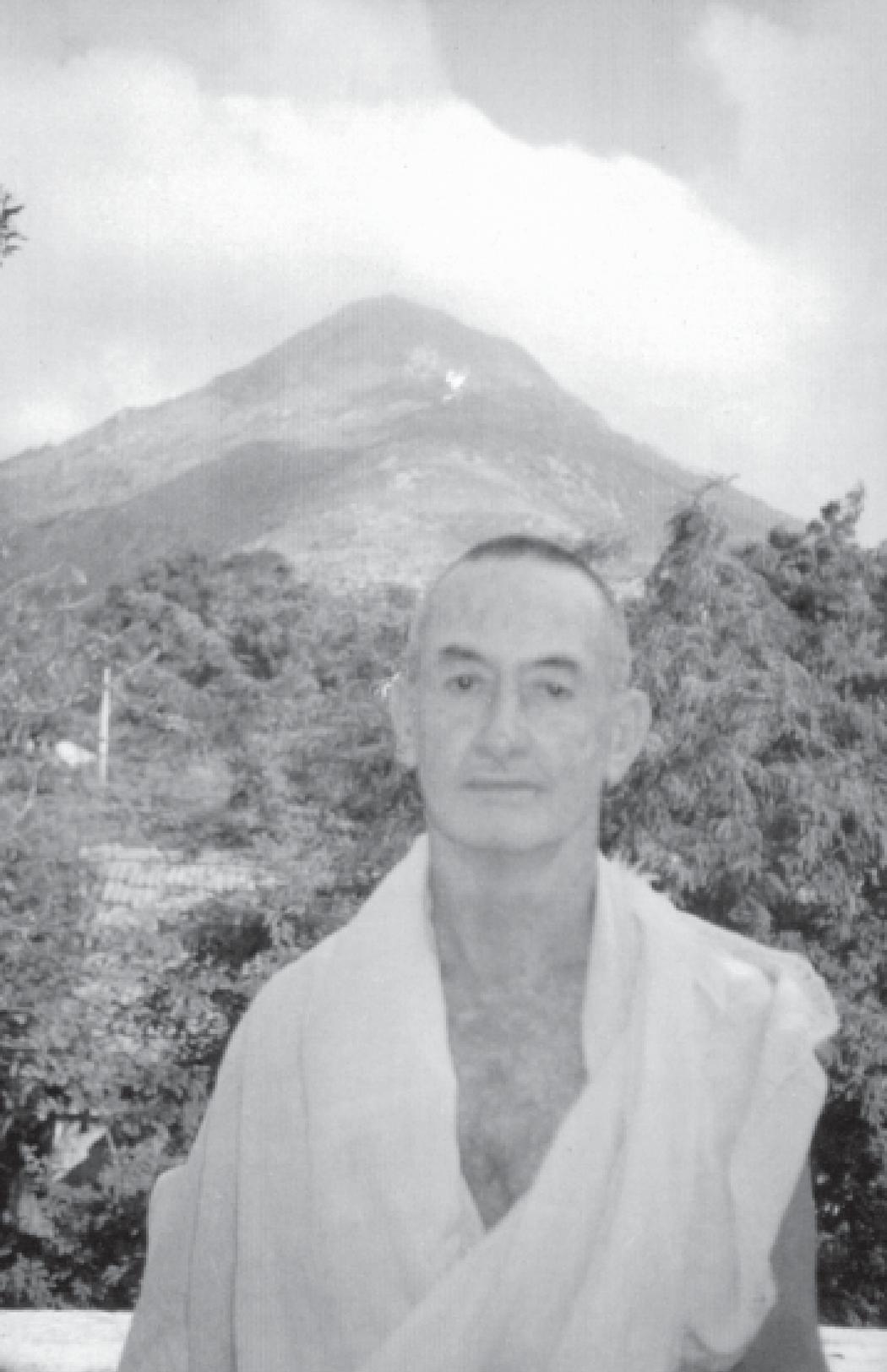


<sup>1</sup> These stories are adapted from *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* (18th January 1946), *The Call Divine* (Jan 1, 1955), and *Sri Ramana Friend of Animals: The Life of Lakshmi the Cow*, p. 18-19, respectively. (For the last story, also see 'Eternal Bhagavan' in *Ramana Smrti: Sri Ramana Maharshi Birth Centenary Offering*, 1980, pp. 146-51.)



### Restoring Order

One day two peacocks walked into Bhagavan's presence, one white and the other multi-coloured. Catching Bhagavan's silent wish, the attendant nearby put out a handful of grain for each of the 'visitors'. The coloured peacock began to peck away at his 'prasad' while the white one, without touching his share, stood watching the other feeding himself with relish. Suddenly the white one flew at the other and drove him away from his food. The one thus driven looked up helplessly at Bhagavan; one could easily feel the silent appeal in the bird's attitude. Bhagavan smiled and spoke to the mischief-maker as a loving mother would to her mischievous little son: "Come here! You have your share so why do you trouble him?" The white peacock took a few dignified steps towards Bhagavan and gazed up at him with shining eyes. Bhagavan extending his hand said softly, "Yes. Eat your share. Let him alone. Go. Go." Obediently, the white peacock retraced his steps to his share of food, while the other which had all this time stood at a distance, came back to his share of the grain. It seemed as if a tensely coiled spring had been gently, yet firmly released. Nobody spoke. Silence had become more silent. Everyone, including the peacocks, understood.



# Narikutti Swami

## A Remarkable Devotee of Sri Arunachala

KAMALA DEVI

**B**arry Owen Windsor was born in August 1930 in Sydney, Australia. His mother died when he was a teenager and this gave him pause for thought about the transitory nature of life. He studied architecture as a young man and became proficient in design, neat drawing and lettering. He exercised this skill throughout his life not only in letter-writing but also in the fastidious way he kept his living quarters clean and spare in content. As a young man he preferred to spend time alone studying and reading rather than socializing and dating as his fellow students were more inclined to do.

At the age of 19 he came under the influence of a fellow architectural student, Adrian Snodgrass. Snodgrass was an extremely erudite young

Kamala Devi founded the Hill of Fire Ashram on the coast north of Sydney, Australia. She is a frequent visitor to Arunachala.

man with a brilliant mind. He inspired a number of people to study Indian Philosophy and Art, particularly Advaita Vedanta. As a consequence Barry studied Ananda Coomaraswamy and the French metaphysician, Rene Guenon, in depth.

In the days before travel to India became popular, Snodgrass had made repeated journeys and when he was planning to set off again in the early 1950s, Barry Windsor decided to accompany him. Their purpose was to go to Kataragama in Sri Lanka, where there was an Ashram under the auspices of Swami Yogananda, a famous guru of the time. Neither had any intention of returning, feeling that they would embrace the life of sannyasins.

After a long sea voyage they reached Ceylon as it was then known and journeyed on to Kataragama where they met with Gauribala, who was commonly known as the German Swami. Gauribala was a disciple of Sri Yogaswami of Jaffna and had a small circle of people around him, including a seemingly ancient crone who served him. This old wise woman named each of the four young men who had gathered with the suffix 'kutti', meaning the small or young one. Snodgrass received the name of 'Punaikutti', the kitten, whilst Windsor was called 'Narikutti', the young jackal. He said, "The jackal will remain here, but the kitten will return to his home"; a prediction which proved correct. The now Narikutti Swami cut all ties with his past and never again contacted his family in Australia.

The two young men lived in Kataragama for some time, adapting to an extremely simple life-style without any of the Western comforts to which they were accustomed. In the hot climate, clothing was reduced to the traditional two pieces of khadi cloth (*vesti and tundu*) whilst food was rice and sambhar. At one time, they set off on a pilgrimage, wishing to visit the major Siva temples of South India, which symbolised the five elements. On this journey, they begged their food along with other sadhus who frequented the temples. Narikutti would sit in line with the other sadhus, receiving alms. Later he would keep only what he needed to purchase some food and then distribute any surplus to the other sadhus. With his keen sense of humour, he enjoyed being a beggar who gave alms. It seemed that Narikutti was made for

the life of a sadhu. He seemed to have an ear for language and quickly picked up conversational Tamil to converse. He made a life long study of Tamil and spoke it in the Jaffna style.

Longing to meet Sri Yogaswami, he made his way to Jaffna. Yogaswami, born in 1872, was a powerful spiritual figure, renowned for his terse words and apparent bad temper. But when for the first time, Narikutti sat down amongst the other devotees one evening, Yogaswami beckoned him to come up and sit beside him, favouring him with a fond look. This initial show of favour did not last though and subsequently Narikutti was sometimes forbidden to approach the guru's house, being sternly told "Go! Go away!" by Yogaswami, and even given a push. This was a common experience of the devotees. Narikutti persisted in remaining as close to his guru as he could until Yogaswami died in 1964. He deeply imbibed the spontaneous outpourings in word and song of his Master, which were mostly written down by whoever happened to be present. Later, amongst his sparse possessions, he kept a copy of *Natchintanai Songs and Sayings of Yogaswami* which was published by the Sivathondan Society of Jaffna in 1974. Yogaswami was a jnani of great experience and he demonstrated and emphasised *mounam* (silence). A little book called *Words of Our Master*, published in 1972, was also kept by Narikutti wherein Yogaswami's four Maha-Vakyas (Great Truths) were set out. These being:

There is no evil.  
We do not know— Who knows?  
All is Truth.  
It was determined long ago.

His teaching to disciples emphasised *mounam*, so that the Inner Guide could be heard. He instructed them to study and recite *Thirumuraikal* as a way of controlling the wandering mind. They were to practise purity of thought, word and deed, and recognize the sattvic quality of all human beings and the innate divinity of every being.

Narikutti remained in Jaffna for a while after the Mahasamadhi of his Master, performing some duties around the Ashram. One day he

questioned, “Why am I remaining here? Is it just for the sake of a regular supply of meals?” Narikutti was extremely proud of his sadhu status. Though begging for food was a respected way of getting food for a sadhu, his master had told him not to actually ask for anything. Yogaswami had told him, “Be like a python, let the food come to you”. In 1966, he decided to return to India and embarked on an extended *yatra* (pilgrimage) to holy places on foot. He walked as far north as Varanasi where he met Alan Ginsburg who was on his own journey. He finally returned to Sri Lanka but felt after some more years of residence, the call of Arunachala which he had visited several times on his trips to South India.

After a preparatory trip in 1968, he finally set off in 1970 for the only place that he had a desire to go to, which was the Holy Mountain, Sri Arunachala. He knew that Sri Ramana Maharshi had from an early age made his abode there and Narikutti was attracted by both the Mountain and the path of jnana exemplified by Sri Ramana.

In a short time he discovered that there was a sadhu’s dwelling up on the Mountain which was vacant and being taken care of by a priest of Sri Arunachaleswar Temple. It was the most westerly dwelling in the string of hermitages and ashrams which perched on the mountain, above the Western wall of the Temple and was called the Lakshmi Ammal Ashram. The approach was very rough without any proper path, the dwelling itself being partly a cave, with an added structure. A deep depression in the rock inside formed a meditation ‘hole’.

Narikutti set up residence and remained in this place for many years. He became well known to the surrounding villagers, who would seek his advice and help on their problems. Goatherds and grass gatherers all felt that they could approach him. He also earned the respect of the other sadhus and devotees who lived on the Mountain. He made improvements by cleaning out the small but deep tank which was situated just below his hut. With some help he constructed a path which connected to an existing one leading down to the Temple. Large and heavy stones were used in keeping with the other paths on the Mountain. Long before anyone thought of systematically planting trees, he began to plant trees to provide shade and beautify the area

with seeds sent from Australia. He took to pruning the lower branches to prevent people from hacking them off roughly for firewood. He had a small team of workers whom he would regularly engage in his projects, such as carrying water, not only for himself but for other devotees, less able to manage themselves. Before Sri Ramanasramam took over the care of Virupaksha Cave where Sri Ramana had stayed for seventeen years, he designed and supervised the construction of a new roof and entry for the place. He also took responsibility for Mulaipal Teertham, the sacred oasis frequented by all the sadhus on the mountain. He organised the funds, supervised the cleaning and in parts, reconstructed with new stones this major source of water for many of the sadhus on the Mountain.

Apart from these activities which made good use of his strong and lion-like constitution, he continued to study Vedantic writings, Puranas relating to the holy places of South India and particularly Sri Ramana’s writings. He had a fine intellect and would enjoy discussions on spiritual subjects with other resident swamis who became his friends. His way of communication was very direct, sometimes causing offence when he only meant to be humourous. He was fond of walking around Sri Arunachala, either alone in silence or discussing the fine points of spiritual teachings with a companion. His reputation as an expounder of Vedanta became known and quite a few Westerners visiting Tiruvannamalai would regularly find their way to his door.

He lived most simply and kept his abode clean and neat. Inside the hut, there was a higher level to the left of the door, which created a platform where he would sit during the day and sleep at night. He sat just inside the door, his back supported by a wooden plank propped against the wall at a steep angle. Within reach, he kept a notebook and three or four books, some stationery for writing letters, a black and a red pen and a ruler. His writing was extremely neat in Tamil and in English and he would rule the page with red ink, creating a neat form. Also within reach was a kerosene lantern, which he would light in the evenings. At the lower level, covered only by thatch, was a place for bathing and washing vegetables and cooking utensils. A single kerosene stove was used for cooking. Nearby was a solid timber chest, in which

were kept any foodstuffs, cloth and papers not in use. The top of the chest provided a seat for a visitor.

Narikutti always dressed in white vesti and tundu and he washed one set of clothes when taking his bath and hung it to dry on a rod above his bathing place. He prepared simple but tasty food for himself, of rice and vegetables and fruit salads from offerings brought to him or purchased if funds were sufficient. There were times when he survived on a pittance. He never asked for money, as his guru had instructed. Nevertheless, he was given money by local people and some Western visitors. He was thrifty, but frequently helped others out with money or goods at his disposal. He would serve visitors making the tea or food himself saying, "In this house, I am the housewife. I am in charge here." In one of his notebooks, he had written a Sanskrit word related to his name, which translated as "living in one's own house, free, independent". This was very important to him, a source of pride and strength.

Narikutti's health was not always good. The climate was hard on him and, as the years went by, he suffered from a number of maladies, developing trouble with his liver and intestines. His once powerful body began to show signs of deterioration and weakness despite the various medicines he took.

His life on the Mountain was not always peaceful and quiet. One day, thieves broke into his hut while he was at home. They clubbed him brutally and turned everything upside down, in search of money or valuables, which they were disappointed not to find. This episode caused Narikutti much anguish. With his deteriorating health and difficulty in climbing up and down from the hill, with deep regret, he was forced to move down from the hill and was kindly given a room in Seshadri Ashram.

At this time, he decided to make a journey to Australia as friends had suggested that a few months' rest in Australia could be very beneficial to his extremely poor health. He accepted this advice with the certainty that he would always return to India. Many years earlier he had been told by a Sri Lankan astrologer that he would make one journey to his homeland before he died. He believed implicitly what was foretold in that horoscope. After an absence of over forty years he

returned to the land of his birth and stayed with various friends and, in particular, stayed at the Hill of Fire Sanctuary in Coffs Harbour, New South Wales.

After some months he returned to Mother India but, the next few months were difficult for Narikutti as his health was failing and he was becoming quite weak. He suffered from serious bile attacks and one morning his cleaning servant arrived to find him sitting in the entrance to his house, breathing with difficulty, and very low indeed. He asked her to go and bring the doctor. But before the doctor could come, while he was alone, and sitting up straight, he ceased to breathe. He left his body as he lived: alone in the knowledge of his own strength to fearlessly face whatever life had to offer.

He had asked for his body to be cremated so this was arranged and carried out on the same day he was found: 15 September 1994.

Narikutti Swami who came to Arunachala full of the fire of tapas was absorbed into Sri Arunachala. He touched many by the example of his firm discipline and the whole-hearted, simple life of dedication and surrender to his guru. ▲

## VERSE

### Truth

D. SAMARENDER REDDY

Whence is Truth,  
Truth that is true  
As time begins and ends  
And even as it wends;  
Truth that is true  
Here, there  
And everywhere;  
Truth that is equally true  
For me and you.



# Ajaan Maha Boowa and Bhagavan's Self-enquiry

## Part One

REINHARD JUNG

Don't speculate or theorise about meditation practice. And don't mistakenly appropriate the knowledge you gain from reading this exposition, assuming that in doing so you understand the true nature of body and mind. Only clear and direct insight guided by mindfulness, investigated with wisdom, and pursued with diligence will penetrate that truth.

Some thirty years ago while struggling to gain a practical understanding of Bhagavan's Self-enquiry I began to study Buddhism. Even earlier, I had been deeply touched by some Zen essays, which stirred up a recognition in me, meeting as if an old friend after a long time and it was a great delight to realise that these masters had expressed what I longed for even though it still seemed to be far away.

Reinhard Jung visits Arunachala annually. He is a practitioner of natural remedies and homoeopathy.

Bhagavan has always been my pole-star of all spiritual truth itself. He entered my life through a book that was gifted to me by a friend quite unexpectedly at a time when I lived in a deep existential crisis. That's why I feel that he came to me. Although I did not understand much of the philosophy at first I was completely drawn in by the photos of Bhagavan and a serene atmosphere redolent of a beautiful perfume. This happened in 1970 but I feel that on the level of the heart everything was complete already.

The level of the personality on the other hand needed a lot of maturing into this heart-contact. Is it not an eternal paradox how simple spirituality is and at the same time how difficult? I am sure we cannot spare either aspect! If we listen to a great musician we can't fail to admire his effortless skill, a skill developed through a life-long training.

Self-enquiry like Bhagavan himself was a mystery to me and irresistible. I had learned Transcendental Meditation and during the six month TM teacher training course I meditated up to ten hours a day. There were subtle, quiet states of mind which open up the sense of awareness, and a love grows for this act of turning within. But self-enquiry was then like a Zen-koan — it was active and I strained myself trying to objectify the 'I'.

I soon came to know about the deep value of sensing and feeling 'into the body'. Many teachers work with this as an intermediary step in between, for instance the French Advaita teacher, Jean Klein. But this practical knowledge has been most elaborated in the Theravada school of Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> Because to turn to the perceiver was too big a step, attractive as it might be, I felt I had to start more from the ground of average experience — to realise the subject of the experience by starting from the objective stance as has been taught by Bhagavan right at the beginning in *Who am I?*:

As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, 'To whom has this thought arisen?' The answer that would emerge would be, 'To me.'...<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Theravada: said to be the original school of Buddhism. It exists in Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

<sup>2</sup> *Who Am I?* Section 11. Translated by TMP Mahadevan.

To realise that the momentary perceived object is to be *related to a subject* stresses the subjective part and helps let go of clinging to the object. This process of abandoning the unconscious relationship between a perceiving ego and its object starts in Theravada schools proceeding from outer to inner levels. In Vipassana one starts with the breath or general changing body sensations. The practice develops a continuous close watching practice sitting and walking meditation, which can intensify during retreats up to twenty hours or more.

I began to look at a master of the ascetic forest tradition of Thailand, Ajaan Maha Boowa.<sup>3</sup> He went through an intensive training process till he reached what is called in Theravada 'Arahantship',<sup>4</sup> meaning complete liberation. His account is given in a vital and powerful language in a compilation, *Arahattamagga*.<sup>5</sup> When he started his practice he soon achieved a certain level of concentration but began to 'rest on his laurels' and experienced a tantalising up and down period for some time without being able to stabilise his mind. He realised then:

I was forced to begin my practice anew. This time I first drove a stake firmly into the ground and held tightly to it no matter what happened. That stake was *buddho*, the recollection of the Buddha. I made the meditation-word *buddho* the sole object of my attention. I focused on the mental repetition of *buddho* to the exclusion of everything else. *Buddho* became my sole objective even as I made sure that mindfulness was always in control to direct the effort.

It was quite clear then to him that:

...to practise meditation earnestly to attain an end to all suffering, you must be totally committed to the work at each successive

<sup>3</sup> The Thailand form for *acharya*, teacher. *Maha*: An academic title for the mastery of Pali scripture.

<sup>4</sup> The interested reader may like to read the whole compilation *Arahattamagga*. You can freely download it at: [www.forestdhammabooks.com](http://www.forestdhammabooks.com)

<sup>5</sup> *Arahant*: worthy one. One who has reached final level of enlightenment.

stage of the path. Nothing less than total commitment will succeed. To experience the deepest levels of *samadhi* and achieve the most profound levels of wisdom,<sup>6</sup> you cannot afford to be half-hearted and listless, forever wavering because you lack firm principles to guide your practice. Meditators without a firm commitment to the principles of practice can meditate their entire lives without gaining the proper results. In the initial stages of practice, you must find a stable object of meditation with which to anchor your mind. Don't just focus casually on an ambiguous object, like awareness that is always present as the mind's intrinsic nature. Without a specific object of attention to hold your mind, it will be almost impossible to keep your attention from wandering. This is a recipe for failure. In the end, you'll become disappointed and give up trying.

What makes Ajaan Maha Boowa so inspiring for us devotees of Bhagavan? His words may challenge us to reflect our own practice. To focus on an 'ambiguous' consciousness 'like awareness that is always present' — this could be a great danger with many who might take Bhagavan's words too superficially and be deceived by our identification of the ego with pure consciousness. Ajaan Maha Boowa's path was not necessarily the outward form according to his Theravada tradition but it took a turn of deep devotion towards Truth. He set a standard of the highest level. What I admire about his practical approach was the deep devotion he brings to the unfolding of the whole path step by step until true ego dissolution. We have to be aware of the fact that to realise the Absolute we require a total transformation and a 'royal battle', as Bhagavan has put it. Jnana<sup>7</sup> is nothing less than the complete disappearance of the ego. But before this the matrix of all vasanas has dissolved:

...we constantly allow our minds to be agitated and confused, engulfed in mental defilements that assail us from every direction.

<sup>6</sup> Wisdom or *panna*: Wisdom, knowledge of things as they are. Concentrated introspective insight capable of the deepest understanding. In Sanskrit, *prajna*.

<sup>7</sup> In Pali it is *nyana*.

They so overpower our minds that we never rise above these contaminating influences, no matter how hard we try. The vast majority of people are not even interested enough to try: They simply close their eyes and allow the onslaught to overwhelm them.

Certainly no complaisant neo-advaitic attitude can spare us this great inner work of purifying our minds. Ajaan Maha Boowa had understood the challenge:

The only antidote is a single, uncomplicated focal point of attention; such as a meditation-word or the breath. Choose one that seems most appropriate to you, and focus steadfastly on that one object to the exclusion of everything else. Total commitment is essential to the task.

*My choice was Buddhisto Meditation.*<sup>8</sup> From the moment I made my resolve, I kept my mind from straying from the repetition of *buddho*. From the moment I awoke in the morning until I slept at night, I forced myself to think only of *buddho*. At the same time, I ceased to be preoccupied with thoughts of progress and decline: If my meditation made progress, it would do so with *buddho*; if it declined, it would go down with *buddho*. In either case, *buddho* was my sole preoccupation. All other concerns were irrelevant.

It is interesting that some of the foremost devotees of Bhagavan also started their respective training with *japa*. Muruganar was asked to repeat 'Siva' as a preliminary practice to vichara and he adds that Bhagavan additionally instructed him to inquire into the source of thoughts.<sup>9</sup> Annamalai Swami requested Bhagavan for a mantra and Bhagavan directed him to continuously repeat 'Siva'.<sup>10</sup> Viswanatha

<sup>8</sup> *Buddho*: Buddha; the one who is aware, used also for 'awareness'. Originally part of the formula used for recollection of the Buddha. In the Thai forest tradition this word is often used as a meditation word that is mentally repeated and used as a preparatory object for developing concentration.

<sup>9</sup> *Upadesa Tiruvahaval* by Muruganar, lines 111–12.

<sup>10</sup> *Living by the Words of Bhagavan* by David Godman, p.168.

Swami reported that ‘Bhagavan advised him to engage in non-stop japa, day and night, except during hours of sleep.’<sup>11</sup>

Maintaining such single-minded concentration is not an easy task. I had to literally force my mind to remain entwined with *buddho* each and every moment without interruption. Regardless of whether I was seated in meditation, walking meditation or simply doing my daily chores, the word *buddho* resonated deeply within my mind at all times. By nature and temperament, I was always extremely resolute and uncompromising. This tendency worked to my advantage. In the end, I became so earnestly committed to the task that nothing could shake my resolve; no errant thought could separate the mind from *buddho*.

The longer I internalized *buddho*, the more subtle the *citta*<sup>12</sup> became, until eventually the subtlety of *buddho* and the subtlety of the *citta* melded into one another and became one and the same essence of knowing. I could not separate *buddho* from the *citta*’s subtle nature. Try as I might, I could not make the word *buddho* appear in my mind.

All that remained then was the *citta*’s profoundly subtle knowing nature, a pure and simple awareness, bright and clear. There was nothing concrete within that awareness to latch on to. With the loss of *buddho*, I had to focus my attention on the essential sense of awareness and knowing that was all-present and prominent at that moment. That consciousness had not disappeared; on the contrary, it was all-pervasive.

Before long, my daily practice assumed a new rhythm: I concentrated intently on *buddho* until consciousness resolved into the clear, brilliant state of the mind’s essential knowing nature,

<sup>11</sup> *The Power of the Presence: Part Two* by David Godman, p.235.

<sup>12</sup> *Citta*: used both for relative consciousness and also for pure awareness.

remaining absorbed in that subtle knowing presence until normal awareness returned; and I then refocused with increased vigour on the repetition of *buddho*.

It was during this stage that I first gained a solid spiritual foundation in my meditation practice. From then on, my practice progressed steadily — never again did it fall into decline.

By that stage, the mind had advanced to *samadhi* — an intense state of focused awareness, assuming a life of its own, independent of any meditation technique. Fully calm and unified, the knowing presence itself became the sole focus of attention, a condition of mind so prominent and powerful that nothing else can arise to dislodge it.

This is known as the mind being in a state of continuous *samadhi*. In other words, the *citta* is *samadhi* — both are one and the same.

Here the next stage opened up. While he was sitting one night and as usual easily entered *samadhi* Ajaan Maha Boowa started to experience the most intensive pain:

Eventually, my body was so racked by severe pain that I could hardly cope. The *citta* was suddenly unnerved, and its good, strong foundation completely collapsed.

I thought: ‘Hey, what’s going on here? I must make every effort to figure out this pain tonight.’ So I made the solemn resolve that no matter what happened I would not get up from my seat until dawn of the next day. I was determined to investigate the nature of pain until I understood it clearly and distinctly. I would have to dig deep. But, if need be, I was willing to die in order to find out the truth about pain.

Thus started one of his inner adventures that required all of his courage until the moment he could clearly see that his consciousness or *citta* was different from his sensations:

As soon as this principle became absolutely clear, the pain vanished in an instant.

At that moment, the body was simply the body—a separate reality on its own. Pain was simply feeling, and in a flash that feeling vanished straight into the *citta*.

In addition, the entire physical body vanished from awareness. At that moment I was not consciously aware of the body at all. Only a simple and harmonious awareness remained — it alone. That's all. The *citta* was so exceedingly refined as to be indescribable. It simply knew — a profoundly subtle inner state of awareness pervaded.

Only the *citta's* essential knowing nature remained...It was totally empty, but at the same time vibrantly aware. This knowing presence was a pure and solitary awareness that was not connected to anything whatsoever. It was awesome, majestic and truly magnificent...

There was no movement — not even the slightest rippling — inside the *citta*.

The *citta* emerged bold, exultant and utterly fearless. Fear of death ceased that night.

Getting up that morning, I felt indescribably bold and daring. I marvelled at the amazing nature of my experience. Nothing comparable had ever happened in my meditation before.

And what is it that dies?

The four elements — earth, water, wind and fire — they don't die. As for the *citta*, how can it die? It becomes more conspicuous, more aware and more insightful. This essential knowing nature never dies, so why is it so afraid of death? Because it deceives itself. For eons and eons it has fooled itself into believing in death when actually nothing ever dies. ▲

## BOOK EXCERPT

# Tat Tvam Asi

PAUL LOKE

*Among the many books published on Advaita today there are but a few which present the intricacies of Advaita Vedanta in a simple, clear and straightforward manner understandable to the general reader without compromising the subtlety of Advaita. Paul Loke's Tat Tvam Asi is such a book and is now available in the ashram book shop. It costs Rs. 100/-.*

### Self-luminosity of Consciousness

**W**e shall approach this final topic in our chapter on the transcendental Self and human experience by first identifying all the plausible means of knowing the Self. Thereafter, each of the possibilities will be critically examined with a view to arrive at the correct answer to the question of how the Self can be known. The following are three possibilities that one can think of: (1) Self is known by an external object; (2) the Self is known by another Self; and (3) the Self knows itself.

Paul Loke lives in Singapore. In 2002 he was awarded a doctorate for his thesis *Tat Tvam Asi* by the Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Viswa Maha Vidyalaya, Kancheepuram.

The first possibility is inadmissible. To say that the Self can be known by an external object is to say that it can be known by the not-Self, for whatever is external to the Self is other than the Self i.e. the not-Self. The not-Self, as we have shown, refers to all the objects of the world including the mind, the senses and the body, which are material and insentient. An object, which is material (*jadavastu*), is not capable of knowing anything. Therefore, the answer that the Self can be known by an external object is untenable.

The second, that the Self is known by another Self, is equally unacceptable for two main reasons. Firstly, this explanation is based on the untenable assumption that there is more than one Self. Such an assumption is contrary to the central doctrine of Advaita, which holds the view that there is only one Self. Secondly, the objection is on the ground of logic. Let us, for the sake of argument, accept the claim that the Self is known by another Self. The immediate question which follows would be, 'How is the second Self known?' If the answer is, 'By a third Self', then this again invites the question of how the 'third Self' is known. Such a position invariably lands us in the logical difficulty of infinite regress (*anavastha-dosa*). Thus, on both counts, the answer that the Self is known by another Self has to be rejected.

This leaves us with the third and final possible answer to the question, viz., the Self knows itself. This answer is based on the assumption that the Self is both the knower and the known, or the cogniser and the cognised, at the same time. This assumption is again untenable. Unlike the Self, a material object is made up of parts. And any object that is made up of parts is divisible. Therefore, it is at least conceivable for an object, which is material, that one part may be the cogniser and another part, the cognised. However, according to Advaita, the Self or pure consciousness is non-dual, homogenous and indivisible. Scriptural justification aside, it is common logic that one and the same entity cannot be both the subject and the object. To use an earlier example, the finger can touch something else but not itself.

It is therefore clear from the above discussion that all the three alternatives are untenable. The question, however, remains as to how is the Self known. In the light of Advaita, such a question is really a

contradiction in terms because one only speaks of knowing something when that thing is unknown. The Self, unlike any object, is never completely unknown. Indeed, to everyone the Self is known. The real issue at hand is to what degree is the Self known. Everyone knows that there is a spiritual principle in him, which is different from the body, the senses and the mind. In his commentary on the *Bhagavad-gita*, Sankara points out that the Self is not something unknown to everybody. It is only not fully known. For most of us, only the general aspect (*samanya-amsa*) of the Self is known. We know that the Self exists. And we make this claim on the ground that in the absence of the Self, the mind, the senses and the body will not function.<sup>1</sup> However, the special aspect (*visesa-amsa*) of the Self is unknown to us. That is to say, we are ignorant of the Self's real nature. Therefore, the Self is known in a general way. This is evident from statements, such as, 'I know myself', 'I exist', etc., which we all make at one time or another. Beyond that, the real nature of the Self as truth, consciousness and bliss remains unknown. At most, some of us may have the intellectual knowledge of the Self from studying the scriptures or listening to spiritual discourses.

The knowledge of the Self, even at the general level, is unlike the knowledge of an object, for example, a stone or a chair. A stone, for instance, is always an object because it has to be known. Being a material entity, it can never be the knowing subject. As an object, the stone requires a subject to know it. The Self, however, is not in such a logical predicament. The Self is not an object of knowledge in the sense in which a stone or a table is an object of knowledge. These objects are known through *pramanas*, such as, perception. It is, however, impossible to prove the existence of the Self by any *pramana*. Every *pramana* functions with the help of, and presupposes, the existence of the Self. What is presupposed by a *pramana* can never be proved by it. In the case of the Self, there is no need for any proof by any *pramana*. As in the case of the building, the existence of the superstructure is sufficient proof for the existence of the foundation.

<sup>1</sup> Self-existence cannot be denied. No one can doubt his own existence or consciousness because even to deny it presupposes the one who denies it.

The question of proof does not arise at all because the building cannot exist without the foundation. The latter is presupposed by the former. The same explanation holds good in the case of the Self. Every case of knowing is made possible by the Self, and every time we make any knowledge claim, we presuppose the existence of the Self. So, the Self does not remain unknown. An object requires something else to know it. However, being the ground of all experiences, there is really nothing apart from the Self to know it. “Where there is duality, there one perceives another, one smells another, one tastes another, one contacts another, knows another, but where all this is Atman, who is there to think, touch and know whom? Who can know him by whom all this is known?... Who can know the knower”, declares a text from the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the normal mind is an instrument of knowledge for ordinary objects. Being a finite entity, it can never know the infinite, as the pen will never know or understand the writer who is using it. More specifically, the Self being Self-luminous (*svaprakasa*), is shining all the time, revealing its presence. The term ‘*svaprakasa*’ conveys the idea that while the Self reveals every thing else, it itself is not revealed by anything.<sup>3</sup> We have seen in the earlier sections of the chapter that the Self is revealing all the time; at the waking level, at the dream level and at the deep-sleep level. The Self reveals because that is its nature. The Self is eternal light. It reveals the world, the body, the senses and the mind. Even in deep-sleep, where the mind, senses and body are absent, the Self is still revealing. It is like fire, where the burning capacity manifests when something flammable, like a piece of wood, is brought near it. Fire burns only when something comes into contact with it. But unlike fire, the revelation of the Self is always manifest because it reveals not only the presence of objects, as in the case of waking and dream states, but also the

absence of objects, as in the case of deep-sleep. The power of revelation of the Self is manifest in the presence as well as absence of objects.

It is the non-relational Self that becomes the *jiva* due to *avidya*. The mind-sense-body complex is a product of *avidya*. What is called the *jiva* is the Self in association with, or conditioned by, the mind-sense-body complex. The *jiva* is the Self-in-the-body. Though the Self by its very nature is non-relational, it becomes relational, as it were, with the mind-sense-body complex and gets involved in empirical existence as the knower, agent and enjoyer. The Self-in-itself, which is not involved in any empirical experience, is called *turiya*, or simply, the Fourth. This is the Self, which is called *visva* at the waking level, *taijasa* at the dream level and *prajna* at the deep sleep level. When all the three levels of experience are transcended, when the *vyavaharika* is left behind, ‘That Beyond’ where only the Self remains is called the Fourth. The Fourth is beyond the three states of experience. There is no cognition, be it external or internal and all distinctions of knower, known and knowledge have faded into oblivion. It is beyond *avidya*. It is, therefore, said to be trans-empirical and trans-relational.

It is Ludwig Wittgenstein who taught us that at the highest level of mystical experience, what cannot be spoken of can only be shown. Wittgenstein made the distinction between the language of saying and the language of showing. The language of saying is effective up to certain point. Beyond which language is ineffective in describing that experience. Here too, the term ‘the Fourth’ is an admission of the limitations of language. What can we call the Self *per se*, which is beyond all experiences and therefore, all concepts? Since *visva* is designated as one, *taijasa* as two and *prajna* as three, the term ‘the Fourth’ is chosen in keeping with the same parlance to show that the Self is by itself and not involved in any kind of experience. It is important to underscore that this term does not imply the existence of four Selves. Also, one should guard against the mistaken notion that the Fourth is referring to a state beyond the deep-sleep level. As we have discussed, experience is one. The three states are mere superimpositions. When the Self becomes conditioned by the limiting adjuncts, it is given different names. The truth is that there is only one

<sup>2</sup> *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, 4.5.15.

<sup>3</sup> Several Upanisadic texts have stated this. In the *Katha Upanisad*, it is said, “When he shines, everything shines after him; by his light all this is lighted.” (2.2.15). Another text declares, “Here in this dream state, this Self is self-luminous.” *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, 4.3.9.

Self. The Self, which is beyond all distinctions and experiences, is called the Fourth. In the *Mandukya Upanisad*, the Fourth is described as, “That which is not conscious of the internal world, nor conscious of the external world, nor conscious of both the worlds, nor a mass of consciousness, nor conscious, nor unconscious; which is unseen, beyond empirical dealings, beyond the grasp (of the organs of action), uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable; whose valid proof consists in the single belief in the Self; in which all phenomena cease; and which is unchanging, auspicious and non-dual. That is the Self and That is to be intuited.”<sup>4</sup> According to Sankara, in his commentary on the above text, ‘nor conscious of the internal world’ means the elimination of the dream state. This is followed by the elimination of the waking state (‘nor conscious of the external world’) and the state between dream and waking (‘nor conscious of both worlds’). The state of deep sleep is also denied in the expression ‘nor a mass of consciousness’. Awareness of all objects simultaneously (nor conscious) and ignorance (nor unconscious) are ruled out in the Fourth too.

In this chapter, we have seen how the transcendental Self is segmented into the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. Although the Self remains unchanging and uninvolved, it is called *visva*, *taijasa* and *prajna* at each of the three levels of experience. We have also seen how the nameless Self at the waking and dream levels become involved and intentional thus giving rise to the knowledge situation. An essential feature in both these states is the *antahkarana-vrtti*, which makes cognition and experience possible. In the ultimate analysis, the Self or Brahman from the acosmic standpoint is the only reality. As the ever-luminous revealing effulgence, the Self is always known. Every act of cognition and every claim made by the *jiva* presupposes the Self. Perhaps no where else has this been summed up more cogently than the point made by Yajnavalkya in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* when he says,

<sup>4</sup> *Mandukya Upanisad*, 7. Intuitive knowledge is something discussed by Spinoza. He calls this ‘*scientia intuitiva*’. Central to this kind of knowing, according to Spinoza, is the ‘immediate union with the thing itself’. This, as we shall see in Chapter 5, is very similar to the concept of liberation in Advaita where the aspirant becomes one with Brahman i.e. knowledge as Brahman.

“When the sun and the moon have both set, the fire has gone out, and speech has stopped... the Self serves as his (the *jiva*) light. It is through the light of the Self that he sits, goes out works and returns”.<sup>5</sup> Being the very basis of experience, the Self can never be known. ▲

<sup>5</sup> *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, 4.3.6.

## VERSE

### Heart, Hold On a Little Longer

D. SAMARENDER REDDY

Futile may seem everything  
And in your step no spring  
Heart, hold on a little longer.

If friendships seem broken  
By some stray words spoken  
Heart, hold on a little longer.

Tempestuous thoughts in the mind  
Fuelled by doubt of many a kind  
Heart, hold on a little longer.

If Truth seems out of reach  
Despite what sages preach  
Heart, hold on a little longer.

Darkness though there be  
In it, too, there is He  
Heart, hold on a little longer.

# 2008 ASHRAM CALENDAR

Pongal	Tuesday	15th Jan
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Tuesday	22nd Jan
Sri Vidya Havan	Wednesday	30th Jan
Sundaram Iyer Day	Monday	25th Feb
<b>Maha Sivaratri</b>	Thursday	6th Mar
Telugu New Year Day	Monday	7th Apr
Tamil New Year Day	Sunday	13th Apr
Sri Rama Navami	Monday	14th Apr
<b>Bhagavan's Aradhana</b>	Saturday	3rd May
<b>Maha Puja (Mother's Aradhana)</b>	Thursday	29th May
Cow Lakshmi Day	Monday	14th July
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Friday	18th July
<b>Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day</b>	Monday	1st Sept
Navaratri Festival commences	Tuesday	30th Sept
Saraswati Puja	Wednesday	8th Oct
Vijayadasami	Thursday	9th Oct
Deepavali	Monday	27th Oct
Karthigai Festival commences	Tuesday	2nd Dec
<b>Karthigai Deepam</b>	Thursday	11th Dec
<b>Bhagavan's 129th Jayanthi</b>	Sunday	11th Jan 2009

# RAMANA KIDS' CORNER



I don't know how to meditate. I don't understand self-enquiry. I don't understand some of Bhagavan's teachings. I need guidance. Where can I get guidance? Who is my guide? If these thoughts bother you, read the letter below....

Dear Children,

I would like to share with you this most beautiful story. I heard this directly from none other than, Smt. Kanakammal, a senior devotee, who has lived most of her life in Thiruvannamalai. Kanakammal Amma came to Bhagavan when she was a young girl, could not escape the powerful grips of Bhagavan's presence, and by Bhagavan's Grace stayed for the rest of her life close to the Ashram. What a blessing!

Once Bhagavan was sitting in the hall surrounded by devotees. Among these devotees, were present Ganapathi Muni (affectionately called Nayana) and Muruganar. Who hasn't heard of these stellar devotees of Bhagavan? Just then, an illiterate devotee walked into the hall and asked for upadesha (instruction) from Bhagavan. Bhagavan replied with his characteristic Brahmashastra (ultimate weapon)! Bhagavan advised the devotee to do self-enquiry, to enquire

## MOUNTAIN PATH

‘Who Am I?’. Nayana on hearing this was overcome with surprise, and remarked that one cannot expect everybody to be capable of understanding such responses! How can everybody comprehend self-enquiry, is it not too complex for an illiterate?

Muruganar quickly responded that Bhagavan’s response is not only in the words, but along with the words, His Grace is transmitted. So definitely the devotee would not only understand Bhagavan’s teachings but his whole life would be transformed by Bhagavan’s Grace.

So, children, if you are wondering on how to meditate, or how to do self-enquiry or do not understand some of Bhagavan’s works — fear not! All you have to do is to have a sincere urge and make attempts to meditate or understand Bhagavan’s teachings. The guidance will surely come from Bhagavan. Ask anybody— Bhagavan has never failed anyone! ▲



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



### Modern Neo-Advaita

I happened to read the article of Sadhu Tanmaya Chaitanya in the July issue. To put it mildly, it is an article which (for the Neo-Advaitins) has the effect of getting shot in point blank range with a battle tank cannon! I can see through it as a true seeker’s search and struggle. It is my own experience too, for these days one has to wade through a mass of pseudo-Advaitic literature before one arrives at a correct understanding. So one has to be quite wary indeed!

It is actually a surprise to see such an article of so much power printed in a generally mild *Mountain Path*. I heartily commend the author of the article and the MP team for publishing some firebrand stuff, and hope we will get more of such good articles in future.

— Ramakrishnan, ‘Davidacharya’, Rishikesh

### Bhagavan’s Teachings and His Role in Guru Vachaka Kovai

Thanks for publishing two excellent articles in MP, October–December 2007—*The Crest-Jewel of Bhagavan’s Teachings* and *Bhagavan’s Role in the editing of Guru Vachaka Kovai (GVK)*.

*The Crest-Jewel of Sri Bhagavan’s Teachings* by Michael James is interesting and lucid commentary written on what he rightly calls as sum and substance of Bhagavan’s teachings.

In reference to the second article about *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, Sadhu Om wrote on the role of Bhagavan with reference to *GVK* verses in his preface to the verses (second edition of Tamil verses). He says Muruganar Swami composed beautiful Tamil verses on day to day basis containing the teachings and instructions given by Bhagavan (to the aspirants). These verses were presented to Bhagavan and gathered, after His approval, as a collection. Bhagavan edited and corrected while checking these verses. He also composed new verses wherever there was scope for making it terse and clear or for incorporating new ideas. Our general impression about Bhagavan, from various accounts, is that He remained unconcerned, more often than not, to what happened in His presence; but *GVK* seems to be an exception. He deeply involved Himself in studying and editing the verses.

There is an old Tamil saying which states that the one who knows doesn't talk about it and the one who talks doesn't know. The implication is that the one with *anubhava*, experience, doesn't talk about it and the one who talks doesn't have the *anubhava*. Every rule has exceptions and Bhagavan and Muruganar were exceptions, as we all know. The saying can also be interpreted as *Mouna* (Silence), the real Mahatma, doesn't talk, as there are no words or thoughts in pure consciousness, and the individuals who talk, as seen by others, are not the ones having the experience, as there are no individuals in reality.

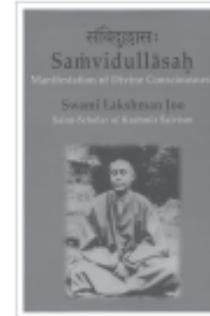
I would like to make a suggestion in this connection.

It would be interesting to see the photo copies of *GVK* verses 1240 to 1248 under the title 'Narration of the Experience' with corrections of Bhagavan in His own hand writing. There is a section in MP for Bhagavan's hand writing and these photo copies could be presented under this section serving the dual purpose of showing the details of editorial intervention by Bhagavan as well as His own hand writing.

— M. Sahadevan

*We will check with the archives and see if it is at all possible to publish further manuscript photocopies of Bhagavan's hand writing, in particular Guru Vachaka Kovai.*  
— Editor

## BOOK REVIEWS



SAMVIDULLASAH MANIFESTATION OF DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS. Swami Lakshman Joo, Saint-Scholar of Kashmir Saivism, A Centenary Tribute ed. by Bettina Baumer & Sarla Kumar. D.K. Printworld, New Delhi. 2007. 238pp., Rs. 1,200. ISBN: 81-246-0414-2 www.dkprintworld.com

Lakshman Joo was a great Kasmiri saint and sage who left this world in 1991. This volume commemorates his birth centenary. *Mountain Path* readers know of this respected yogi and who came to Bhagavan in 1936 and received initiation by look (*drstidiksa*). There is a record in *Talks* of several conversations with Bhagavan. One can see from a photo of the time his humility in the presence of Bhagavan. He spent several happy weeks at Arunachala before returning to Kashmir where he upheld and enriched the school of Kashmir Saivism with his scholarship, deep sincerity and sanctity. He was a lineage-holder of a tradition dating back to Abhinavagupta, the eleventh century great Kashmiri Saivite preceptor. Some say he is the last holder of this lineage with no apparent successor in sight.

Normally commemorative volumes are more about style and less about substance but in this instance we see a first-rate exception. The editors have brought together a thoughtful collection of serious yet approachable essays on Lakshman Joo the person and the philosophy of Kashmir Saivism. There are essays by the eminent scholars Jaidev Singh, Kapila Vatsyayan, and Alexis Sanderson as well as close devotees who were transformed by his company.

What struck me most about reading the various accounts by the contributors was their love and respect for their master. Lakhman Joo was obviously a loving, considerate and profound scholar who freely shared wisdom with all who came, in the right spirit of openness, intelligence and a willingness to learn.

Though Kashmir Saivism is very different from Sankara's Advaita there is much we can learn from this school whose central feature is the creative impulse of Siva, the all-pervasive Consciousness in which the self (*atma*) is not simply a witnessing consciousness but unlike Advaita, an active force that is the source of all manifestation and the cause of all distinctions. In its highest reality all is a manifestation of this Consciousness whose power is Spanda, the vibration of consciousness. — Amrit Ray



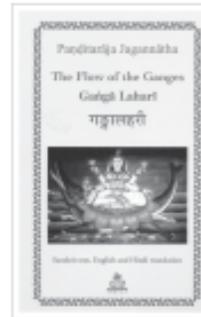
**MEDITATION** Talks on Meditation by Ajahn Chah. Buddhist Publication Society, PO Box 61, 54 Sangharaja Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka. 2006. 155pp., US\$4.50. ISBN13:978-955-24-0094-4 www.bps.lk

Ajahn Chah was a great Thai Buddhist meditation master who lived from 1918 to 1992. He was an eminently sensible monk whose life was dedicated to the practice of Vipassana-Samatha meditation. After years of assiduous practice in the forests of Thailand his reputation grew and a monastery was set up around him where he taught others based on Buddhist techniques and his profound experience. He was influential in the spread of these Theravadan meditation methods to the West where many forest meditation centres were set up under his guidance and support. His principal Western disciple is the respected Bhikkhu Sumedho who is based at the Chithurst Buddhist Monastery in England.

The collection of talks under review is refreshing for their directness and simplicity. It is an excellent introduction to meditation and provides level-headed, probing food for consideration. Though one may have heard it all before, coming from the lips of a master the Dhamma teaching resonates. Those who follow or practise Hindu spirituality will find compatibility and inspiration as we follow Ajahn Chah's insights into the workings of the mind. His primary concern is to explain the meaning of the Dhamma and how through meditation we can understand and transcend the blind workings of the mind which causes suffering.

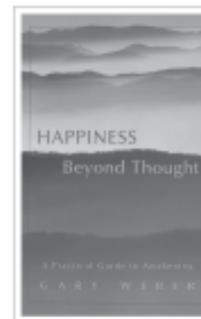
The Buddhist Publication Society, Sri Lanka is to be commended for this inspirational book and I would recommend the other titles in the catalogue if you go to the website.

— Christopher Quilkey



**THE FLOW OF THE GANGES GANGA LAHARI** by Panditaraja Jagannatha. Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP, India. 2007. 130pp, Rs145. ISBN: 81-86569-62-6 indicabooks@satyam.net.in

*The Ganga Lahari* is the best known poem in praise of the Ganga written by a seventeenth century pandit. It was written as a penance for marrying a non-Hindu which in those days was anathema for a Brahmin. Tormented by ostracism and guilt he went to the Ganga to bathe and found the river receding as he came towards it. He started to chant the slokas of the *Ganga Lahari* and with each step the Ganga advanced one step closer until he was immersed in its blissful waters. The book is both a commentary on the beauty and purity of the Ganga but also provokes a reader to consider its metaphysical, cultural and quotidian aspects especially today with all the man-made pollution the mighty river carries to the sea. For those who love the Ganga this poem speaks the prayers held in our heart that we cannot articulate — Varun Kumar Singh



**HAPPINESS BEYOND THOUGHT. A Practical Guide to Awakening** by Gary Weber. Ph.D. iUniverse Inc., 2007. 201 Pine Lake Road, Suite 100, Lincoln NE 68512 USA. 153pp., US\$15.95. ISBN-13:978-0-595-41856-5 www.iuniverse.com

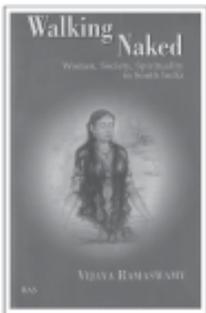
With all the endless talk about you are the Self and how all is One, it is refreshing to read a book in which nothing is taken for granted. Gary Weber is a successful businessman and dedicated meditator who has pursued over many years various paths and practices of hatha yoga, Zen, Hindu and Buddhist philosophy.

The book is a practical guide for beginners as well as for those who further along the path want both an overview and specific instructions to facilitate their practice. He starts with an introduction to what we consider to be our 'I' and how to awaken to happiness. The emphasis is very much on doing the practice rather than empty talk. With chapters on asanas, breathing, chanting, the concept of surrender in regard to scientific research on the brain the author competently guides us through an array of tools

which help us to deepen our practice. Mr Weber understands that happiness is the key to well-being and applies the teachings of Ramana Maharshi to cut through those cherished beliefs which blind us to the suffering we unnecessarily create for ourselves and for others.

The second half contains translations of three spiritual texts: *Upadesa Saram*, Sankara's *Nirvana Shatakam* and selections from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Though one could be picky with some of his interpretations of *Upadesa Saram*, on the whole he is faithful to the text and his commentary is quite effective. The book is not a stale set of overworked ideas but rather the author's practical intent is strongly communicated in a voice that is original and clear using traditional wisdom as the fundamental ground.

— Andrew Clement



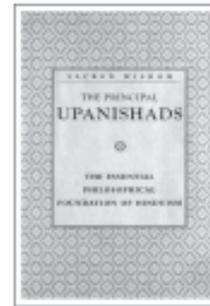
**WALKING NAKED: WOMEN, SOCIETY, SPIRITUALITY IN SOUTH INDIA**, Vijaya Ramaswamy, 2007. Published by Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla - 171 005 Tel: 0177-2830006, 2831375 E-mail: proiiias@yahoo.com www. iias.org, pp. 285, Rs. 400.

This revised and expanded second edition of the award-winning book of 1997 is supplemented with a new chapter on the history of women at Sri Ramanasramam. In "Gender and Monastic Living: The Ramanasramam", the author traces a long line of women devotees who came from all over India and abroad to sit at the feet of Sri Bhagavan. She consults various biographies and journals pertaining to early Ashram visits but also goes into the field to conduct interviews with women who currently come to the Ashram to ascertain what it is that draws them here.

The chapter outlines Bhagavan's unconventional views on women's rights and spirituality and points out the progressivist beginnings of Sri Ramanasramam — a shrine erected in dedication of a fully enlightened woman, Sri Bhagavan's mother. When asked about the unorthodox decision to entomb his widowed mother, the author paraphrases his response this way: "...In mukta and jnana there is no difference between man and woman, the body of a woman who had become liberated during her lifetime is not to be cremated for it is a temple."

Vijaya Ramaswamy is a Professor at the Centre for Historical Studies in the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, is an alumni of the School of Oriental and African Studies and was a Fulbright Fellow at Berkeley in California.

— M. S. Balasubramanian

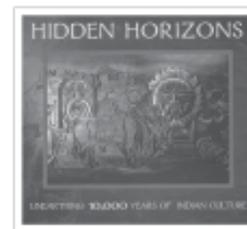


**THE PRINCIPAL UPANISHADS** The Essential Philosophical Foundation of Hinduism by Alan Jacobs. Sacred Wisdom. Duncan Baird Publishers, London.2007. ISBN 978-1-84483-460-0 pp.378, US\$10.95 or £5.95 www.dbponline.co.uk

Alan Jacobs is familiar to *The Mountain Path* readers as a writer, poet and chairman of the Ramana Maharshi Foundation, UK. In a superbly presented pocket sized edition Alan presents a selection from the principal Upanishads which have been reworked from existing translations in a style that is judicious, beautiful and effective.

I found familiar passages took on a new and fresh light in Alan's skilful hands. For reasons of space here is a condensed example: In the beginning /The Universe was the Self. / Pure Consciousness, alone; / There was the image / Of an archetypal man, / Purusha. / Looking around he saw nothing / Other than his own Self. / He uttered, "This is I-I." / So he became I-I by name. / Then if a man or woman / Is asked "Who are you?" / He or she replies, "This is I." / And then his other name, / Before the Self is destroyed / By fire all evils. /Therefore he was named 'man', / Purusha. / He who knows this burns down / Anyone who tries to supplant him."

— Christopher Quilkey



**HIDDEN HORIZONS** Unearthing 10,000 Years of Indian Culture by David Frawley & N.S. Rajaram. Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, Amdavad 2007.pp.180, Rs.100. ISBN 81-7526-331-8

There has been a simmering controversy over the past century which flared up in recent years concerning the question of the so-called Aryan invasion. New evidence discovered by NASA satellites has revealed traces of ancient river courses which establish the Saraswathi River as a reality and not a poetic myth.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

This has bolstered the arguments of those who state that there was no such incident as the Aryan invasion from Central Asia or Persia but that the Vedic tradition and culture was entirely home-grown. This book under review provides an excellent guide for those who wish to read in layman terms the archaeological, geological and linguistic arguments in support of the original Vedic literature being wholly indigenous.

The basic premise is that the Vedic culture started soon after 8000BCE(Before Common Era) when the last Ice Age ended. The Saraswathi basin became a major cultural centre where science and literature flourished and reached its pinnacle in 4000BCE when legendary sages of the Vasisthas and the Angirasas of the Kuru clans in the north and the Bhrigus of the Puru clan in the south prospered. The civilisation disappeared around 1900BCE when the Saraswathi dried up and the various clans shifted to the Gangetic plain.

This is a good introduction. The presentation is of a high quality as the book has been heavily subsidised by the Swaminarayan Aksharpath.

— T.V. Ramamurthy

**Books Received**

ESSENCE OF SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA by Dr. N.K. Srinivasan. Pustak Mahal. Delhi. 75pp, Rs60. [www.pustakmahal.com](http://www.pustakmahal.com)

SHIVA-AHIMNA STOTRAM Hymn on the Greatness of Shiva. Translated by D.V. Bhatt & S.V. Ganesan. 60pp. [www.shaivam.org](http://www.shaivam.org)

SANSKRIT PRIMER by Prof. R.T.Vyas. Yoga Resource Inc, 201, Harmony Complex, Alkapuri, Vadodara 390007. [www.sanskritacademy.com](http://www.sanskritacademy.com) 104 pp., price not stated.

AN EXPERIMENT IN SPIRITUAL ENQUIRY FOR THE YOUTH by C. Shanmuganayagam. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai 1998. pp.124, Rs.90.

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY FOR PEACE & PROSPERITY. Teachings of Sage T.G. Narayanaswamy. Compiled by R.Ganesh. TGN Foundation Centre for Self-Realisation, 1F, Dev Apts, 13&14 Sunderrajan St, Abhiramapuram, Chennai 18, 2002. [www.tgnfoundation.org](http://www.tgnfoundation.org) & [pamban@vsnl.com](mailto:pamban@vsnl.com) pp 352, price not stated.

PARABLES FOR THE SOUL by K. Venkatraman. Srishti Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2001. pp.192, Rs.145.

VISWACHAITANYAM LO SATYADARSANAM (Telugu& English) by Kasturi Bhaskara Rao. 2005.Narodaya Book House, Arya Samaj Mandi, Baddechowdi Hyderabad 500027. pp.205, price not stated. ▲



### Karthigai Deepam

The Deepam Festival is the pre-eminent celebration of *tejostala* Tiruvannamalai when the Holy Hill shines in full splendour and pours out Divine Grace on devotees near and far.

The 2007 festival season began with the flag-raising (*dwajarahana*) ceremony at the Arunachaleswara Temple on Thursday, 15th November, and climaxed with the Bharani Deepam, in the early morning hours of the 24th November. Maha Deepam occurred at sundown. Processions along the four streets around the Temple took place both day and night throughout the ten day Festival and this year saw an unprecedented turn-out for the seventh day of the procession around the Temple when the Big Chariot circumambulated the Temple. At the Ashram, record crowds came on the evening of the 24th for the lighting of the *Akhandajyoti* cauldron in front of the Samadhi Hall at the spot Bhagavan always sat for the event. Lighting of the 'Lamp' atop the Hill took place each night at 6 pm, followed by devotees' recitation of Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai*. This year two million people are estimated to have circumambulated the Hill during the Festival.

### Krishna Yajur Veda Ghana Parayanam

Devotees had the opportunity to hear the second *pada* of the Yajur Ghana Parayanam continued from last year's Deepam celebration. Organized by the Ashram Veda Patasala teacher, Sri Senthil Natha Ganapadigal, ten Vedacharyas gathered for the recitation. The entire Yajur Veda is to be completed by Deepam 2009. The Sama Veda was performed by visiting priests each afternoon.

### Sri Bhagavan's 128th Jayanthi

For many of Bhagavan's devotees, Navaratri, Deepavali and Deepam are preludes to the biggest event of the year, Bhagavan's Jayanthi. In 2007, Jayanthi fell on 25th December and began with the traditional *dhanurmasa* puja in the early morning, followed by hymns on and by Sri Bhagavan, the morning. The highpoint was the Mahapuja in the late morning. All who attended this auspicious event experienced the grace of Sri Bhagavan's enduring presence.



### Navaratri

Navaratri at Sri Matrubhuteswara shrine began with a procession on the 11th October and concluded on the 20th with Vijayadasami. This festival is a favourite among devotees as the Mother shows her abundant kindness to all present. Laksharchana and the recitation of *Devi Mahatmyam* were performed daily in the Mother's Shrine and for three nights, devotees heard devotional music in the dining hall organized by Mr. Kandasamy of Tiruchi. Chennai Smt. Revathi Krishna (Veena), Andankoil Sri A.V.S. Sundarajan (vocal), and Dharmapuram Sri S. Jnanaprakasam (vocal) were among the artists who performed as well as *Konnakkol* by Trichy Sri R. Thayumanavaswami on all three nights as in previous years.

### Samvatsara Abhishekam

To mark three years since the Ashram Kumbhabhishekam, on 3rd November, 2004, a special puja and homam were performed on Punarvasu Day, 1st November. Sri Rudra Ganaparayana was performed in the afternoon led by the Veda Patasala teacher.



### Sri Ramachandra University Free Medical Camp

More than forty health care professionals from Sri Ramachandra University arrived on 10th November, in preparation for a free medical camp the following day. Twelve departments were represented including paediatrics, cardiology, orthopaedics, neurology and dental care. The staff came equipped with state-of-the-art technical support and provided medical advice over one thousand Ashram residents and devotees at the Mourvi compound during the course of the day. Credit for the camp's astonishing efficiency goes to the camp organizer, Prof. S. Thanikachalam, administrators, Dr. S. Anandan and Dr. K. Balaji Singh, and the camp in-charge, Mr. K. Vaithy Subramanian.

### Muruganar Mandiram Book Release

Muruganar Mandiram at Ramanathapuram released a new Tamil volume entitled *Bhagavan Ramana and Muruganar*, in conjunction with celebrations on Muruganar's Samadhi day, on 11th September. Swamis Paramananada and Swarupananda, Dr TNP Haran and Somasundaram of Madurai Mandiram gave discourses at the event. The book was compiled by Balasubramanian of Pollachi.

### Sivaprakasam Pillai Memorial Inauguration

Inauguration of the new Sivaprakasam Pillai Memorial, planned for 1st November, was postponed due to heavy rains and flooding in the area near Idayan Palchori village, 8 km from Chidambaram. The revised date of the function is 16th December.

### Obituary: Sri Ganapathi Raman

Sri Ganapathi Raman was related to Bhagavan through Bhagavan's mother who was the sister of Sri Ganapathi Raman's grandfather. He had his first darshan of Bhagavan in 1932 at the age of twelve when his uncle Narayana Iyer and he came to see Bhagavan with the boy's mother, who was gravely ill at the time. Though knowing his mother's condition, Bhagavan suggested they take her for giripradakshina. As she could not walk properly, Bhagavan suggested they be



accompanied by a bullock cart for carrying food and water. At about noon, bracing his mother as they went, they reached Adi Annamalai at which point she began to speak a little. On reaching Bhagavan's bridge, they stopped for food and found her much improved. After some 12 hours of slow walking and rests they completed the circuit, and, in the hours and days that followed, she made a dramatic recovery. From that time on, the family came for regular visits to the Ashram, later settling in Tiruvannamalai.

In 1944, Ganapathi Raman secured a position in government service. While stationed at Vellore, he visited the Ashram weekly. Unmindful of the hot sun, upon arrival, he would start his giripradakshina, giving alms to sadhus along the way. In 1983 he retired and began 25 years of service in the Ashram in charge of accounts. He was punctual in his duties and cordial with co-workers. Gentle natured, kind and unassuming, he never encroached into the affairs of others. He was self-reliant in personal matters in spite of others' offers of assistance. Recalling



Sri Niranjanananda Swami's dedicated service to the Ashram, he held Bhagavan's beloved brother up as a model of selfless service and kept a photo of him above his desk.

An orthodox Hindu, Ganapathi Raman rose each morning at 3 am, did his morning oblations, and performed puja in his room. When his health no longer permitted his regular pradakshinas, he started circumambulating Arunachaleswar temple each afternoon.

In April 2007 Sri Ganapathi Raman appeared to have suffered a minor stroke, but within a short time he recovered and resumed his normal routine. On 27th September, he worked in the ashram office as usual and rose the following morning at 3 am. However, when his attendant returned to check on him at 3.30 am, Sri Ganapathi was found peaceful as though asleep: he had attained the Supreme at the feet of Arunachala. Family and friends gathered during the course of the day and final rites were performed at 4pm on the 28th September.

With Sri Appichi Mama's passing in July 2007, a devotee rightly remarked, "A large banyan tree has fallen!" With Sri Ganapathi Raman's passing yet another great banyan tree has fallen. Devotees will miss him. ▲