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Ramana Ashtottaram

56. ओ विमलाय नमः

Om Vimalāya namah.

Prostration to the flawless one.

The flaws in our human nature, which hide the Self as clouds conceal the Sun, are the dark shadows cast by the ego. Bhagavan, being wholly egoless, shines as pure Awareness free from every flaw.

57. ओ दीर्घदशिनि नमः

Om Dīrgha darśine namah

Prostration to the far-sighted one.

One of transcendental vision who sees beyond time and space; one who looks through the phenomenal and sees the Real.

58. ओ आप्ताय नमः

Om Āptāya namah.

Prostration to the near and dear one.

Closest of friends and kinsmen, dwelling in one's own heart and ever available for help; *atmabandhu*; Self of the self.



EDITORIAL

Effort and Effortlessness

Among the exceptional individuals whose stature is recognised not only in India but around the world, Mahatma Gandhi stands out in the public eye as the one who shaped modern India and influenced other political activists who sought freedom through peaceful means. He worked tirelessly for the country's freedom from external rule and at the same time taught the importance of spiritual values. He did not believe that the ends justified the means and showed his fellow Indians by example, that inner purification and self-reliance were just as important as external independence. His life was one of unremitting work and effort. His attire was characterised by four items: his khadhi cloth, his walking stick and sandals and the watch which was tucked into his waist. Like Bhagavan his life flowed to a strict timetable.

There could not be a greater contrast between this politically savvy individual who toured India, meeting, discussing, and lecturing his countrymen, and the sage of Arunachala who remained in one place,

did little apparently in the eyes of an external observer and spoke sparingly. Yet he too, is revered both in India and the world at large for the spiritual dimension of his existence.

Ramana Maharshi and Mahatma Gandhi were contemporaries and knew and respected each other. Gandhi was known to have sent some of his followers to Ramanasramam and this included Rajendra Prasad, who later became the first president of India. He found inner strength and peace in the presence of Bhagavan. He asked Bhagavan for a message to take back to the Mahatma. Bhagavan replied: “*Adhyatma sakti* is working within him and leading him on. That is enough. What more is necessary?”

Bhagavan made some comments soon after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Among other things he said, “When Ramaswami Reddiar went to see the Mahatma immediately after taking office as Chief Minister, Madras State, the Mahatma, it seems, asked him for how long he had been going to the Ramanasramam. When he answered that he had been going there for over thirty years, the Mahatma said, ‘Is that so? I have tried thrice, but so far have not been able to go there’. What could he do? How could he come here when he was not left alone for a moment?”¹

When Congress Party activists came to the ashram they invariably asked Bhagavan questions about timetables for freedom and what must be done to create it. In turn Bhagavan would draw their attention to the necessity of *nishkama-karma*, selfless action, and the spirit of surrender to a higher power without any thought of results. There is no question of success or failure, what has to happen will happen no matter how hard we try to influence the course of destiny. By surrender Bhagavan meant that we should be aware and accept what happens in the moment with neither desire nor fear. It is not a supine, lazy act but one which requires tremendous attention and dedication. Surrender is not for the weak.

In *Talks* there is a quotation taken from Gandhi’s magazine *The Harijan* in which he writes about a trip: “How mysterious are the

¹ ‘The Passing Away of Mahatma Gandhi’, No.167, p.372. *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma. Revised edition, 2006.

ways of God! This journey to Rajkot is a wonder even to me. Why am I going, whither am I going? What for? I have thought nothing about these things. And if God guides me, what should I think, why should I think? Even thought may be an obstacle in the way of His guidance.” Bhagavan remarked how true this was and referred to the Tamil mystic, Thayumanavar and the state where we are not, which is Self-abidance, *atma-nishta*.

Bhagavan and the Mahatma represent two extremes of activity. The Mahatma did not stop his physical and mental efforts to untie the country and prepare it for independence, and so powerful was his appeal to people in general that they were willing to make any sacrifice on his behalf, including giving him their money, their jewellery and their very freedom. Bhagavan on the other hand, did nothing imposing apparently aside from the normal human actions to keep his body clean and healthy. He did not espouse a political cause; he did not create a movement; he did not set himself up in the role as a guru. He was effortlessly himself.

The dichotomy between Bhagavan and the Mahatma’s roles exemplify the distinction between effort and effortless. These two historical figures are representative of the opposite but valid poles of enterprise dedicated to the pursuit of truth.

We often see in the magazine articles which seemingly take contradictory positions. One says that Bhagavan instructed us to make an effort and the other says that Bhagavan enjoined people not to do but just be. What are we to make of these opposing attitudes?

Both are right. We do need to make an effort to purify the mind and heart if we are to feel and be open to the grace of the guru. And yes, we do need to be still in order to listen to the words and surrender to the grace, *anugraha*, of the guru.

There is a marvellous metaphor told by Swami Adbutananda, one of Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s original group of young men who created the Ramakrishna order. Adbhutananda was the one unlettered disciple but his fearless penchant for salty truths revealed he was a gem hidden in the garb of a peasant.

“Once a devotee came to visit Latu Maharaj [Swami Adbhutananda] in Kolkata, after attending the annual birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna at the Belur monastery. He came with several friends. Latu Maharaj asked him, ‘How much did you give as an offering to the Lord in the shrine?’ The devotee told him what he had given. Then Latu Maharaj asked about his friends. When he heard that they had not offered anything, he smiled, ‘Your friends want religion by “bearing post”.’ The devotee did not understand. The Swami explained that they wanted their letters to reach their destination without putting any stamps on them; thus the recipient must pay the postage.”²

We all have experienced gratuitous grace that came apparently from out of nowhere. Without any expectation we are suddenly lifted up. Rarely does it happen a second time and a third time, almost never. God, higher power, guru, call it what you will, has freely given us a taste without us ‘paying’ for it. Often, as a result, we begin to ask why and haltingly grope towards the light that was shone on us by exercising our memory of the event and searching for answers from other sources, be it books or a person whom we think knows the answer.

Bhagavan said that if we take one step towards the guru, the guru will take nine steps towards us. The operative phrase is one step. That is our responsibility and unless we make the effort, more often than not there is nothing a higher power can or will do to raise us out of our ignorance. Our laziness defeats us until suffering painfully awakens us to the necessity of effort in order to discover our true depths.

It should not be imagined that Bhagavan sat like a lump on the couch and watched the world go by. The sattvic state of being is the most intense state a human is capable of expressing. When we see a superb performance by a great artist, say a singer or dancer, we experience the illusion of effortless ease. We gain the impression that it is so simple we could do it. We too could play the piano in a concert hall or tennis

² *How a Shepherd Boy Became a Saint* by Swami Chetanananda. p.123. Advaita Ashrama. 2002.

at Wimbledon just like the experts. But when we try even for a moment to exercise the dexterity necessary we are abruptly brought down to earth and are confronted by a melancholy paucity of skill.

To climb a mountain requires us to start at the bottom and work our way up. We can see the pinnacle but it is more a dream than a reality. There is ahead of us the hard slog of assiduous effort from which no one else can relieve us. The trick is to focus on the step-by-step process and live in the moment, neither expecting advance and success nor fearing our admitted limitations. Who is it that wants success? Who is it that is familiar with deprivation? There are many wise sayings which allude to the fact that the point of the journey is not the arrival but the learning on the way.

There is necessary effort and linked with it there is effortless awareness because we do not measure ourselves by another person’s supposed virtues and accomplishments, nor how far we *should* have come. When we are aware *in itself*, there is a sense of fullness and we want for nothing. How can there be effort? Effort is necessary when we want something. Stillness is that which wants nothing outside the spontaneous moment. We all know those moments which seem timeless and graceful. During, for example, convalescence after a severe illness, we participate in a sense of well-being; the stamp of gladness marks all we see. Who has not luxuriated in the consciousness of just observing the scene before one, not doing anything but rejoicing in being alive and aware of the precious gift of life?

The point is how do we ‘capture’ it in our normal life? The one sure way is to become one with it and appreciate it. It requires effort to bring the mind back to a still, transparent centre. When there is no separation of doer and deed we live in the moment. This is effortless awareness. But again, this is the paradox, for that to occur we are required to apply the effort to be alert and yet, be still as the bird is on the wing gracing the thermals above.

These descriptions are not answers but are clues, keys to open our own doors of perception. The effort is ours to make; the effortless awareness our choice to accept. ▲



Bhagavan's Forty Two Verses from the Gita

NEERA KASHYAP

An enormous literature stands woven around the *Bhagavad Gita* as translation, note or commentary, seeking to explain to our hearts the directly spoken words of Lord Krishna, divine teacher and friend. Reading the *Gita* again and again as a whole, one sees how little it lends itself to analysis, for it is a song of such vastness and resonance that it is best experienced not by the mind but in the silence of the heart. Despite its symphonic range, from the cataclysmic to the infinitely tender, the song is personal to us — for it is the personal dialogue of a loving teacher with his devotee friend who loves but despairs and knows not that his strife is not for the earthly but for the eternal. It is the Lord's recognition of the aspirant in Arjuna and Arjuna's faith in Him

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that is the basis for this immortal poem's teaching that gives hope and reason, love and light to all aspirants who strive to return to His eternal refuge. Though Arjuna wavers, questions, reasons, and even counters Krishna's words, his soul slowly absorbs the teaching as irrefutable Truth, as irrefutable as when Krishna reveals Himself as all-powerful Time which *will* destroy the foe even if Arjuna will not fight. For the reader, too, the *Bhagavad Gita* is a *pramana* — authoritative knowledge — a testimony, resting irrefutably in the end beyond analysis and reason.

Yet what is it that we hear through its 700 verses? As in the Upanishads we hear the theme of *jnana*, Self-knowledge, as the highest theme and the *jnani*, the man of self knowledge as one above all men, for he dwells in God. Says Krishna, 'the man of vision and I are one. His whole soul is one in me, and I am his Path Supreme' (7.18).¹ But the recurrent theme is of *bhakti*, love, which unites man with God and thereby man with man. At a daily level Krishna urges, 'Whatever you do, or eat, or give, or offer in adoration, let it be an offering to me; and whatever you suffer, suffer it for me' (9.27). The same urgent invitation is heard more sweepingly, 'Give me thy mind and give me thy heart, give me thy offerings and thy adoration; and thus with thy soul in harmony, and making me thy goal supreme, thou shalt in truth come to me' (9.34).

The themes connect: Bhakti leads to Jnana, and Jnana is the joy of Brahman, the joy of the Absolute. So the Bhagavad Gita is a book about Self-knowledge and love, but all this as integral to Life. Since life is work, Karma yoga in the Gita is work made sacred through desirelessness — perfection in action offered out of love.

While it is obvious that the spiritual yoga of the Gita is love, it is this yoga that helps us in the yoga of jnana to turn inwards to contemplate the Self as the source of all creation, light and knowledge. The Yogas of jnana, bhakti and karma meet and converge again and

¹ Juan Mascaro's translation has been chosen for 3 reasons: he is a Sanskrit scholar, an artist in words and deeply sympathetic with the spirit of the original. Also true to himself, his translation was done over 20 years, with occasional verses translated up to 20 times before he was satisfied. He writes: "The aim of this translation is to give, without notes or commentary, the spiritual message of the Bhagavad Gita in pure English."

again to throw up key elements for aspirants. Itself a song of great harmony and compassion, the Gita stresses on self harmony: the purifying harmony of body, mind and words, the oneness of unwavering harmony, the harmony of the wise in whose hearts dwells the divine. The essence of the Gita's karma yoga is a sense of perfection in action based on self-restraint, desirelessness and surrender. While outward actions are to be performed to our best capacities, the fruits of the actions are to be surrendered in love. For Krishna invites us again and again to think of him at all times, to offer all our works to him, to take refuge in Him for the protection of our souls, and ultimately, to know Him as the source of all. His is the promise of peace through surrender, Self-abidance and self-harmony. His is the call to action to the warrior; His is also the call to action through the deep prayer of silence. In the Gita, there is the vision of the universe and all things — good and evil — in God; the vision of God as man and friend of the struggling soul; and the promise that the man who sees Brahman abides in Brahman with the description of such a one who has found joy in God.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, at the request of devotees, selected 42 verses out of the 700 verses of the Bhagavad Gita, and re-set them in a particular order. This was later published by Sri Ramanasramam in a little book entitled *Gitasara* or 'The Song Celestial' which carries an explanatory note at the end.² This note highlights the selection of these verses as the essence of the Bhagavad Gita, showing to the aspirant the direct means to realize the Sat-Chit-Ananda Atman, the Self Absolute, the one ultimate object of man's quest through the ages. The emphasis is primarily on jnana and bhakti margas, the path of *nishkama-karma* (desireless work) being implicit in both.

What did Sri Bhagavan indicate to us as devotees through his selection — the essence of this vast generous poem? His selection

² The selection of verses from the *Bhagavad Gita* may also be found in *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp.153-157. Sri Ramanasramam 2001. The reader may assume that in the course of the author's argument those quotations which do not give a reference can be located in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

MOUNTAIN PATH

highlights first and foremost the state of the man who finds peace and joy in the Spirit, pure in heart and vision, with desires and works surrendered, in perfect harmony and equilibrium, beyond action and contraries. The path of love finds greater emphasis in this selection than the path of self-knowledge. Says Krishna, 'Only by love can men see me, and know me, and come unto Me' (11.54); love and faith being the surge of the soul towards a oneness of vision, wisdom and self harmony. And who is the jnani, the knower of Truth? The one who sees that 'the unreal never is: the Real never is not,' who sees the immortal Lord in all that is mortal, who sees the field (the body) and the knower of the field (consciousness).

Pervasive through Sri Bhagavan's selection is a pointer to the Spirit — the never-born and eternal, the never-changing and indestructible, the ever-pure and omni-present, dwelling in man and in all. And where is the in-dweller? 'God dwells in the heart of all beings, Arjuna: thy God dwells in thy heart,' in mercy, in oneness, in eternity — whirling beings onwards on the stream of time. The promise for those who will heed the quest of Self knowledge as the only important aim of life, is salvation and peace as the soul reaches the highest end, the abode supreme — beyond sun, moon and fire, Invisible and Everlasting — never to return — 'thy home of eternity.' The specific *sadhana* that must be undertaken is to vanquish desire and to lead the unsteady mind forever into the Spirit.

Sri Bhagavan, in his selection, lays foremost emphasis on the state of the man of self knowledge, and the utter peace he enjoys. This is underscored through the repetition in the content of the verses: 'Because the peace of God is with them whose mind and soul are in harmony, who are free from desire and wrath, who know their own soul' (5.26); 'When a man surrenders all desires that come to the heart and by the grace of God finds the joy of God, then his soul has indeed found peace' (2.55); 'For the man who forsakes all desires and abandons all pride of possession and of self reaches the goal of peace supreme' (2.71); 'He whose peace is not shaken by others, and

Opposite page: Charcol and incense burner used during Bhagavan's day.

John Maynard



before whom other people find peace, beyond excitement and anger and fear — he is dear to me' (12.15). Desirelessness, self-harmony and perfect equanimity, hence, are the preconditions for peace.

Realizing the Spirit is realizing joy, for man is satisfied in the Spirit and is glad with whatever God gives him. Such a man is free from the contraries of pleasure and pain and beyond the law of action for 'he is beyond what is done and beyond what is not done, and in all works he is beyond the help of mortal beings.' Inherent in Sri Bhagavan's selection of verses on the state of the self-realized is the process by which we get beyond contraries and beyond action: man's soul must rest ever in his inner spirit; unwisdom must be corrected by the wisdom of the inner spirit; undertakings freed from anxious desire and fanciful thought. Even with life and mind and reason harmonized, with wrath and desire gone, the man must keep 'silent his soul before freedom, (for) he in truth has attained final freedom'.

But what is the wellspring and sustenance of our quest? It is the oneness of love and faith in our Lord, our Guru, whose voice we hear and follow for His is the eternity of love. As directly as we love so are we empowered to walk the direct path that He teaches. It is the answering response of the devotee's love and faith that Sri Bhagavan highlights in his selection of verses on bhakti. Says Krishna, 'Only by love can men see me, and know me, and come unto Me' (11.54). For Love encompasses all. It encompasses faith that moves man's nature and life; it harmonizes him and steers him to wisdom and thereby to 'peace supreme'. It helps him surrender all selfishness and be even with friend or foe and in honour or disgrace. These verses are radiant with feeling for they carry in them the divine lord's recognition of the devotee's surrender. Says Krishna, 'The greatest of these is the man of vision who is ever one, who loves the One. For I love the man of vision, and the man of vision loves me' (7.17). To those who live in harmony and worship with love, the divine gives the promise of plenty, of vision, and of peace supreme.

Sri Bhagavan made no distinction between bhakti and jnana. He said, "The eternal, unbroken, natural state of abiding in the Self is jnana. To abide in the Self you must love the Self. Since God is verily

the Self, love of the Self is love of God; and that is bhakti. Jnana and bhakti are thus one and the same."³ Sri Bhagavan's selection of the verse, 'The unreal never is: the Real never is not. This truth indeed has been seen by those who can see the true' (2.16), is significant for he urged that unless the idea that the world is real is given up, the mind will always be after it. He said that in taking the appearance to be real, one will never know the Real itself, although it is the Real alone that exists. Through Sri Bhagavan's selection one infers the meaning of self knowledge in the Gita: 'the wisdom which sees the field and the knower of the field;' 'who sees that the Lord of all is...immortal in the field of mortality;' the jiva who knows his own soul knows the peace of God, freed from desire and wrath, with mind and soul in harmony.

And it is only after knowing the Being can one act without desire. Sri Bhagavan affirmed that it is only a jnani who can be a good karma yogi, renouncing desire and the fruits of all action. So included in his selection of the 42 verses is the Gita's unequivocal verse, 'even as a burning fire burns all fuel into ashes, the fire of eternal wisdom burns into ashes all works' (4.37), purifying them in the fire of wisdom so 'his works bind him not.' Since karma yoga is integral to the Bhagavad Gita, Juan Mascaro, in the introduction to his poetic and moving translation of the Gita connects karma with bhakti. Writes Mascaro: "All life is action, but every little finite action should be a surrender to the Infinite...every little work in life, however humble, can become an act of creation and therefore a means of salvation, because in all true creation we reconcile the finite with the Infinite, hence the joy of creation'. And connecting karma with jnana he writes, 'When vision is pure and when creation is pure there is always joy.'

After giving primary significance to the state of the man of self-realization and next to the paths that lead to it — the yoga of bhakti and the yoga of jnana, Sri Bhagavan then places emphasis on the Self — the eternal Spirit. As in the Upanishads, the selection highlights the eternal and immutable aspects of the Spirit. It also highlights its

³ *Maharshi's Gospel* p.17, Ch 4, 'Bhakti and Jnana'. Sri Ramanasramam 2002.

omnipresence, its indestructibility, its immovability, its ever-oneness. It is interwoven in creation, present in man and in all. It dwells in matter but is pure from the touch of matter just as the omnipresent ether is pure because it is intangible.

How does one experience the eternal spirit? In Sri Bhagavan's way, *sattva-guna* is the very nature of the mind, pure and undefiled like ether. By identification with the body and world, one forgets its original *sattva* nature. Its natural pure state can only be restored through action without attachment over many lives, by listening to the scriptures from a true guru and by meditating on their meaning. Said Sri Bhagavan: "In the pure mind that has been rendered subtle and unmoving by (such) meditation, the Self bliss will become manifest. As without the mind there cannot be experience, it is possible for the purified mind endowed with the extremely subtle mode (*vrutti*) to experience Self-bliss by remaining in that mode, i.e., in the mode of Brahman."⁴ While citing the enquiry 'Who am I?' as the principal means for the removal of misery and attainment of bliss, he said: "When the mind becomes quiescent in this manner, Self-experience arises of its own accord without any hindrance. Thereafter, sensory pleasures and pains will not affect the mind. All phenomenon will appear then, without attachment, like a dream. Never forget, one's primary Self-experience is real bhakti (devotion), yoga (mind control), jnana (knowledge) and all other austerities."⁵

At the centre of all, lies the spiritual heart, self-luminous like the sun. It is the primary energy source that illumines the mind and body, which only reflect the consciousness of the heart. In Sri Bhagavan's way, the heart is at once the fullness of consciousness and the origin of all thoughts — the goal being to in-turn the mind and merge it in its source, the heart. Said Sri Bhagavan: "The mind sees itself diversified as the universe. If the diversity is not manifest, it remains in its own

⁴ *Self-enquiry*, section 11. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, section 12.

⁶ *Reflections on Talks* by S. S. Cohen, Number 7.

essence, the Heart. The Heart is the only reality. The mind is only a transient phase. To remain as one's Self is to enter the Heart."⁶

In Sri Bhagavan's selection of verses on the heart, Lord Krishna speaks both in the first and third person. In speaking to Arjuna directly and to him of others, He says: 'I am the soul, prince victorious, which dwells in the heart of all things,' and 'In my mercy I dwell in their hearts and I dispel their darkness of ignorance by the light of the lamp of wisdom.' It is as if the heart pulls a seeker back into the source, responding with love and compassion to the soul's yearning for merger. This assurance takes on urgency in Lord Krishna's words: 'God dwells in the heart of all beings, Arjuna: thy God dwells in thy heart.' And always giving Self experience priority, Sri Bhagavan selects the verse that describes Self-abidance, 'He sees himself in the heart of all beings and he sees all beings in his heart. This is the vision of the Yogi of harmony, a vision which is ever one' (6.29).

At last the highest end is reached. In the verses selected, this is an abode, 'my abode Supreme'. Through reiteration, there is emphasis on the moving promise that those who reach that abode never return. It is reached by those who go with all their soul. It is reached by His grace: 'By His grace thou shalt obtain the peace supreme, thy home of eternity.' Surely, this is Brahman. And affirming the Upanishads, Sri Bhagavan said Brahman is the heart — the centre of all!⁷

Though there is instruction throughout the verses selected, it is the instruction of inspiring example, of personal invitation, of human potential, of unravelling mystery, of the unshakeable promise that the Unknown can be known. There are only a few verses that give direct instruction to the aspirant. One verse simply says, 'Know Him...and let His peace give thee peace. Be a warrior and kill desire, the powerful enemy of the soul' (3.43).

Sri Bhagavan selects two other verses that are a hallmark of his own direct way of merging the mind in the heart: '...let the seeker quietly lead the mind into the Spirit, and let all his thoughts be silence' (6.25), and '...whenever the mind unsteady and restless strays

⁷ See § 252. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p.210.1996.

away from the Spirit, let him ever and for ever lead it again to the Spirit' (6.26).

In Sri Bhagavan's selection of the 42 verses, the *Gitasara*, are thus highlighted the themes of the state of a jnani, the paths of love and light that lead to Self-knowledge, the state of the eternal spirit, the heart as the centre of all, reaching the abode Supreme — the eternal refuge of the seeker and the *sadhana* of silence.

The order in which the 42 verses have been set by Sri Bhagavan also gives us insights into how they unfold. The knower is first established followed by an assurance that the divine lives in every being. Though death follows life and life death, the eternal spirit, the Self, is never born and never dies. While interwoven in creation, the spirit is pure from matter. Those able to see that 'the unreal never is: the Real never is not' reach 'my supreme abode', never to return. It is only the man of pure vision, free from attachments, contraries and desires who reaches this abode and not the one who follows desire. It is he who sees that the Lord of all is the same in all, immortal in mortality.

Self-knowledge is possible only through love of the divine. For love is based on faith and he who has faith has wisdom, lives in self harmony and soon finds the peace supreme. The divine responds to this loving worship by dispelling darkness and giving vision to the seeker who works alongside to purify himself by the wisdom of the inner spirit. Since the spirit in man is higher even than reason, the seeker is directly instructed to know Him by killing desire so the peace of the spirit is his. Since the fire of knowledge destroys all actions, work itself, becomes pure when the wise act in the world.

The promise of peace for the one who lives in harmony, free from desire and wrath both precedes and succeeds direct instructions to the seeker. The direct instructions are to lead the mind into the Spirit, again and again, till all thoughts are silenced. Keeping thus silent his soul before freedom, he attains it. His is the vision of the Yogi of harmony who sees himself in the heart of all beings and all beings in his heart. He loves the divine and is fully loved by Him, a rare being fulfilled by the divine itself.

The next wave of verses swells in a fullness of description of the utter peace that is the experience of the knower. He whose peace is not shaken by others but calms others is dear to the Lord. For he has surrendered all desires and goes beyond the *gunas*, beyond contraries and the law of action. He is happy with whatever God gives him, even-minded and unattached. Towards the end of these verses on peace comes the personal reminder to Arjuna, the greatest of warriors and devotees, 'God dwells in the heart of all beings, Arjuna: thy God dwells in thy heart' (18.61).

For the end, Sri Bhagavan selects the famous verse from the eighteenth chapter, so full of love and hope and grace, 'Go to him for thy salvation with all thy soul, victorious man. By his grace thou shalt obtain the peace supreme, thy home of eternity' (18.62). ▲

Saranagathi Website

Due to the availability of the Internet with its relative ease of communication, the ashram has created a new website:

www.sriramanamaharshi.org

The purpose of this new website is to bring together devotees of Bhagavan from all over the world. The website provides the opportunity for devotees to share their experiences as well as the events at their *satsangs* or kendras. Devotees may check the website for the latest events at the ashram and important announcements. The *Mountain Path* will continue to publish short reports of ashram activities and other events of interest to devotees.

Emails may be sent to: saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org



Freewill

JOHN GRIMES

This thought-provoking article is an excerpt from Chapter Two of the forthcoming book in The Builders of Indian Philosophy Series: Ramana Maharshi: Darshan through Darshana by John Grimes and will be published by Munshiram Manoharlal. The book is an attempt to analyse Sri Ramana Maharshi through the eyes of Indian philosophy in general and Advaita Vedanta in particular. After a short summary of Ramana's life, there are chapters on Ramana and Philosophy; Advaita Vedanta; Epistemology; Metaphysics; Ethics etc and a concluding Evaluation. The over-arching theme of the book asks the question: Can Ramana be considered as a philosopher in the conventional sense and, if so, what were his contributions to Indian philosophy?

Ramana's views on free will vis-a-vis predetermination are so astounding that it behoves us to explore the issue. According to Ramana, at the level of an ordinary person (*ajnanî*), individuals, from birth to death, will experience a series of preordained activities

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and experiences, all of which are the consequences of previous acts and thoughts. The only freedom which exists, if one does, is to realize that, in actuality, no one is acting and no one is experiencing. If the Self is realized, then the words 'freedom' and 'predestination' lose all value, for, the Self neither acts nor experiences, is neither free nor bound. For the Self, 'nothing has ever happened', and thus all words and concepts lose their meaning.

Are human beings victims of an inescapable fate, or do we really have the power to create our own destiny? That is the age-old question that has plagued philosophers, theologians, and even the common person on the street. According to Ramana, the question of free will or predetermination does not at all arise from the point of view of non-duality. Individuality itself is illusory. However, so long as one imagines that one has a separate individuality, so long does one imagine that one has or does not have free will.

To set the stage, look at two quotes from Arthur Osborne:

Sri Bhagavan was uncompromising in his teaching that whatever is to happen will happen, while at the same time he taught that whatever happens is due to *prarabdha*, a man's balance-sheet of destiny acting according to so rigorous a law of cause and effect that even the word 'justice' seems too sentimental to express it. He refused ever to be entangled in a discussion on freewill and predestination, for such theories, although contradictory on the mental plane, may both reflect aspects of truth. He would say, "Find out who it is who is predestined or has free will."¹

Actually, however, the question of free will or predestination does not arise at all from the point of view of non-duality. It is as though a group of people who had never heard of a radio were to stand around a wireless set arguing whether the man in the box has to sing what the transmitting station tells him to or whether he can change parts of the songs. The answer is that there is no man in the box and therefore the question does not arise. Similarly, the answer to the question whether the ego has free will or not is that there is no ego and therefore the question does not arise. Therefore Bhagavan's usual response to the

question would be to bid the questioner to find out who it is that has free will or predestination.²

Ok. But what about at the level of individuality – what happens there, where ordinary individuals live and experience the world? What are we to make of Ramana's own words in the light of a person's everyday experience of cause and effect in the physical world?

Arthur Osborne himself asked Ramana:

"Are only important events in a man's life, such as his main occupation or profession, predetermined, or are trifling acts also, such as taking a cup of water or moving from one part of the room to another?" Ramana replied: "Everything is predetermined." Osborne said, "Then what responsibility, what free will has man?" Ramana replied, "Why does the body come into existence? It is designed for various things that are marked out for it in this life . . . As for freedom, a man is always free not to identify himself with the body and not to be affected by the pleasures and pains consequent on its activities."³

On another occasion, in a remarkably similar manner, Ramana was asked, "I can understand that the outstanding events in a man's life such as his country, nationality, family, career or profession, marriage, death, etc. are all predestined by his karma, but can it be that all the details of his life, down to the minutest, have already been predetermined? Now, for instance, I put this fan that is in my hand down on the floor here. Can it be that it was already decided that on such and such a day, at such and such an hour, I should move the fan like this and put it down here?" Ramana replied, "Certainly. Whatever this body is to do and whatever experiences it is to pass through was already decided when it came into existence."⁴

Finally, there is Ramana's reply to his mother when she came to visit him in Tiruvannamalai for the first time. She had come in the hope of taking him back to Madurai:

"The Creator, remaining everywhere makes each one play his role in life according to their past deeds (*prarabdha karma*). Whatever is

² *The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, Ch. 1, pp. 66-67.

³ *Ibid.*, Ch. 2, pp. 78-79.

⁴ *Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar. pp. 90-91.

¹ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-knowledge* by Arthur Osborne. Ch. 5, p. 42.

not destined to happen will not happen, — try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. Therefore, the best course is for one to remain silent.”⁵

So what is one to make of this? Ramana, in his own words, from the empirical perspective, seems to uphold a doctrine of predetermination which, on the face of it, seems almost shocking, so counter-intuitive, rather disconcerting and astounding in its total thoroughness. “All the activities that the body is to go through are determined when it first comes into existence. It does not rest with you to accept or reject them. The only freedom you have is to turn your mind inward and renounce activities there.”⁶

The consequences of this are not lost on any intelligent person. One’s next question becomes, if this is the case, then what responsibility does a person have? Where is the scope for bettering oneself, let alone for liberation? To this Ramana replied: “Why does the body come into existence? It is designed for the various things that are marked out for it in this life.”⁷

Then again, on a different occasion, to a questioner with perhaps different needs, Ramana replied: “Free will exists together with the individuality. As long as the individuality lasts, so long is there free will. All the scriptures are based on this fact and advise directing the free will in the right channel. Find out who it is who has free will or predestination and abide in that state. Then both are transcended. That is the only purpose in discussing these questions. To whom do such questions present themselves? Discover that and be at peace.”⁸

There appears to be no contradiction here. According to Ramana, individuality has only an illusory existence. However, as long as a person imagines that he or she has a separate individuality, so long do they also imagine they have free will. These two, individuality and free will, exist together inexorably and inevitably.

⁵ *Bhagavan Ramana and Mother*, pp. 11-12.

⁶ *Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar. p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

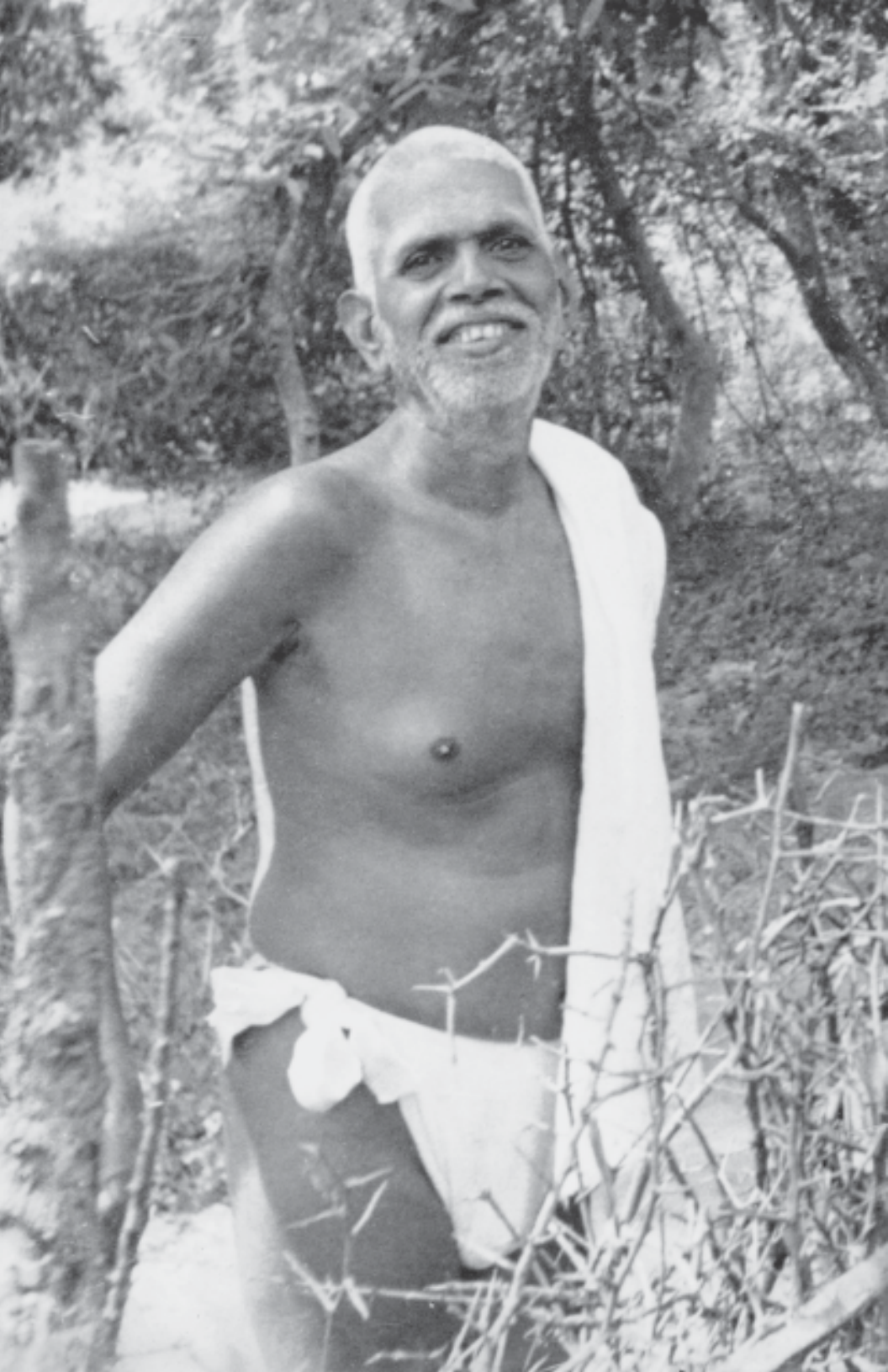
⁸ *The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, Ch. 2, pp. 80-81.

Stated differently, the problem of free will, according to theologians, places God, the Creator, between the horns of a dilemma. If God gave human beings free will, then God is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. If humans have free will, then God does not know what will happen because what happens will depend on the free will of what people decide. God will not have control of everything, because humans will have the power to change things. On the other hand, if God is omniscient and omnipotent and does control everything, while humans have no free will or possibility to do things other than as they happen, then such a God is unbelievably cruel and capricious. People are advised by sages and scriptures to be good; yet, if they have no ability to change their fate, then that is just cruel.

For example, in a movie that has been filmed, each actor plays his or her part and that part is written out beforehand and cannot be changed after the film is made. Each actor plays a role and yet remains unaffected by their actions, because they know it is a role that they play. When an actor is born or dies on the screen, the person playing the role is neither born nor dies. When fire burns or water wets, the screen remains unaffected. Or again for example: If one acts a part in a play, the whole part is written out beforehand, and one acts faithfully, whether one is Caesar who is stabbed or Brutus who stabs. The actor is unaffected by events on the stage because he is playing a role and not ‘real’.

In the same way, that person who realizes his identity with the deathless Self acts his part on the human stage without fear or anxiety, hope or regret, not being touched by the part played. If one were to ask what reality one has when all one’s actions are determined, it would lead only to the question: Who, then, am I? If the ego that thinks it and makes decisions is not real, and yet I know that I exist, what is the reality of me? This is but a preparatory, mental version of the quest that Ramana prescribed, but it is an excellent preparation for the real quest. “Others are not responsible for what happens to us. They are only instruments of what would happen to us some way or other.”⁹

⁹ *Conscious Immortality* by Paul Brunton and Munagala Venkataramiah. p.134. Sri Ramanasramam, 1984.



My Childhood with Bhagavan

Part Two

RAJALAKSHMI

In the first part of this reminiscence I spoke about my grandmother Venu Ammal (younger sister of Echammal) who, due to tragic circumstances, was responsible for my upbringing. As was the custom in those days, she was married at a very young age and when she was around fifteen in about 1902, she gave birth to a daughter, Balakuchambal. Shortly after her daughter's birth, the first tragedy struck her life when her husband passed away and the responsibility of bringing up her daughter fell on the shoulders of the young widow. With meagre resources at her disposal her life was a constant struggle until at last she was able to arrange for her daughter's marriage. Venu Ammal's daughter gave birth to me on 30th October 1920.

Venu Ammal was utterly devoted to Bhagavan and Arunachaleswarar, often to the neglect of her own family. Once, Bhagavan's mother told Venu Ammal that if she continued like this,

she might not even be able to be by the side of her daughter when she gave birth to a child. It so happened that when Venu Ammal went to Arunachaleswarar temple to witness the *annabhishekam*, her daughter gave birth to a child i.e., me and at that time only the servant maid was by my mother's side. Only after returning from the temple did she learn that her daughter had already given birth. What Bhagavan's mother Alagammal had predicted came true.

During Bhagavan's stay at Skandashram, Venu Ammal served Bhagavan's mother Alagammal and took care of all her needs; this occupied so much of her time that she often forgot to take care of her own grand daughter. Mother Alagammal used to remind Venu Ammal that it was already late afternoon and she should go down the hill to her young grand daughter. Mother Alagammal loved Venu Ammal so much that she used to tell fellow devotees that Venu Ammal was also one of her daughters like Alamelu.¹

Sadly, within two and half years of my birth my mother Balakuchambal passed away and from then on, I was brought up by my grand mother Venu Ammal.

Venu Ammal, who was serving at the ashram, would take me along with her in the morning and return home with me in the evening. I was three years old in 1923 when I first saw Bhagavan and from then onwards I visited him and felt his grace daily. Bhagavan took personal interest in my development and showered me with love and affection. I always referred to Bhagavan as *Thatha* (Grandfather).

As a young child, I some times used to weep without any reason, probably thinking about my mother whom I lost when I was barely two and half years old. My grand mother Venu Ammal whose life was full of tragedy from the loss of her husband as well as her only daughter, used to be occasionally depressed and on such occasions if I happened to weep, she would show her frustration by beating me. Once I complained to Bhagavan about this and from then on, my grand

¹ During the last days of Venu Ammal, she was staying with her grand daughter Rajalakshmi in Madras. Venu Ammal died on 10th June 1965 at her nephew's house at Vilapakkam near Polur.

mother Venu Ammal was very careful not to beat me fearing that I would complain to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan used tell me that both he and I were in the same boat since both of us recently lost our mothers.²

When I completed 8th standard at Tiruvannamalai, my father who worked in the revenue department there, was transferred to Arani. He wrote a letter to my grand mother at Tiruvannamalai requesting that I should come and join him at Arani and go to the local high school. However, neither my grand mother nor I wanted to move to Arani as I wanted to be in the company of Thatha i.e. Bhagavan. I showed the letter received from my father to Bhagavan and told him that I would like to continue my studies at Tiruvannamalai since I did not want to leave Thatha. Normally, before going home, I would do pradakshina around old hall and then go inside and prostrate to Bhagavan. On that particular day while I was doing pradakshina around the old hall, I noticed a small piece of paper on the floor near the window behind Bhagavan and I handed it over to him. Bhagavan told me that he had been searching for this piece of paper that I had found and it was from Nayana (Ganapati Muni). He asked me to read the verse written in Sanskrit on the piece of paper. When I finished reading the verse, Bhagavan told me that this sloka was the answer to my dilemma as to whether I should stay in Tiruvannamalai or move to Arani. At that moment, I did not understand the significance of Bhagavan's reply. The very next day, I received a letter from my father from Arani saying that I could continue my schooling in Tiruvannamalai and need not come to Arani. I did not know why my father changed his mind, perhaps he realised that though he missed me, he knew that I was happy being with Bhagavan. I mention this episode because it shows that even seemingly trivial incidents were significant when they occurred in Bhagavan's presence.

In the old hall I once noticed a magnifying glass and wondered what it was, so I asked Bhagavan its purpose. He explained its use and

² Bhagavan's mother attained Maha Samadhi in May, 1922 while Rajalakshmi's mother died in January, 1923.

mentioned that if it was focused against sunlight and if cotton was kept at the focal point, then the cotton would catch fire. He then asked Madhava Swami to bring a small piece of cotton and asked me to experiment with it by myself. I kept the cotton at the focal point against the sun's rays until it caught fire. Once it was completely burnt I wanted to continue the experiment with a cloth and since there was no piece of cloth available nearby, I focused the rays against my *pavadai* (cotton garment skirt) until smoke started coming from my dress. Bhagavan noticed this and asked Madhava Swami to extinguish the fire. Bhagavan advised me not to repeat this experiment on my dress.

One day, the attendant, Madhava Swami, was peeling the skin off ripe mangoes that had been offered as *prasadam* to Bhagavan and devotees. He was peeling it in such a manner that only a very thin layer of skin was removed without disturbing the flesh. I had a liking for these peeled skins and I would request Madhava Swami to give the skin to me. Bhagavan noticed me eating the thin mango skin which had practically no flesh and directed the attendant to peel the skin in such a way that it had sufficient flesh and give it to me.

There is a special food made of rice flour and jaggery, known as *adai* in Tamil, which is made especially on a particular day called *Karadayam nonbu*. I prepared this dish at home and offered it to Bhagavan. On examining the *adai*, he remarked that it had not been cooked properly and carefully explained to me how a properly cooked *adai* should look with its smooth and shiny surface. He jokingly remarked to me that although it had not been cooked fully, it didn't matter because once it reached the stomach it would get fully cooked due to the heat of the body. Then he asked the attendant to distribute my offering to the devotees present and he also tasted it himself.

Like Echammal, my grandmother Venu Ammal often used to offer bhiksha to Bhagavan and once she prepared a special *sambar* (sauce or gruel) known as *sukkanga vattha kolambu*. Sukkanga is a vegetable which is dried in sun light and these dried pieces are added to hot *sambar*. She served rice and this special *sambar* to Bhagavan. On tasting it, he asked Venu Ammal whether she had fried the *sukkanga vatthal* before adding it to the *sambar*. Venu Ammal replied that she had not

fried it but just added it as it was to the hot *sambar*. Bhagavan told Venu Ammal that the *sukkanga vatthal* should be separately fried in oil and then only it should be added to hot *sambar*. These two incidents show that Bhagavan was a master cook.

Once during the weekend, I took school friends to the ashram and played *kummi* in front of Bhagavan while singing the songs taught in school. As a last song, I started singing *Upadesa Saram* but by then, I was too tired and could not continue singing the verses. Immediately, Bhagavan and Muruganar came to my rescue by singing the remaining part of *Upadesa Saram* and we then finished our *kummi* play.

I would like to narrate an incident pertaining to Sri Ramanatha Brahmachari. He was a staunch devotee of Bhagavan. He had a long standing desire to meet Mahatma Gandhi and offer him a garland made out of hand spun cotton (*khadi*). He spun the cotton threads himself and made a nice garland. When Gandhiji visited Tiruvannamalai he went near him to offer the garland. Since he was a little away from the great man, his hands could not reach Gandhiji's neck and he was helped by surrounding people who physically lifted him to enable him to garland the Mahatma. On his return to the ashram, he narrated this incident to Bhagavan who remarked to Sri Ramanatha Brahmachari that at last his long standing desire has been fulfilled. I happened to be in the old hall when Bhagavan made this remark.

As a young girl, I used to make some handwork items and show them to Bhagavan who would appreciate the work. Once, in the old hall, using a rectangular perforated cardboard sheet, I drew on the cardboard a sketch of a *mantapam* (structure supported on four pillars and covered on the top with a decorative roof). Then, I decorated all around the *mantapam* using colour woollen thread as well as silver *zari* material. I made two such pieces and showed them to Bhagavan. In both the pieces, Bhagavan pasted his photo at the centre of the *mantapam* and gave some finishing touches to the *mantapam*. He asked Gopal Rao to make arrangements to fix it in a photo frame covered with glass. Out of the two pieces, I presented one piece to ashram and this was hung in the ashram hall and I kept the other in my puja room.

Once in the old hall, after prostrating to Bhagavan, I saw a statue of Bhagavan which was beside him. I had not seen this statue earlier and surprised, I stared at the statue and wondered whose face it was, since the face of statue did not resemble that of Bhagavan. Then, I turned to Bhagavan and asked who it was, Bhagavan said that it was a stone swami (god) and it would not speak. I concluded from the reply that Bhagavan did not cherish the idea of people making a statue of him. Later on, the statue was taken away from there and I never saw it again.

I was married to Sri C.S.Arunachalam in the year 1936. My first visit to ashram with my husband was in 1939. We entered the old hall and both of us prostrated to Bhagavan. The moment we finished prostration, Bhagavan uttered the word *Smaranath Arunachalam* towards my husband whose name is Arunachalam. I was thrilled when Bhagavan uttered this word.³ Then Bhagavan talked to both of us for some time and blessed us for a happy and prosperous life.

As a young girl, I was fortunate also to have the grace of Seshadri Swamigal. In those days, in the morning, children would be served food consisting of left over cooked rice from the previous night mixed with curd or butter milk and this is called *pazhayadhu* in Tamil. Once, while my grand mother, Venu Ammal was serving this food to me in the morning, Seshadri Swamigal entered the house and sat by my side and asked Venu Ammal to serve the same food to him. Venu Ammal wanted to serve freshly cooked food to Swamigal and requested him to wait in order to give her time to cook the food. However Seshadri Swamigal insisted that the food served to me had to be served to him. Venu Ammal served the food in my right hand palm which I would shape into the form of a bowl and eat. Seshadri Swamigal also extended his arm to receive the food in his palm and Venu Ammal served him

³ Smaranath Arunachalam is a sacred expression in Sanskrit which means that by merely thinking of Arunachala (Smaranath Arunachalam) one will attain Salvation. By uttering this expression Bhagavan blessed the newly married couple. Rajalakshmi was ecstatic at Bhagavan's graciousness because Arunachalam was also her husband's name and through her marriage she would be constantly thinking of him and through his name also that of holy Arunachala.



the food in his palm like she did for me. After eating a few servings, he got up and went away.

At times, Seshadri Swamigal would escort me to school. Once while I was going to school, Seshadri Swamigal was coming in the opposite direction and there were few devotees following him. Suddenly, Seshadri Swamigal prostrated in the middle of the road and the devotees around him also prostrated. I also prostrated in the road along with Swamigal. After he got up, devotees asked him the reason for his prostration for which he showed his finger towards the sky and remarked, “See there in the sky, he is going on a *rishabha vahganam*.”⁴

The last time I saw Seshadri Swamigal was on the day of his Samadhi. On that day, as usual, on the way to school, I prostrated to him as he was resting on the front veranda of the house of the temple priest, Chinna Gurukkal, in Sannadhi Street. The headmaster at my school often used to enquire from me about Swamigal since I too lived in Sannadhi Street close to Swamigal’s. On the day of Swamigal’s Samadhi, the headmaster enquired about Swamigal and I mentioned to him that I saw him in the morning and offered my pranams to him. After some time, news broke out in school that Swamigal had attained Samadhi. It was hard for me to believe this news since only in that very morning I had seen him alive. Even now at the age of 87, I clearly remember him and the association I had with this unusual and colourful person.

Venu Ammal used to offer *bhiksha* to Ganapati Muni (Nayana) in her house at Tiruvannamalai. Shortly after my birth, my mother had serious health problems. She had severe pain in the breast since the breast milk froze (mastitis). Everybody suggested that Venu Ammal take her daughter to Vellore for treatment. Venu Ammal informed Nayana about her plans and immediately Nayana came to Venu Ammal’s home and asked for some *vibhuti* (sacred ash) and camphor and he did japa for some time and then asked my grandmother to apply the *vibuthi* all over the body of my mother. Next morning, the frozen milk from the breast came out and she fully recovered.

⁴ Bull vehicle. That is, Lord Siva was riding across the sky on his vehicle, the bull (*rishaba*).

I knew Ganapati Muni and his family members intimately. He had given me *mantra upadesam* (mantra initiation). On the day of the passing away of Visalakshi (the wife of Ganapati Muni) she wanted to see me and sent word for me to come. I went to her house and met her. On seeing me, she was very happy, touched me and wished me success in life.

In 1953, I visited the ashram along with my children. Chinna Swami was not well and was laid up in the room near the water tank. I met him and he was happy to see me and enquired about myself and family. He then called his attendant who was sitting outside and told him to take me to the ashram kitchen and arrange for food. I told Chinna Swami that there was no need for the attendant to come along with me. When I went to the kitchen and asked for food, it was difficult for the staff to serve me due to the scarcity of items available. I told the staff that when taking leave of Chinna Swami he would ask me again whether I had taken food at the ashram and I could not lie to him. At least for that reason I asked the kitchen staff to provide a very small quantity of food as a token of Bhagavan’s prasada. Finally, they relented and served some food. It was then possible to take leave of Chinna Swami. After a very short period, he passed away. Following the samadhi of Bhagavan, the ashram suffered considerable hardship because most devotees had left and the premises had a deserted look, but even in those times Chinna Swami thought about others and wanted to serve them.

I also visited Bhagavan’s sister, who out of respect I addressed as Alamelu *attai* (elder sister), who was then bed-ridden. I sat by her side, caught hold of her hands and enquired about her. *Attai* was extremely happy to see me and my children. She placed her hands on my head and gave a blessing for me and my family for a happy and prosperous life. Shortly after that, Alamelu *attai* also passed away. I was really grateful that I had met both Chinna Swami and Alamelu *attai* before their demise. Both were a major influence in my childhood and it was my good fortune to be able to pay my respects to them before they departed from this world. Being around Bhagavan one felt that one was part of one big family, each member having a part to play in the lives of the other members. ▲



On the Nature of Self-Inflicted Suffering

MUKESH ESWARAN

All suffering is self-inflicted. We may believe that the cause of our suffering lies elsewhere — in the world, in our circumstances, in other people, in our fates, and so on. But we are wrong; we are deceiving ourselves. Our suffering is self-inflicted. It is the purpose of this essay to argue why this is so. Clear recognition of this fact may perhaps motivate us to hasten the sadhana necessary to stop afflicting ourselves.

We do not wish to inflict suffering upon ourselves but we all do, nonetheless. We bring on suffering by looking for happiness in the wrong places and in the wrong way. Indeed, we seek happiness for the wrong 'person'. The source of suffering is ignorance of one's true nature. The calamitous error we make — one that is the root cause of all our troubles — is that we take ourselves to be something we are not: we take ourselves to be the ego (our sense of self). We believe that our *being* is the ego. So firmly are we wedded to this notion that we go

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through life without ever questioning it. By happiness we invariably mean happiness of the ego; by sadness we mean sadness of the ego.

As long as we identify with the ego and seek its happiness, we are doomed to disappointment. What the ego wants is wealth, fame, comfort, status, power, sexual gratification and the like. We imagine that we will be happy if we find these. It is a matter of common experience, however, that even if these are found the satisfaction they yield is short-lived. The ego soon takes these for granted and grasps for more. Why is this? What is the deep-rooted reason responsible for the ego never saying, 'Enough'? And if ego is indeed the cause of suffering, why do we attach ourselves to it so strongly? Further, Advaita insists that the ego is a fiction. Why then do we find it so difficult to jettison it and live a life free from suffering? There is a very fundamental cause that provides answers to all these questions. Although that cause, which is explained below, is scientific in nature it is easily understood. For this, however, we have to understand the key role played by the ego in evolution.

The ego was evolved by Nature to enhance the material well-being of individuals. Ego is a vehicle that greatly promotes the physical survival of a body. A sense of self that identifies itself with a particular body keenly looks out for the body's needs and does whatever is needed for its survival. Those with a stronger sense of self garner more resources for themselves precisely because they are more self-centred. And greater availability of resources to an individual fosters his physical survival. Furthermore, it also fosters the physical survival of his offspring. It is one thing to have many children, but to ensure their survival is quite another. The number of children who *survive* into adulthood depends on the resources available to their parents. In our evolutionary past (going back a million years or more), individuals with more resources had more surviving offspring.

Why is the capacity to have more surviving children in our ancient past relevant to our subject? Because that is what evolution crucially depends on. *Children genetically inherit their parents' physical and psychological traits and, by surviving, will themselves pass these on to posterity.* In the process of evolution, a trait like physical strength that

increased an individual's ability to acquire material resources, then, was embodied in more people in subsequent generations than traits that were less successful in this regard (simply because people of the former type left behind more surviving children). People who possessed traits that helped them acquire material resources lived longer and so had more children. At the same time, they also genetically transmitted these very traits to their children.

It follows that the traits we observe in people today are precisely those that have proved themselves 'successful' in the past in terms of the narrow yardstick of evolution, namely, the number of surviving offspring. After thousands of generations in our evolutionary march, only those traits that were most successful in appropriating resources (the 'fittest') remained in the population. It is in this way that successful traits got singled out by Nature and passed on to future generations. In short, in the struggle for survival, Nature 'selected' those traits that succeeded in reproducing themselves.¹

Evolution, then, forged and established the ego because it greatly facilitated physical survival and reproduction. Because it has such a long evolutionary history, ego is deeply ingrained in human nature.² This is why it is so hard to cast off or circumvent. We believe it defines who we are, and this is the source of our tenacious attachment to it.

The ego is trained to respond only to pleasure and pain. Pleasure was the carrot that Nature offered to attract the ego to situations that were beneficial to an individual's survival; pain was the stick Nature wielded to drive it away from situations that were detrimental to

¹ This process was referred to as 'natural selection' by Charles Darwin in his classic book, *The Origin of Species*, and is the principal mechanism through which evolution works.

² Darwin himself did not propose the role for ego that is being suggested here, but that role is a hypothesis maintained in this essay. The only sage who has written about the evolutionary significance of ego, to my knowledge, is Sri Aurobindo (see, especially, his *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, India.). In the Christian tradition, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is the only mystic who accorded evolution any role in spirituality (in particular in his posthumously published *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper and Row, New York, 1959).

MOUNTAIN PATH

survival. Individuals who embraced pleasure and fled from pain did better in evolutionary terms, and so now we all tend to welcome pleasure and resist pain. Our firmly entrenched notions of 'good' and 'bad' derive from Nature's twin devices of pleasure and pain, and they serve to keep the ego in place. We pursue what we believe is good for us and shun what we believe is bad. 'More of everything good and less of everything bad' is the ego's motto. This is the modern evolutionary reason that explains the ancient insight of Hinduism and Buddhism that desires are the principal tentacles of ego and, therefore, constitute the major impediments to liberation.

People all over the world are egoistic. Egoism is a condition that blights the lives of almost all humans. Yet Advaita claims that ego is an illusion. In what sense is this so? Ego is an illusion in the sense that *it is not a permanent attribute* of human nature. It is true that egoism is pervasive, tenacious, and universal. Advaita takes Truth as that which is eternal. Since ego is not eternal, it is an illusion. It was created by Nature as a vehicle to promote the physical survival of the body. If one manages to sidestep its workings even for a moment (as in the enlightenment experience of Self-realized sages), one sees that the ego is an illusion. Ego is Nature's creature, manufactured for evolutionary purposes. But it is not the truth of our being. It is in this sense that ego is an illusion, as is its perception of the world.³

There are further consequences that arise from the sense of self. The pursuit of material well-being pits one ego against other egos that are engaged in a similar manner. This results in conflicts, for resources that accrue to one individual frequently come at the expense of others. Conflicts in turn lead to anger, hate, the proclivity for violence, the penchant for revenge, and other unsavoury emotions. These negative emotions arose in the long march of evolution because the actions that sprang from them enabled individuals to seize more resources for

³ Recent developments in neuroscience have demonstrated that the sense of self is created by the brain. (See e.g. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* by A. Damasio, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1999). This confirms Advaita's ancient claim that the ego is a fabrication.



themselves — resources that they could not have otherwise acquired in the struggle for survival.

These negative traits are hardly conducive to happiness; indeed, they are now deemed to be ‘sins’. So how could they arise? Nature’s purpose in constructing the ego was not to make people happy or virtuous. What Nature rewarded was the capacity to acquire resources and the reward it conferred was better chances of survival for oneself and one’s children. In other words, the reward Nature offered for garnering more resources was greater representation of an individual’s traits (genes) in future generations.

This is not to suggest that people consciously wanted to maximize the number of children they left behind. Most people do not think in this manner at all. The point is that those people who had ‘successful’ traits *did* leave behind more people like themselves — whether they intended to or not. *Nature did not rely on people’s intention to bring this about.* To the extent that anger, competitiveness, violence, and ego-strength facilitated an individual’s survival (and that of his offspring), to that extent these negative traits got distributed more broadly in the human population and got more firmly entrenched in human nature. It is for this reason that such traits are almost universal in humans. They persisted because they served an evolutionary purpose.

We are now in a position to appreciate why the ego can never be permanently happy. The ego was designed by evolution to make comparisons. As we have seen, an individual with an abundance of resources will do well in evolutionary terms (as measured by the size of his progeny). But another individual with slightly more resources will do even better. People who were predisposed to constantly comparing themselves with others and improving their own lot accordingly, therefore, did better in evolutionary terms. And so the psychological tendency to gauge one’s well-being by measuring oneself against others got embedded in human nature (either genetically or through imitation by children). *Nature has thus programmed humans to live by making comparisons.* It is not enough that we are rich; we want to be the richest. It is not enough that we are powerful; we want

to be the most powerful.⁴ And even if we fortuitously happen to be the richest and most powerful, we constantly worry that we may not always remain so. This is why the ego can never be truly happy. Nothing is ever enough because nothing it can grasp is entirely permanent.

Since the ego masquerades as our being, it is perpetually insecure. It is constantly in need of support to assure itself of its legitimacy. Its pose as our being is a wholly fraudulent one, and so it is always in need of defence against this falsehood. Sri Ramana said, “What is the ego, then? It is something intermediate between the inert body and the Self. It has no *locus standi*.”⁵ The ego is incessantly trying to acquire whatever it believes will strengthen its position — more wealth, more power, more status. But no matter how great the wealth it amasses or how artful the defence it mounts, it cannot transform a lie into truth. The attempt is very costly, however, though we may not recognize this cost because we are so accustomed to it. In fact, our whole lives are taken up by this dubious activity of propping up this fraud. How much more costly can it get?

For the ego, therefore, lasting happiness is an unattainable goal. The attempt is doomed to failure from the start.

This brings us to the issue of suffering. Why is suffering self-inflicted? Identification with the ego is the cause of suffering. If a man’s wealth were lost in a robbery, he would be greatly upset and saddened because he subscribes to the belief “I have lost my wealth.” His sense of loss and grief comes from his voluntary identification with a psychological claim to the missing wealth. He would not react in this way if it were a stranger’s wealth that was stolen. If his awareness were not tied so firmly to a particular body-mind, his reaction to the loss would be greatly muted. Were he to approach Sri Ramana, the sage would surely have urged him to ask himself, “Who is it that has lost his wealth?”

⁴ Articulating the deep desire in humans to excel in status and power, Caesar is said to have remarked, “I would rather be first here (in a village) than second in Rome.” Plutarch’s *Life of Julius Caesar* available online at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Caesar*.html

⁵ Quoted in *Be as You Are: The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, by David Godman. Arkana Paperback, London. 1985. Ch. 5, p. 61.

We have seen why we are so attached to the ego and why, as long as this is so, suffering is inevitable. To recapitulate: promoting happiness is not why Nature created and programmed the ego for. The ego's reason for existence is something else altogether — to help procreate and to garner whatever resources it can to advance procreation. There are only two masters the ego reacts to: pleasure and pain. Nature has burdened us with an illusionary sense of self because those among our forebears in our evolutionary past who embraced this fiction left behind more offspring (who genetically inherited the same inclination). Ego is the earthly inheritance that Nature has bequeathed to humans. And it is this bequest that we have to disown through intense sadhana (self-enquiry), if we wish to perceive the Truth about ourselves.

The ego may be a fiction, but suffering cannot be easily dismissed: it is certainly very real to us. We feel it deeply. Nevertheless, it is true that it is only our ego that suffers. What is attached to wealth, for example, will suffer when wealth is lost. It follows that, from the standpoint of Truth, suffering is an *assumed burden* because *we choose* to identify with the ego in the first place. Suffering is a self-inflicted wound. Because we have lost sight of the fact that we make a choice, we attribute our suffering to some other cause — to other people, to our circumstances, etc. Our ego is a device, a concept that Nature has fabricated. But it is *we* who have opted to embrace, love, cherish, and worship it as an idol. This is entirely *our* own doing. The conclusion is inescapable: *suffering is self-inflicted*.

What about the pain the body feels when it is hurt? That, surely, is not self-inflicted? True, physical pain is not necessarily one's own doing. Nevertheless, the suffering that usually accompanies it is. That is why, when a most painful osteo-sarcoma was eating away his body, Sri Ramana did not suffer. There has to be an ego present that accepts suffering; when there is no ego, there may be pain but not suffering.

But behind all the machinations of the ego there stands our true nature, our true Being, untainted by all the suffering the ego creates for itself. Once we recognize and acknowledge our true Self, our suffering vanishes. The world as *it is perceived by the ego* is then seen to be maya, illusion. This is what the sages assure us.

What is the solution to the problem of suffering, then? Since evolution has shaped our behaviour over a million years, what chance do we have of escaping from its clutches? There *is* an escape route. However, except in the cases of a fortunate few, it usually requires great effort. It consists in recognizing that our true nature is the same as God's. This is our heavenly inheritance. This is our birthright, the Being of our being. The scriptures and countless sages are unanimous in asserting this. We have forgotten our birthright and are wandering around like nomads in an alien land, fighting and struggling for more of this or that when, in truth, everything that exists is ours already. Our being permeates the entire universe and here we are trying to appropriate fragments of the world and claiming exclusive ownership of them. How absurd it seems when we think that we have renounced our divine birthright and are begging for scraps to feed a worthless fictitious idol!

The problem of suffering is to be solved, then, by shedding our false identity and retrieving knowledge of our true one. We have to escape from the mechanical rut that Nature has trapped us in. We have to surrender our tendency of grasping for more and more to offer more and more as tribute to our ego. We have to stop voluntarily identifying with the ego and recognize that the ego is itself a pathetic creature of a mechanical deity, Nature. We have to cease being enamoured by Nature's earthly bequest to us if we are to retrieve our heavenly inheritance.

Different spiritual traditions prescribe different means to accomplish this. But if all our problems arise because of the fateful error that we take ourselves to be something we are not, then the most natural thing to do would be to question our identity. This is why the technique Sri Ramana recommended (self-enquiry) is the most direct. By persistently asking oneself the question "Who am I?" and rejecting every answer offered by the mind (which can only serve up more concepts), self-enquiry promises to break our identification with the body-mind and reveal our true identity as the Self. Until we have firsthand experience of this, we are doomed to keep heaping suffering upon ourselves. ▲



John Maynard

KEYWORD

Mounam

Sanskrit: Silence of speech, Stillness, Cessation of mind, Extinction of thoughts, Abandonment of self-will, Negation of ego, Living in surrender without *sankalpas*, Renouncing all reactions of the mind.

Bhagavan wrote, “The fates of all souls are ordained by God in accordance with their past deeds; whatever is destined not to happen, will never happen however hard one may try. What has to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. *The best course, therefore, is for one to abide in mounam.*” This was his very first teaching, wrung out of his rock-like silence by his grieving mother Alagammal who first met him on the rocks of Pavazhakkundru by the slopes of Arunachala. She had then come with the Herculean resolve to take him back to the comforts of the hearth and home at Madurai. Her heart-rending appeals and tears failed to fulfil her original intent but succeeded in eliciting this timeless message from Bhagavan for the benefit of a deeply restless and angst-ridden humanity. These immortal words, teaching the panacea of acceptance and surrender, radiate a rare power that bestows solace to distressed seekers, when hit by tragedies. For Bhagavan himself lived what he taught, by abiding

in *mounam* in its deepest sense all his life, in utter abandonment to divine Providence and complete effacement of self-will. These words codify not only a life of surrender to a Higher Power in devotion, but carry the germ of *atma vichara* that came to be the hallmark of Bhagavan's teachings. To live in *mounam* is thus to negate the slightest rising of the ego at its source, by putting the axe of the 'Who am I?' *vichara* at the root level of all thoughts, as and when they rise.

Mounam is the bedrock of all mental activity and every thought is but a wave-like perturbation in the ocean-bed of Silence, which is the very nature of our Self. As each thought-wave sallies forth from within, instead of getting carried away helplessly with the surging onslaught of thought-flow, we are asked to enquire 'to whom does this occur?'. When this query is persistently held onto and posed in front of every thought, the mind is stunned and balked in its tracks and thus cajoled to subside in its source. With consistent practice of thus turning it inward, the mind develops the strength to abide in its natural state of thought-free Self-awareness.¹ This is the state of true *mounam*, where the mind regains its pristine purity and tranquillity and Self-abidance becomes effortless. The extinction of the mind is accompanied by cessation of all efforts together with the self-will that prompts them in the first place and this alone is indicated by the terms 'mounam' and 'akarma' (actionlessness).²

The word 'mounam' derives from the root 'man' which means 'to reflect profoundly', 'to contemplate', 'to know' and thus broadly indicates the 'saintly/ascetic disposition of a contemplative, reticent recluse' (*munerbhavah iti mounam*). Sage Ashtavakra describes an enlightened 'mouni' picturesquely as, "The bliss of *atma* belongs *only to that master idler*, who finds it a great affliction to exert himself even in the matter of winking his eyelids and not to anybody else (who swerves from Self-abidance with the slightest sense of doership notion)."³ He further says with a tinge of humorous sarcasm,

¹ *Who am I?* The answers to Questions 10 and 11, p.39. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2007.

² *Spiritual Instruction*, p.55. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2007.

³ *Ashtavakra Gita*: v.16.4, *vyaapaare khidyate yastu nimesha unmeshayorapi, tasya aalasya dhureenasya sukham naanyasya kasyachit*.

"Knowledge of this Truth makes a man *dumb, inert and lazy* who was, prior to this wisdom, highly eloquent, intelligent and very enterprising in all endeavours; therefore, worldly people seeking petty pleasures shy away from this saving knowledge!"⁴ Bhagavan Ramana echoes similar sentiments in verse 37 of *Akshara Mana Maalai* in a rhetoric poser, "Is there anything higher than the state of 'supreme laziness' by shedding all the ego-driven actions of the body, speech and mind, while remaining indifferent to all matters pertaining to the non-Self and enjoying the bliss of the Self alone as one's food and sleep?"

In verses two and four of *Atmavidya Kirtanam*, Bhagavan sings, "As one pursues the *vichara* *marga* and traces the *aham vrtti* to its source, all thoughts vanish, leaving behind only the pure awareness of the Self in the form of *aham sphurti* — this alone is *mounam* as abidance in the space of Consciousness, the abode of bliss," and "This *vichara* *marga* is easier and more direct than all other paths for liberation from the bondage of *karma* and *samsara*; for by simply dropping all actions of the body, mind and speech and abiding in the stillness of *mounam*, without bestirring oneself in any manner, one eventually beholds the effulgent Self within and experiences Eternity in the ocean of bliss." In verse 31 of *Akshara Mana Maalai*, he again prays to Arunachala, "Without a fuss, quietly manifest in my Heart so that the sea of joy may surge forth within me and let all words and thoughts cease and subside forever, Oh Arunachala!" In verse 36, he reveals the Grace of Arunachala as, "In silence you told me, to stay silent without a word, and you remained silent yourself (instructing me by example)."

Bhagavan clarifies with a warning note that "this is not an effortless state of indolence. The act of communion with the Self (*atma vyavahara*), or remaining still inwardly, is intense activity performed with the mind without a break. Ignorance is destroyed only by this intense and ceaseless activity which is called silence (*mounam*)."⁵ Bhagavan emphasises that great effort (*sadhana*) necessarily precedes

⁴ *Ashtavakra Gita*, v.15.3, *vaagmi praagnya mahodyogam janam mooka jadaalasaam, karoti tattva bodhoyam atastyakto bubhukshubhihi*.

⁵ *Spiritual Instruction*, p.55. *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2007.

effortlessness, the final beatitude which cannot be contrived or merely imitated by beginners. The *Mandukya Upanishad* indicates in the celebrated seventh mantra, the total commitment and absorption of mind that is demanded in this one-pointed sadhana of supreme mounam with the phrase, ‘*ekatma pratyayasaaram, prapanchopashamam, shantam sivam advaitam caturtham manyante sa atma sa vijneyah.*’

Bhagavan Ramana never tires of saying that by holding on to the ‘I’—thought to the exclusion of everything else (*ekatma pratyaya saaram*), one plumbs the depths of the Self, where all phenomena of the world cease (*prapanchopashamam*). For when the mind is extinguished, how can the world-appearance be left behind?⁶ Thus true mounam happens spontaneously when the mind is dissolved in the limitless ocean of the Self-Consciousness (*manopashamanat mounam*) and not where a little bit of it stays back as a residue to enjoy the glimpse of the Self and report it to ‘others’. Bhagavan consistently said, in Self-Knowledge there are no ‘others’ to share with or serve or save, as “all duality ceases to exist after realization.”⁷ At the pinnacle of Advaitic realization, all the noble ideals of ‘sharing, serving and saving’ others are seen to be mere delusion, while in the lower rungs of sadhana they have a role to play in attaining purity of mind (*chitta shuddhi*) inasmuch as they make a person increasingly selfless in one’s empirical life.

Mounam, at the empirical level, accommodates all views (*mounam sarvartha sadhakam*) by rising above them. Silence heals all discord and soothes frayed nerves (*moune kalaham nasti*), for it is said to be ‘the sound of a one-hand clap’. For a sadhaka, silence of speech is a great aid to turn within, by avoiding futile discussions and thus preserve hard-earned spiritual energy. Sankara extols it, along with solitude, as ‘the primary gateway towards self-conquest’.⁸ The Chinese thinker Lin Yu Tang says forcefully, “He who talks about Truth injures it

thereby; one who tries to prove it maims it; he who gives it a label and develops a school of thought kills it; he who declares himself a blind believer buries it!” Lao Tzu in the opening verse of his *Tao Te Ching*, declared famously, “The Tao that can be talked about is not the eternal Tao.” A Tamil saying goes as, “Those who have seen It, remain silent; the ones who prattle eloquently about It have not seen!”⁹ Straddling across the realms of the absolute and the relative, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna, “I am Mounam, the supreme among all secrets.”¹⁰

Great masters like Buddha took refuge in silence when confronted with questions of academic curiosity, concerning ultimate ‘concepts’ like God that transcend empirical experience. When Pontius Pilate demanded ‘What is Truth?’, Jesus replied in sublime silence. Bhagavan Ramana said mounam is *Isvara svarupam* itself and *mouna diksha* (initiation through silence) is the most powerful form of teaching, transmitting immediate benefit to ripe and ready disciples. Mounam is therefore, unique by being both the goal (*lakshya*) and the pointer (*lakshana*) at the same time, demonstrating the Biblical saying, “I am the Way; I am the Goal.” Thus in Hindu mythology, Adi Guru Lord Dakshinamurti expounded the highest Truth in mounam to the mind-born sons of Brahma, conferring spontaneous enlightenment with felicity.

Bhagavan Ramana sat in supreme silence as the human embodiment of the celestial mouna guru, Arunagiri Yogi under the banyan tree, and dispelled the doubts of genuine seekers. Verily does he shine as the pole star of spirituality that continues to guide a groping humanity caught in an ever-deepening existential crisis. Blessed indeed are the meek who heed his liberating wisdom, emanating from his eloquent, ever-living Mounam! ▲

⁶ Ulladu Narpadu, v.6.

⁷ *Mandukya Karika*: 1.17 and 18, *upadeshaadayam vaado, jnate dvaitam na vidyate.*

⁸ *Vivekachudamani*, v.368, *yogasya prathamam dwaram vangnirodhah...nityam ekantasheelatah.*

⁹ *Kanndavar vinndilar, vinndavar kanndilar!*

¹⁰ *Bhagavad Gita*, 10.38. *mounam caivasmi guhyanam.*

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Twenty

S. RAM MOHAN

20. If one sees God without realizing ones' own Self — the Seer — it will just be a projection of the mind. There is no God apart from the Seer; to have a vision of God is to be merged in the substratum of one's own Self.

Commentary

It is said that devotees can reach the goal of ultimate deliverance through worshipping God with a name and form. We all have read anecdotes about those who had visions of God. But is not God — the ultimate source of all — beyond the mind? For the senses cannot reach the source where thoughts completely cease and the ego

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dissolves into pure consciousness. From this pure consciousness, the ego, the mind and then, the whole universe emerge as manifestations. That reality which is our Self is the Seer in all.

The word *yoga* means to approach or to unite. It presupposes that there must have been a *viyoga* or separation. If we want to truly see or unite with God, we must transcend the sense of separation by enquiring into the very source of everything, and consciously abide there. When we enquire whether the sense of separation is real, it will lead to the quest of 'Who am I?'. The end of this enquiry will be the realization that there was never any such separation (The truth of this is also brought out in verse 14 of the supplement to *Ulladu Narpadu*). The realization of the Self is the solvent of all the problems. Ego is the fundamental flaw which creates the illusion that it is the Self.

If it is so, how is that there are many anecdotes about devotees and saints who had the vision of God? When a devotee's mind is totally focused on his favourite aspect of God (*ishta devata*), his mind creates a projection, a vision of God. Such visions give him a joy that is not sensuous but pure and subtle. Nevertheless, such visions are not the Ultimate Reality. These visions exist in space and time and eventually cease. Reality is not conditioned by time and space. It would be a mistake for the bhakta to think that because he had a vision, the goal has been reached and that there is nothing more to aspire for. Inevitably the vision is temporary and the bhakta prays for the vision to be permanent. Through deep devotion, selfless love and constant contemplation of God, the true devotee's mind is saturated with *sattva guna* and Grace will spontaneously flow. By that Grace, egoism and attachment are weakened. The conscious act of surrender matures and the true harmony with God is attained — the experience of Self (*atmanubhuti*). The bhakta can see his favourite God-form everywhere. His outlook becomes universal and slowly the sense of separateness from God and other beings vanishes. In due course, the mind is transcended and there is unity in the Self.

It is only then that the devotee, realising that there is no God other than the Self, really 'sees' God, the inner 'Seer' of all.

There is no conflict between theism, advaita and devotion, for unshakable faith in God attenuates the ego and paves the way for its annihilation. By focusing the mind on the one point that is the nameless, formless *caitanya* (consciousness) in the purest form of 'I', the mind is anchored and the mind's distracting tendency curbed. The individual realizes that there is a force greater than the limited ego, which shapes all things and events. Knowing the world to be finite, he holds on steadfastly to the Infinite, which he sees in his God. Vedanta recognizes the utility of devotion as a spiritual discipline. At the same time, it also wants us to recognize that we have to go beyond it. Devotion to an *ishta devata* does not destroy the sense of limitation or finitude. We ultimately have to transcend devotion with its built-in sense of difference if Self-realization has to occur. Even if there is a miniscule sense of difference or duality, the process is not complete.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* beautifully posits this idea, "He who worships a God thus 'He is different; I am different' does not know; he is a domestic animal to the gods."¹ Since ego is imperfect and finite it assumes God as a perfect and infinite person. "Any idea of personality necessarily involves imperfection and finitude. All ideas of God formed by the ego contain, therefore, a self-contradiction. This contradiction cannot be removed as long as the ego lasts. It is only when the ego vanishes that the truth dawns, the truth of the non-dual reality which is the Self."²

The truth that Bhagavan teaches here is that the God-form seen in a vision is not real but a mental projection. This projection is achieved by devotion to God. This vision is separate from the seer and is not permanent. Since the truth of God is the Real Self, who is ever present, the real vision of God is the experience or identity of Self as God.

In all empirical experience, there is the triad — the seer, the act of seeing and the object seen. It is only in the absence of Self-knowledge that there is the empirical usage of 'seeing'. All seeing, including the seeing of God as the 'other', is an act of ego. The forms of God that

¹ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, I.IV.10.

² *Ramana Maharshi and His Philosophy of Existence* by TMP Mahadevan, p. 68. 1999.

are seen by the mind are images. They certainly have their value but they are not the final truth. Bhagavan said that seeing is not true but only being is true.

A question may arise here. Does not a jnani (realised sage) who has the awareness of Self, which may be called the vision of God, see God? The answer to this question is the latter part of the verse, which says that such a sage also does not see God, because this would-be seer, the ego, has become extinguished by that Awareness so that 'he' has ceased to remain separate from Him (since seeing is a triad of seer, the seer and act of seeing). In the state of awareness, there is no seer nor is there a vision for the realized person. The expressions 'realizing' and 'seeing' are only figurative, because in Self-realization, there is no subject-object distinction. The distinction remains only as long as the ego remains. After the ego has abided or dissolved in the Self, how can there be any seeing?

The *Kena Upanishad* explains this:

"That which is not expressed by speech, but that by which speech is expressed — that alone you should know thou as Brahman, and not this which people worship here.

"That which is not thought by the mind, but that by which the mind is thought — that alone know thou as Brahman, and not this which people worship here.

"That which is not seen by the eyes but by which the eyes are seen that alone know thou as Brahman, and not this which people worship here."³

The latter part of the verse can also be interpreted thus: The one who has experienced the Self has seen God since the cause of his separate existence — the ego — has become extinguished. He is now one with God. It means that the sage who has the non-dual experience sees God as He really is — as his own Self and therefore it can be figuratively said that by that experience, he has the vision of God. ▲

³ *Kena Upanishad*, I.5.7.

The Significance of Pradakshina

N. A. MOHAN RAO

The Tradition of *Pradakshina*

Pradakshina is an age-old devotional practice associated largely with temple-visits. Before the devotees enter the inner shrine that houses the deity, they go round the shrine as a token of their reverence and self-surrender. This is called *pradakshina* or circumambulation.

The purpose of *pradakshina* is to afford the devotee some time to halt his flow of worldly thoughts, and bring out into his surface-consciousness his deep-seated feelings of devotion, before he comes face-to-face with the deity. Sometimes, to achieve this he may take to *japa* of the deity's name in a low tone or silently within himself. Having gone through such preparation, he is usually rewarded by a rapturous communion with the divine at the time of *darsan*.

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Pradakshina is practised around other holy objects too — such as a Mahatma's *samadhi*, a basil (*tulasi*) plant in the household, etc. *Pradakshina* around Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai), Lake Manasa-sarovar and Mount Kailas (the Himalayas), and Mount Govardhan (Brindavan) are well known. Hindu marriages are often sanctified by *pradakshina* by the bridal couple around a fire. In the conduct of *yajnas*, *pradakshina* of the sacrificial fire forms an integral part of the proceedings.

In all such *pradakshinas*, the devotees follow the clockwise direction i.e., they move round keeping their right side towards the object of devotion. The number of circumambulations is left to the choice of the devotee: but generally an odd number is preferred, one, three, eleven being common.¹ A devotee may sometimes undertake a fairly large number, say like 108, for a specific purpose e.g., seeking fulfilment of a wish, acknowledging fulfilment of a wish, or in token of penance and self-purification.

The clockwise direction is referred to as the *savya* (or proper) direction. It is followed on auspicious occasions. When the occasion is inauspicious, the *pradakshina* is done in the anticlockwise (*apasavya* or improper) direction e.g., around the funeral pyre while conducting last rites.

When the *pradakshina* route is long, such as that around a hill, the constant remembrance of the deity, with or without *japa*, becomes identified with meditation. On such occasions, there is no binding rule that the *pradakshina* should be non-stop; and the devotee may take as many rests in between as he feels like.

Esoteric Significance of *Pradakshina*

Pradakshina is basically viewed as a practice pertaining to the *dvaita* tradition (of *bhakti* or devotion). So, it comes to us somewhat as a surprise when Bhagavan chooses to refer to it in *advaitic* terms:²

¹ One explanation suggested for choosing an odd number is that it leaves a feeling of incompleteness, and thus prompts the devotee to return for more later.

² *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Devaraja Mudaliar, Entry of 15.4.1946 Morning. Bhagavan quotes this from the *Ribhu Gita*, Ch.3, verse 39.



“After all, the proper *pradakshina* is going round the Self, or, more accurately, to realise that we are the Self and that within us all the countless spheres revolve, going round and round.”

We normally tend to take such remarks of Bhagavan in a broad philosophical or figurative sense. We come to realise that there is something more to it than what appears on the surface. We shall try to delve into this other meaning taking the illustrative case of a temple-visit.

Consider the *pradakshina* by a devotee around the inner shrine of a temple. For easy comprehension, let us suppose that the *pradakshina* path is rectangular. We shall see later that the same explanation applies to other shapes of the path.

Usually, the deity of a temple faces east, and so the devotee starts the *pradakshina* at the eastern entrance. Since the *pradakshina* is to be in the clockwise direction, he stands with his right shoulder towards the deity i.e., himself facing south. He moves straight to the end of the *pradakshina* path in this direction, and then turns to his right. He will then be facing west. He goes to the end in that direction, and again turns right. He will then face north. He continues thus with the remaining stretch of the path, taking two more right turns before he returns to the starting point at the entrance.

We see thus that in the course of the *pradakshina*, the devotee takes four right-turns. It means he has turned round himself once, as he would have if he had taken those four turns standing still at a place! Since the Self is felt to be inside the body, this would mean he has done *pradakshina* round the Self,³ i.e., an *Atma-pradakshina* or Self-circumambulation.⁴

³ “Go round yourself. That will be *Atma-pradakshina*.” *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, by Suri Nagamma. Ch. 64, dated 19.8.1946. 2008 edition.

⁴ The fact that he was on the move during the *pradakshina* does not make a difference to this conclusion, since the Self, supposedly lying within him, also moves with him. As a matter of fact, even when we do *Atma-pradakshina* apparently standing still, we are actually not stationary but moving in space along with the earth as it moves round the sun and round itself. Just as we raise no objections in accepting it as *Atma-pradakshina*, we should have no objection in accepting the ‘walking *pradakshina*’ too as *Atma-pradakshina*.

We have assumed here that the *pradakshina* path is rectangular. But the same thing applies even when it is of some other regular or irregular shape. Because, in tracing it the devotee would be turning all the time to his right, till he comes to face the starting direction, and in that process he completes a circumambulation round himself. Thus, any customary *pradakshina* involves an *Atma-pradakshina*, which in Bhagavan’s terms is ‘the proper *pradakshina*’ (see quote above).

We see here harmonisation of two points of view: *dvaita* and *advaita*. From the *dvaita* standpoint, the object of *pradakshina* is held to be outside — say, inside the shrine. From the *advaita* standpoint, the object is held to be within oneself as one’s own Self. That Bhagavan commends the latter view here admits of a delightful explanation as follows.⁵

When one wants to do *pradakshina* round God, who is actually unmanifest, the ‘best’ way is to go round the entire universe,⁶ since the universe is looked upon as His manifest aspect. But since such a *pradakshina* is not practically feasible, one may consider the alternative of going round Arunachala, which Bhagavan says has the same merit as going round the world.⁷ Simpler than that is to circumambulate the Arunachaleswara temple. The *Atma-pradakshina* is even more simple, and yet confers the same benefit, since the Self includes ‘all’.

On a more absolutist note, Bhagavan defines *Atma-pradakshina* thus: “... the ego which goes round like a whirlwind must get destroyed, and must get absorbed in *Atma*. That is *Atma Pradakshina*.”⁸ Quoting from the *Ribhu Gita*, he says: “I remain fixed whereas innumerable universes becoming concepts within my mind, rotate within me. This meditation is the highest circuit (*pradakshina*).”⁹

⁵ Adapted from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, #212, Entry of 19.6.1936.

⁶ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma. Ch. 41 dated 15.4.1946. 2008; (as per a dialogue quoted from the *Ribhu Gita*).

⁷ Bhagavan could as well have said that since, according to legend, Isvara himself manifested as Arunachala, a *pradakshina* round Arunachala is *pradakshina* round God. But his aim here is to bring the focus down gradually to *Atma-pradakshina*.

⁸ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma. Ch. 64, dated 19.8.1946. 2008.

⁹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. The fact that Bhagavan thought it fit to repeat this quotation ten years later (footnote 2) shows the importance he attaches to this concept, which is attributed originally to Sankara (footnote 6).

Arunachala Pradakshina

Bhagavan, as a true Master, tailored his teachings to suit his visitors with different levels of maturity. But he always topped them up with pronouncements of the highest *advaitic* import. This is because, he wants us to keep that lofty goal ever within our sight, even as we walk the plain grounds of day-to-day *sadhana*. The aforesaid remarks of his on *pradakshina* fall into this context. While hardline followers of *jnana* might embrace them heartily, the others who constitute the vast majority may look for greater comfort from the Master's views on conventional *pradakshinas*, which "are not condemned."¹⁰

Among conventional *pradakshinas*, Bhagavan assigns a special place of importance to *pradakshina* round the Arunachala hill. He not only endorsed and encouraged this '*giri-pradakshina*' (*pradakshina* of the hill) strongly, but, set an example by undertaking it himself at frequent intervals till 1926. He was usually joined on these circuits by a large number of devotees and enthusiasts. He held that as the legend says, Arunachala is Siva's manifestation. He often referred to it unequivocally as his Guru. The very name of the hill arises from *Aruna* for 'red' with connotations of 'fire', 'light' and 'knowledge', and *achala* for 'hill'. It is thus the 'hill of *Jnana*', and the veritable spiritual centre of the world.

Bhagavan describes the greatness of the *giri-pradakshina* in glowing terms thus: "To go round this hill is good. The word '*Pradakshina*' has a typical meaning. The letter '*Pra*' stands for removal of all kinds of sins; '*da*' stands for fulfilling the desires; '*kshi*' stands for freedom from future births; '*na*' stands for giving deliverance through *Jnana*. ... One should go round either in *Mouna* (silence) or *Dhyana* (meditation) or *Japa* (repetition of Lord's name) or *Sankeertana* (Bhajan) and thereby think of God all the time. One should walk slowly like a woman who is in the ninth month of pregnancy. ... Really, it is difficult to describe the pleasure and the happiness one gets by this *Pradakshina*. The body gets tired, the sense organs lose their strength and all the activities of the body become absorbed within. It

¹⁰*Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar. Entry of 15.4.1946 Morning.

is possible thus to forget oneself and get into a state of meditation. As one continues to walk, the body automatically gets harmonized as in the *Asana* state. The body therefore becomes improved in health. Besides this, there are several varieties of medicinal herbs on the hill. The air that passes over those herbs is good for the lungs. ...

"It used to be very exciting during those days when we were going for *Pradakshina*. We started whenever we felt like it especially if there was any festival day; we used to halt whenever we felt it was late or we were tired, cook for ourselves and eat. There was no anxiety whatsoever as there was no stipulation that we should stop at any particular place. ... [You become absorbed in your Atma by walking with no other thought than that of God]... The body becomes light and it walks of its own accord. There will not be the feeling that we are walking. The *Dhyana* that you cannot get into while sitting, you get into automatically if you go for *Pradakshina*. The place and the atmosphere there are like that. However unable a person is to walk, if he once goes round the hill he will feel like going again and again. The more you go, the more the enthusiasm for it. It never decreases. ..."¹¹

Devaraja Mudaliar recalls that even close disciples of Bhagavan, who were expected to be strongly aligned to *advaita*, went on *pradakshina* regularly and realised its virtues as extolled by Bhagavan.¹²

Sri Muruganar even reported his going into samadhi while going round the hill. Nagamma, the lady-chronicler of Bhagavan, used to go on the *pradakshina* all alone without any fear even in pre-dawn darkness. Tuesdays are generally believed to be auspicious for this *pradakshina*. Going barefoot is the norm.

Pradakshina around Arunachala is said to automatically turn one's mind inward, cause steady destruction of *vasanas* (tendencies) and

¹¹ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma. Ch. 251, dated 26.6.1949. 2008. Further readings on *pradakshina* as practised in Bhagavan's times may be had from *Self-realization* by B.V. Narasimha Swami. Ch. XXIII (1996 Reprint).

For an exalting account on the efficacy of *giri-pradakshina* as derived from Sadhu Om, see <http://sri-ramana-maharshi.blogspot.com/2008/05/giri-pradakshina.html>.

¹² Portions of this and the next para are based on an excellent online article at: <http://www.davidgodman.org/asaints/powerofa2.shtml#bk2>.

MOUNTAIN PATH

finally burn away the mind, as surely as fire drives away moisture from a block of damp wood, and then ignites and burns it. This internal purification proceeds unknown to the devotee, even when the *pradakshina* is undertaken without faith in it. All this makes us wonder if Bhagavan has himself invested a remarkable power in this *giri-pradakshina* as a lasting benediction to humanity. Therein perhaps lies its extraordinary significance. ▲

VERSE

The Names of Siva

RAMESH MENON

The Maha *Yogin*,
on white Kailasa,
locked in the lotus
he sits.

Pushpaka vimanas
he has, fleet sky chariots,
quick as light and time;
olden *Vrishavahana*,
you ride just the great bull.

Night stalker you are,
bhutas and pretas your trackers;
soft you make your kill
out in the deserted street,
Nishachara, past midnight. ▲

The poems are loosely based on the Japanese tanka form of 5 lines. A tanka is a haiku with two extra 7-syllabled lines. The lines have 5/7/5/7/7 syllables, in that order.

In Praise of the Lazy Ones

DAVID GODMAN

Verses 773 and 774 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* are grouped together under a chapter heading entitled 'Being Still' or 'Remaining Still'. The second of these two verses immediately attracts attention because Bhagavan states quite clearly that abiding in *swarupa*, one's true state, is a state of laziness:

The method of true and supreme *tapas* that our Lord Ramana declares to be worthwhile and which the mind should firmly hold onto is this, and no more: 'Being still.' Other than this there are absolutely no thoughts to think, nor any duties to be contemplated by it.

The lazy state wherein you exist motionlessly and shine is the state of *swarupa*. In that supreme state you have become

David Godman has written many books on Ramana Maharshi and his devotees. His most recent, a new translation of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* that was done in collaboration with T. V. Venkatasubramanian and Robert Butler, came out a few weeks ago.

That. It cannot be attained except by direct, excellent and rare *tapas*. You should therefore honour those who are established in that laziness as holy beings.

These verses are from a new English edition of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, translated and edited by T. V. Venkatasubramanian, Robert Butler and myself, which will be available by the time this article appears in print.

The state of the Self is described here, perhaps a little ironically, as 'lazy' only because there is no one left there who can do anything. It should not be taken as an encouragement to *sadhaks* to be lazy; it is simply pointing out that this state of spiritual 'laziness' is inevitable for enlightened beings who have completely lost the 'I am the doer' idea.

Muruganar wrote in *Padamalai* that Bhagavan bestowed this 'idle' state on him:

The golden *Padam* [Bhagavan] completely abolished my wandering around as a wicked one and made me shine as a perfect idler.

Even the actions I perform, believing them to be my own, are in reality the actions of *Padam*, the complete and absolute truth.¹

Bhagavan also mentioned this state of laziness in *Aksharamanamalai* verse 37:

If I sleep consciously as a lazy one, remaining still and consuming bliss, this is the supreme state. Is there any [state] other than this, O Arunachala? If there is, please tell me!

Even though this verse begins, in Tamil, '*Sombiyai...*', which means 'as a lazy one', most translators have avoided the word 'lazy' in their translations, perhaps feeling that it is a somewhat pejorative description of the Self, and by extension, of Bhagavan himself. In two translations I looked at while I was writing this article one opted for 'lying in peaceful repose' and the other for 'slumbering in quiet repose'. It is

possible that these euphemistic phrases were trying to convey the idea that realisation is a state in which nothing can be done or needs to be done. While this is a true description of the state being described, the impact of the original phrase '*Sombiyai...*' is considerably watered down.

I believe that when Bhagavan composed this verse he was using the word 'lazy' in its full and normal sense. Why? Because when Muruganar wrote his Tamil commentary on *Aksharamanamalai* (*Aksharamanamalai Vritti Urai*) and showed it to Bhagavan, Bhagavan added the following verse from *Tirumandiram*, one of the canonical scriptures of Saivism, to the section of Muruganar's manuscript that dealt with this verse:

The place where the lazy ones dwell is pure space.

The place where the lazy ones rest is pure space.

The consciousness of the lazy ones remains in the place which the *Vedas* have abandoned as beyond their scope.

The lazy ones have gained the state in which they are sleeping, totally unaware of the *Vedas*.²

A few weeks ago I posted my views on this verse on a blog I had recently started (<http://sri-ramana-maharshi.blogspot.com>). One reader responded by sending me the following very interesting comment:

There is the fascinating anecdote in the book *Drops from the Ocean*, written by Sri V. Ganesan. He wrote that Sri Bhagavan's old devotee TPR told him the following story:

'Bhagavan would accept a new pencil or pen only when the old one was completely exhausted or totally damaged. He would then take a piece of paper and scribble a few times with the new one to see whether it was working properly. Most of us, on similar occasions, sign our own names, write OM or some God's name. So I was very inquisitive to know

¹ *Padamalai* by Muruganar, pp. 342, 343, vv. 62, 64.

² *Tirumandiram*, v. 127.

what He scribbled. Bhagavan permitted me to see what He wrote. Even those who were close to Him did not know about it. Either He wrote, “Arunachalavaasi”, meaning, “One residing in Arunachala”, or “Panilenivadu”, meaning, “One without any work”.³

‘*Panilenivadu*’ is a Telugu term that is made up of three components: *pani*: work; *leni*: not there, or non-existent; *vadu*: a person.

Another contributor to the blog, a native Telugu speaker, pointed out that while the three components of the phrase denote a person who is idle, there is also the connotation that it is not a temporary idleness: the laziness is permanent. So, this phrase ‘*panilenivadu*’ conveys very well the ‘lazy’ state of permanent Self-abidance in which nothing can be done because there is no longer a doer who can initiate actions.

Verse fifteen of *Upadesa Undiyar* contains a similar idea:

For the great yogi who is established as the reality due to the death of the mind-form, there is not any action [to do because] he has attained his [true] nature.

When Bhagavan translated this verse into Telugu, he used this same term ‘*panilenivadu*’ to describe the ‘great yogi’s’ final state of not having any actions to do.

This phrase ‘the man who has no work’ came up in a story that was narrated by Suri Nagamma. She had complained to Bhagavan that Devaraja Mudaliar was teasing her about being Bhagavan’s ‘Telugu secretary’.

‘What am I to do, Bhagavan? He teases me saying “Nagamma, secretary, secretary”. I requested him several times not to do so but he ignores my entreaties. What great work has Bhagavan got to require a secretary?’ No sooner had I said it than Mudaliar laughed and said, ‘Yes. I did say so. It is based on actual facts. Nagamma is the Telugu secretary

and Muruganar Tamil secretary to Bhagavan. What is wrong if I say so?’ He left the hall thereafter. Bhagavan merely laughed and kept quiet.

Taking up the thread of the conversation, Balarama Reddy remarked, ‘Bhagavan has no work whatsoever. Where is the need for a secretary?’ ‘That is exactly what I have been saying. When Bhagavan has no work to do, where is the need for two secretaries, Nagamma and Muruganar? Whatever little work there is, we are doing it on our own to satisfy ourselves; otherwise where is any work worth mentioning? I have told him several times that if he has any opinion, to keep it to himself but not give such high sounding designations. He however persists. So I thought I should bring the matter to the notice of Bhagavan hoping it would have the desired effect on him. That is all.’ Bhagavan laughed and said, ‘I have already been dubbed as “a man having no work”.’ ‘Yes. That is just it. This is just like the saying, “A person having no work has ten people working under him”.’ I said. We all had a hearty laugh. In spite of all that had happened, Mudaliar did not give up calling me secretary.⁴

Since Bhagavan spoke fluent Telugu and Balaram Reddy and Suri Nagamma were both native Telugu speakers, I think it is reasonable to assume that this conversation would have taken place in Telugu. Bhagavan said, probably in Telugu, ‘I have already been dubbed as “[*panilenivadu*] a man having no work”.’

I think the Telugu phrase ‘*panilenivadu*’, with its connotations of perpetual ‘idleness’, would have appealed to Bhagavan, and I can see him using it to test out a new pencil with a smile on his face. However, I don’t think that he wrote this phrase very often during his pen-tests. As V. Ganesan has reported elsewhere in *Moments Remembered*, when Bhagavan was given a new pen or pencil, he generally initiated it by writing ‘Arunachala’ as the first word. ▲

³ *Drops from the Ocean* by V. Ganesan, p. 117.

⁴ *Letters and Recollections from Sri Ramanasramam* by Suri Nagamma, pp. 170-1.



Freud's *Unconscious* in the Light of Vedanta

S. MOHAN

*Sarvam etad brahma ayam atma brahma soayam atma
chatuspath.* — Mandukya Upanishad, 2.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* is one of the briefest expositions on Vedanta and is yet considered to be one of the most significant treatises. It definitively and authoritatively describes the structure of the human being and the entire universe as being fourfold in nature.

The first part (or *pada*, literally connoting 'quarter') is the physical aspect, the human body and the entire physical universe, both of which have been the subject matter of science. This is termed the 'gross body' (the *sthula*) and is described as having nineteen modes of expression.

S. Mohan, electrical engineer, and his wife, Nirmala Mohan were introduced to Bhagavan and his teachings by her father, Sri V. N. Srinivasa Rao, Barrister, in 1978. They are devoted to researching unifying concepts in world philosophical thought and practice.

These include the five sensory organs, the five organs of action, the five vital airs (or *pranas*), thoughts, intellect, memory (*citta*) and individuality (*ahamkara*). The last two modes are a kind of memory bank of accumulated information, impressions and experiences, and various unique feelings associated with them. *Citta - ahamkara* thus defines the unique personality of the individual and describes how the person views the world. It will be noted that the physical aspect, according to the Upanishad, incorporates the four aspects of the mind, thus emphasizing that even the so-called physical aspect comprises not only the bodily parts but also the vital airs and the mind. The first *pada*, the *vaishvanara* or *viswa*, is thus an amalgamation of all three energies, physical, vital and mental.

The first part of the human system is amenable to observation by others in the form of its actions, expressions and general behaviour. This first *pada* is termed the 'waking state' or *jagrtha avastha*. It implies that in this condition the human being is aware of the outside world in a fully awakened condition. The term 'waking' differentiates this part from the other aspects.

This part of the human personality is the easiest to study and hence Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) termed it the 'Conscious' aspect of human personality. As a medical practitioner and scientist he commenced his study from this part.

The second part is the mental aspect of the human being. While the 'mind' is present in the first part in a muted and invisible form in the awakened body, in the second part everything is mental. The Upanishad calls the second part as 'of the nature of light' or *taijasa*. The mental part of the human personality reproduces all the experiences of the first part in a subtle or 'illuminated' form. It is akin to a movie or video record of real-life experience. The waking state experiences the latter, while the mental state reproduces the former. That is why the purely mental state is called 'dreaming state' or *swapna*. The dreaming condition in the human being best delineates the mental state. The Upanishad calls it the 'inward consciousness' or *antar pragna*. This condition has all the characteristics of the waking state because it simply reproduces the stored memories of past experiences.

Sigmund Freud was fascinated by the dream state. He carried out a careful study of the dreams of his patients as also his own dreams. He noted, as the Upanishad indicates, that past experiences are replayed in dreams. However, his analysis indicated several important features of dreams. In particular, he noted that certain experiences are replayed in a distorted form. He spent considerable research effort in analyzing the nature and cause of these distortions and posited the existence of a filtering or 'censorship' mechanism that does not permit certain memories to be replayed in their original form. He concluded that the dream is an important means of ventilating stored memories. He theorized that such stored memories could be said to have an 'energy' level of their own. Negative memories could be said to have higher energy levels than normal or positive memories. One could say that the more difficult or traumatic the experience, the higher the energy required to store or suppress the memories.

Consequently these negative or traumatic memories seem to exert a force of their own to become known. This resulted in complex dreams, or in many cases, the stored negative memory forced itself out even in the waking condition in the form of peculiarities of speech, or facial contortions, or strange behaviour accompanied by strong emotions, all of which, in Freud's time came to be classified as 'hysteria'.

The Upanishads do not specifically classify dreams as negative or positive but state that they have the same characteristics as the waking state, except that they are in subtle form.

The waking and dream states in man are considered akin to each other, as they arise from the same original cause, namely, *chitta-ahamkara*, i.e., stored memories and individuality.

In his seminal work *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud posited a vast storehouse of memories from which the censor would permit distorted versions to appear in the form of dreams. He called this storehouse as the 'Unconscious'. He sensed that the human being is not aware of this storehouse, but it had the capacity to create tremendous internal and external problems for the person. It is this very storehouse that is called *chitha-ahamkara* in the Upanishad. The memories relate not just to the day-to-day experiences of this lifetime but contain traces from previous births.

Freud's analysis of dreams tends to be selective, being limited to those shared by his patients and those experienced by him. Several thinkers have recorded dreams which do not seem to relate to any experience of this lifetime. All creative thinking, art, literature, music etc. can be said to derive from the *citta-ahamkara*. Modern existentialism has given a free reign to the expression of these inner memories in various forms.

Freud called this ventilation of inner urges as 'wish-fulfillment'. The Upanishad terms it as an expression of desire or *kama*. However, Freud did not analyze the third part of the human system which the Upanishad describes, and which is called 'deep sleep'. The Upanishad gives this aspect a great deal of importance. The deep sleep condition or *sushupti* state, which is called the third *pada*, is a state of bliss marked by the total absence of sensory phenomena and the absence of mind in all its aspects. The only consciousness in the deep sleep state is of a state of bliss.

From this analysis arises the Yoga formula that absence of mind with all perceptions of memories and feelings can result in a near state of bliss. All Yoga sadhana, therefore, attempts to describe methodologies to detach consciousness from the world outside, from one's body, and from one's mind, the stored memories, feelings of individuality and the stress of desires.

The Upanishad posits that the bliss of the deep sleep condition is only a reflection of the blissful nature of Reality or *Brahman*. In this condition, the *jivatma* no doubt experiences bliss but it is steeped in ignorance of Reality and does not cognize *Brahman*. Thus the state of deep sleep is one of blissful ignorance.

However, the Upanishad goes on to state that 'This *atma* is *Brahman*'. When that realization is achieved, the *jivatma* becomes *paramatma*. The transition from the third part, represented by the deep sleep state, to the fourth part or level that is realization of *Brahmanhood* is the most difficult *sadhana*.

In India we have been blessed with a continuous exposure to *Brahman* in various forms with various names. The names and forms given to Brahman, the pantheistic tradition of symbology of gods and

goddesses, of symbolic battles and all sorts of legends and stories, the Puranas, has helped us to detach ourselves from the waking and dreaming experiences in life and look beyond deep sleep at self-realization as a worthwhile goal of life.

The Upanishad promises peace, auspiciousness and non-duality or unity, as the resultant condition achieved by sadhana. Thus, instead of researching the phenomenal world of the waking condition and the memory-actuated world of the dreaming condition, instead of indulging either in the pleasures of the outer world or the pains of past memories, one is continuously advised to look seriously at the bliss of the deep sleep condition, recognize the broad outlines of one's soul, and yearn, struggle and contemplate union with *Brahman* which is called the Existent Truth, the Perfect Pure Awareness and Absolute Bliss (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*).

During the last century, the Western world has been greatly exercised with the discoveries of Sigmund Freud and the long line of psychologists who have followed him. It may be appropriate for the world to consider, more seriously, the fourfold structure of the human personality and the universe propounded by Vedanta. Mankind's march to universal peace, brotherhood and bliss may well be along this path. Several Vedic and Vedantic texts state with great conviction, 'There is indeed no other path!' i.e., *nanyah pantha ayanaya vidyate!* ▲

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Julian of Norwich

Part One

SISTER BRIDGET MARY

Introduction

Julian lived from 1314-1416. Though her book *Revelations of Divine Love* is recognised as a spiritual classic she is little known today. Her original name is not known and the name she adopted was that of the church in which she became an anchoress. At that time the town of Norwich had over fifty hermitages and anchorites, more than anywhere else in England. She probably received instruction from other anchoresses where she lived. An anchoress was a recluse who withdrew from society to a life of contemplation and solitude, but like many hermits at that time it was the custom to give counsel to other Christians who sought them out. In the depths of the Dark Ages, among political upheaval and the Black Plague, Julian provided hope for anyone who visited the window of her anchorhold.

At the age of thirty she became seriously ill. It was during this illness that she experienced sixteen revelations of God's divine Love.

Sister Bridget Mary C.S.M.V. resides at St Mary's Convent, Wantage, England. She has visited Tiruvannamalai during her travels in India.

Julian refers to the revelations as 'showings'. Her showings mainly took place on one day in 8th May 1373. She is quite explicit and graphic as she writes. The very last showing came later.

Julian explains how much she wanted to be with God and was not afraid of death and was prepared to die for this. She was extremely ill for more than a week and her mother and the rest of her family thought this was her end. She was given a crucifix to look at — then suddenly she awoke full of vitality and her transformation took place. She saw the crucifix come to life and had these fifteen showings — one after another.

It must have been overwhelming. She realised that she had to show that all these sufferings are to be seen as love for mankind. Her love was not only turned to Jesus, but also to us; and she revealed His glory to all who could receive it. It overflowed so much that at the end she could only say, "Love was His meaning". She spent 20 to 30 years mulling over what occurred.

After the revelations in 1373, Julian began to record the 'showings'. First she recorded what is known as the short version of *Revelations of Divine Love*. This is basically the sixteen revelations as they were written in the immediacy of the event. Over the next twenty years she would write the long version, contemplating the meaning of each showing until she had completed eighty-six chapters. Julian was modest about her skills as a writer, and though it may be true that she was not highly educated as a young woman, in the fullness of time she rose as a great literary figure and theologian. She is considered the first woman to write a book in the English language.

Julian's life was long. She outlived her share of kings, as well as three plagues. She witnessed through the visitors at her window, the wrath of war and the Peasants Revolt. She endured the Great Schism of 1378 and the bloody dramas that had become routine in those times, rising above it all, keeping her heart fixed on the nurturing 'motherly' qualities of God and Jesus.

We have no picture of her and those that produce one portray her not as I think she would have been. There is a contemporary icon with Julian holding a cat. Hermits were allowed to have cats possibly in order to kill off vermin. In the 1970's there was a service of celebration

for the 600th anniversary of her death at Norwich Cathedral. During the service a cat walked straight up the aisle turned right into another aisle and nothing more was seen!

I did not realise how much wider and broader her vision was until I came to India.

Thomas Merton said, "The English mystics are Paradise men, and the more clear and spontaneous this awareness of Paradise, the more truly English is this contemplation; always positive, always affirmative — a mysticism of praise, an affirmative view of God's creation and of human existence in the world."¹ Not what men call a *world-affirming* spirituality, concerned with establishing the Kingdom of God in a solid political and economic setting. Rather a *paradisal* spirituality which recovers in Christ the innocence and joy of the first beginnings and sees the world as it came from the hand of God.

Nowhere is this exemplified with such charm and clarity as in Mother Julian. She is one of our great theologians, in the ancient understanding that one who truly prays is a theologian, and one who is a theologian truly prays. What is her appeal today in our complex, sophisticated age? Hers too was an age of ferment; of social upheaval and resistance to change within the feudal system — even regarding the opening of minds through translating the Bible into the vernacular. The city onto which she had one window witnessed scenes of violence, public and cruel execution, and decimation by plague. Unlike today the church was at the heart of life, shaping its culture, learning and trade through the mystery plays of city guilds. Its leaders were powerful, influential and often tyrannical, amassing great wealth for themselves.

In the midst of this Julian speaks of a different city — that of the soul undergirding society if we but realised. I believe her imagery and perception strike at our hearts still, *precisely* because church and religion are no longer at the centre of affairs. Dislodged from their temporal throne, increasingly marginalised and irrelevant in life as a whole, how are they to recover meaning and significance in contemporary values and conduct?

¹ *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* by Thomas Merton.

MOUNTAIN PATH

Martin Buber remarks that in this age thinking knows how to speak about things and in an illuminating fashion, but our relations to things and beings form the marrow of our existence yet seem to have become alien to modern life.² This great insight confronts us with vulnerability and insecurity. Seeking to relate to God, and to one another, challenges us with the mystery of communion. “I will be there as I will be there”, says God to Moses out of the burning bush. How do we know He will be there? Will we recognise Him when He comes? In this vein Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the night of his own soul, wanting faith wrapped up in a contemporary way, only to hear that being born anew is elusive as the wind, sudden in coming, sweeping us into unfamiliar paths before abruptly departing. We are left to recover our balance, find our bearings, and fumble our way. To become fully alive there is a price to pay. Not the neat tags we pin on commodities and people today. Rather the riskier pricelessness of ‘letting be’: of learning about ourselves and one another through exchange of a vital part of ourselves. In this process we become more attuned and responsive to our inner being.

Julian draws us into the very heart of relationship, with its vicissitudes of pain and joy: the deeper she goes, the more transparent this becomes. The price she paid was to be brought to the brink of death. We understand perhaps her desire to understand the nature of Christ’s passion and thereby come to contrition for her sins in genuine compassion and a deep longing for God. But it may seem extreme, even masochistic, to desire purification through illness and suffering to the point of death. Yet, unravelling this in the light of our own experience, it seems true that, at moments of extremity, when we are taken out of ourselves, insight and new life flow in. This is true for me.

I remember once talking to a Jewish man, and he said loss for him meant loss of faith in God. We stared at each other. My experience of loss was the opposite — of discovery, of finding an underlying presence holding the weight: a pattern repeated in varying degrees, in situations,

² See Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* and *Between Man and Man*. The uncited quotations in the following pages are from these texts.



throughout my life. He thought how fortunate I was, how unusual my experience. But I am still pondering. Letting go is excruciating. We will do anything to avoid the void. It remains my firm belief that we will be met at the point of extremity if only we trust, and we are given lessons all along the way.

A further more disturbing thought. We are indebted to our Jewish heritage with its understanding that God gives meaning to existence. His is the initiative, ours the response. Julian opens up vistas when she shares her innermost relationship with God. About prayer He shows her: "I am the ground of thy beseeching; first it is my will that thou have it; after that I make thee to will it: and after that I make thee to beseech it. How should it be then that thou shouldst not have thy beseeching?" God Himself implanted the desire she shares with us. Not only that. He gave her the environment, the capacity and courage to go deeply into the nature of His redemptive love. Her life style was such that she could be single-minded in her response. It is amazing to realise that her revelations lasted only a matter of a few hours, and one can hardly imagine her fit to jot a few notes down! God answered her prayer by writing it on her very soul, engraving it so deeply that she was led through all the pitfalls of doubt, dryness, fear, anguish by the spirit prompting her. Her native wit and homely language seldom fail to light up the darkest corners of her experience. She weaves an amazing tapestry of many-coloured threads that we can recognize as part of the warp and woof of the pilgrim in every age.

She offers so much it is difficult to know which thread to unravel. The most quotable of writers, the first woman of English literature, she can be lifted out of context, and remain in context to meet our needs, as I have experienced. To the contemporary scene she seems to become increasingly relevant. To go to Norwich and stay alongside the little church that was the site of her cell, as I did for a few months, was to be made aware of a numinous love and outpouring, and her inner unsolicited promptings coming to meet one's needs. People are drawn there unexpectedly, even turning up without realising why. What accounts for this? Isn't it because she is so sure, so centred on Love as God's meaning in our lives and the world at large, however bleak and

contrary it seems from the outside? Externally she had so little, inwardly she had all. We are crowded out with news and views, violence and greed, disaster, fear, oppression and apathy in the face of such pressures. The further we move from the centre, the more needs we seem to create. Man himself is edged to the periphery of the world he has created for himself in the spiralling process, and ideologies prevent meeting and dialogue. Space, silence, time in which to be and relate only serve to diagnose an emptiness which must be filled.

When at times we're tempted to wonder 'what on earth have I done with my life, where has it all vanished?' there comes the thought, 'I thank you for your travail, and especially for your youth, the years you have given to me.' Such is Julian's understanding that even the fag-end of life offered to God will be received in equal love and worshipful thanks. Think of the parabolic labourers in the vineyard, and the elder brother of the prodigal son. It doesn't seem fair to us, but as another young person pondering the ways of God remarked, 'God has many viewing points; we've all got points of view.' Julian sees God in a point, that is, in her mind's eye. She too is shown life from God's angle — God the focal point in all things. This thought is developed within her when she wrestles with the problem of sin and the concept of hell, and is firmly told 'that which is impossible to thee is not...to me: I shall save my word in all things, and I shall make all things well.' Here she learns that in God's sight the least action is as good as the greatest. We categorise some deeds as good, others as evil, but God's grace is continually 'drawing fair nature to the blessed point from which it came.' There is a lovely moment when, experiencing the extremity of Jesus' pain, Julian thinks 'this is the end.' Suddenly His expression changes to cheer and joy, and He brings merrily to her mind: 'Where is now any point of the pain or of thy grief?' The 'point' has vanished, or rather shifted to its final shining centre at the heart of the Trinity. No one captures this so transparently as Andrei Rublev, the great Medieval Russian painter, in his icon of the Old Testament Trinity.³

³ See Genesis 18 of the Old Testament in the Bible, which describes the prefiguration of the Trinity.

He shares Julian's tenderness. At the centre of the circle of the loving gaze of three figures, each looking to the other, rejoicing in knowing and being known lies the chalice. The cup of *sacrifice* is revealed as their loving communion cup, heralding the Messianic feast of the Kingdom to come.

After God shows Julian a little thing, the size of a hazelnut in the palm of her hand, she wonders 'what is this?' and is answered 'It is all that is made,' she realises the significance of all that is created: 'It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it. God made it, loves it, keeps it.' We can learn from this. We don't have to do great deeds so much as realise what is precious in all that comes our way — prize out the pearl from unlikely shells maybe. Julian is led to reach out to the Love that sustains and holds it, not diverted by anything less.⁴ 'He is our true rest' echoes St. Augustine's 'restless is the heart until it rests in Thee.' She learns the wisdom of cleaving to God and recognising prayer as entering into close relationship with Him, letting go endless petitioning to listen to the inner prompting of our heart. Thus are we led and taught what He would have us pray about, and quickened in new ways. The outer structures and systems we erect will never take us to the heart of meeting; always comes the moment when we have to let go. Julian blossoms into wondrous imagery: "As the body is clothed in cloth so we are clad head to foot in the love of God. Yes and even more closely, for all these things will decay and wear out, whereas the goodness of God is unchanging and incomparably more suited to us." (I am reminded of Anna, in *Mr. God, this is Anna*, observing that that we pile more ... words, explanations on top of one another, ..then finally, faintly, arrive at the word 'God'. 'Life begins with Word,' she says... 'with God'). The Word can take the weight of all the rest; with relationship, and then we can add the words appropriate to our state, and look into the dark, alien places in ourselves; situations where we are at a loss, or resistant/hostile to the 'other' and what it would reveal. When such things are held up to the

⁴ That is, the hazelnut it is all (of us) that is made.

brightest light and transforming power residing at the centre of ourselves, our perceptions may deepen, shift and change.

Julian is a blueprint to this world within. She was not shown that the outward could draw the inward to conform to it: rather, that 'the inward should by grace draw the outward, that by the power of Christ both might be made eternally and blessedly one.' I think this is what Laurens van der Post points to in his book on Carl Jung:

"We assume that without and objectives are one and the same thing. I believe that they are by no means synonymous... there is something as objective within the human being as great as the objective without. We are subject to two worlds, the physical...without, and within, invisible except to the sensibilities and imagination. This objective world within has its own irrefutable geography and laws that one ignores at one's mortal peril. One breaks one's neck if one defies the laws of gravity of the world without. Equally some disaster overwhelms one and one's community if one ignores the facts of life and transgresses the laws of the world."⁵

It seems to me that we are being cornered, not only personally but collectively. We deny our creatureliness, our right dependence on God, and our responsibility for relationships at our peril. Merton's paradisaical state is not simple, naive, and unplumbed. The creation he covers and holds unplumbed — not fully explored or understood. Julian says that, if we want to know our own soul and enjoy its fellowship, it is necessary to seek it in Our Lord. Each soul is so deeply set in God that we cannot come to know it until we first know our Creator to whom it is joined. Our senses have to be raised to the level of our substance through the virtue of Christ's passion, and enriched by the trials laid upon us in order to come to full development. This singleness of intent is vital for us today if we hope to cross the barriers confronting us on every side, and to grow in love and sensitivity. We must start from ourselves and radiate from the source that quickens us: 'God dwells where man lets him in.' 'Perfect love casts out fear' of the unknown, the alien. ▲

⁵ *Jung and the Story of Our Time* by Laurens van der Post.



John Maynard

Practical Sadhana

Part Three

The Method and What Hinders It

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA

This article is the third in a series that presents practical instructions on the various methods that Bhagavan taught to those who sought his guidance. The authenticity of these methods relies on the fact that they are gleaned from Bhagavan's own words, or from those who lived with him and who today are respected as his main disciples.

Question: I know Bhagavan has said: "The obstacles that hinder realization are habits of the mind (*vasanas*), and the aids to realization are the teachings of the scriptures of realized souls."¹

What is difficult to grasp, and therefore needs clarification are the methods of carrying out the teachings, especially in regard to Bhagavan's system.

Reflection (enquiry) is said to be one of the most effective and advanced techniques of spiritual attainment, for it leads to Self-realization.

¹ § 13, p. 5. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam 2006. All the books quoted are published by Sri Ramanasramam unless otherwise indicated.

Opposite page: Fan used by Bhagavan in the Archive Collection.

Reflection in *Sanskrit* is *vichara*, also sometimes called *manana*. Its foundation is based upon the quality of intellect.

When the intellect is pure and subtle, one begins to reflect upon ‘Who am I?’, what is the nature of this world, and what is my goal in this life and how am I going to attain it. These are all questions pertaining to an inward movement of the mind. But when the intellect is externalized it becomes tainted through attachment to material things.

This attachment will in time contaminate the intellect, resulting not in questions vital to man’s inner search, but rather in ones essential to the survival of the ego. This externalized mind is eternally occupied with acquiring wealth, sensual pleasures, name and fame, and then equal time is spent warding off troubles that might jeopardize their maintenance. Our attachment produces desire, from which sprouts anger when the desire is thwarted and from anger proceeds delusion and forgetfulness.²

Results of Actions

The consequences of indifference, inattention and procrastination concerning what in the beginning was merely a bad habit but later matures into *pramada* (defined in the *Vedantic* scriptures as death)³ is never directed at our own Self, but is only associated with the temporary body in which it is dwelling.

Our mental processes do not focus themselves on the central problem, the revelation of the Truth of our nature. Our attempts to settle matters in the external world of *maya* literally blind us to the subtle and real problem of “Who am I?” and this blindness constitutes our impurity. The fruitless but nevertheless all-consuming effort put into an attempt to secure happiness from the outside world compounds our problem. The neon lights advertising worldly happiness initially cause us to postpone our inner search and if we remain distracted by the glamour of the world long enough, we will completely forget the goal of Higher Life. Thus sadly, the result will be that we succumb to the egotistic self-forgetfulness of God.

² This section includes quotes and paraphrases from talks by Swami Jyotirmayananda, Yoga Research Foundation, Miami, Florida, USA. www.yrf.org

³ See *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch. 2, verses 62-63.

The vast majority of people have this externalized intellect in various degrees inasmuch as they are not interested in the essential problem of “Who am I?”. Inattention to spiritual practice at first only obscures the Light of God, but by degrees it spawns indifference which results in blindness.

The Art of Reflection

The practising aspirant however learns the art of reflection on “Who am I?”. He allows the mental energy of a purified intellect to focus and concentrate. The ego thrives in an individual in the absence of reflection, which state allows the whole world-process to exist. If we reflect skillfully and long enough the obstructing thoughts of the world will be worn down, our problems will dissolve and our purified intellect will merge into the experience of our unity with God (*samadhi*). Bhagavan assures us of this by saying:

“We are ever in *sushupti* (absolute Being, in the dreamless deep sleep state). Becoming aware of it in *jagrat* (the waking state) is *samadhi*. The *ajnani* (one ignorant of his true Being) cannot remain long in *sushupti* because his ego pushes him out of it. For the *jnani* (Knower of the Self), although he has scorched the ego, it continues to rise again and again due to *prarabdha* (past life habitual tendencies). So, for both the *jnani* and the *ajnani* the ego springs up, but with this difference: whereas the *jnani* enjoys the transcendental experience, keeping its *lakshya* (aim, attention resulting in transformation) always fixed on its source, that of the *ajnani* is completely ignorant of it. The former is not harmful, being a mere skeleton of its normal self, like a burnt up rope. By constantly fixing its attention on the Source, the Heart, the ego gets dissolved into it like a salt doll which has fallen into the ocean.”⁴

The Higher and Lower Self

It is essential to understand the difference here in Bhagavan’s affirming that the “absolute Being that we really are” (with a capital “B” denoting our higher divine Self), without the process of transformation

⁴ *Guru Ramana* by S.S. Cohen. p. 56. 2006.

enjoined, could very well be life times away from our present state of 'being as we are' (with a small "b" denoting our lower egotistic self). This is because though the ego seems to be ever concerned with our well being, it comes between our practical personality in this world and the spiritual personality of our higher Self.

It comes in-between and lies; and our belief in the lie deludes us with the idea that we are only the body, without the spiritual basis which Bhagavan declared as essential. Led by the ego's lies, the individual experiences fleeting joys mixed with lasting frustrations and sorrows, which drag him from one delusion to another.

When we practise reflection we begin to understand the illusory nature of the ego. The purpose of *atma vichara* is to remove this illusion. In essence we melt the ego itself, or transcend the ego through submission to God.

Gradually through either path, God becomes the dominating factor in our lives. The verification of this achievement is actual experience of the grace and bliss of stillness and peace, which Bhagavan promised is our higher Nature by inheritance.

Engaging the Enemy with Meditation

Before this revelation, there must come a confrontation and a conquering, then finally sublimation through the rising of our self by our own self-effort (*svadharma*).

"One should uplift oneself by one's own Self and not lower oneself. Truly, it is the Self which is one's friend, and it is the self which is one's enemy."⁵

Bhagavan gives us a choice of two means of practice. He frequently said:

"There are two ways: 'Ask yourself Who am I?' or 'Submit and I will strike down the ego'.⁶

For those who have set their hands to the plough of: "Effort, which is itself *yoga*,"⁷ it seems safe to assume that both of the means employ

similar methods. Bhagavan's statements concerning the success of either path exemplify this. A devotee who received direct instruction for a long period of time from Bhagavan asks:

"Although I have listened to the explanation of the characteristics of enquiry in such great detail, my mind has not gained even a little peace. What is the reason for this?"

Bhagavan replied: "The reason is the absence of strength or one-pointedness of mind."

Devotee: "What is the reason for the absence of mental strength?"

Bhagavan: "The means that make one qualified for enquiry are meditation, *yoga*, etc. One should gain proficiency in these through practice and thus secure a stream of mental modes that are natural and helpful. When the mind that has in this manner become ripe, listens to the present enquiry, it will at once realize its true nature, which is the Self, and remain in perfect peace, without deviating from that state. To a mind that has not become ripe, immediate realization and peace are hard to gain through listening to enquiry. Yet, if one practises the means for mind-control for some time, peace of mind can be obtained eventually."⁸

Once a devotee of Bhagavan asked:

D.: "What is the meaning of strength of mind?"

Maharshi: "Its ability to concentrate on one thought without being distracted."

D.: "How is that achieved?"

M.: "By practice. A devotee concentrates on God; a seeker, follower of the *jnana-marga*, seeks the Self. The practice is equally difficult for both."⁹

D.: "What are the steps in practical *sadhana*?"

M.: "They depend on the qualifications and the nature of the seeker. If you are doing idol worship, you should go on with it; it will lead you to concentration. Get one-pointed, and all will come out right.

⁵ *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch. 6, verse 5.

⁶ *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings* by Arthur Osborne. p. 64. 2000.

⁷ *Guru Ramana* by S.S. Cohen. p. 74. 2006.

⁸ Self-Enquiry (*Vichara Sangraham*) of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, translated by Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan. p. 16-17. 2005.

⁹ § 91, p. 90. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. 2006.

People think that Liberation is far away and should be sought out. They are wrong. It is only knowing (by direct experience) the Self within oneself. Concentrate and you will get it. The mind is the cycle of births and deaths. Go on practising and concentration will be as easy as breathing. That will be the crown of your achievements.”¹⁰

Constancy and Ardency

Here Bhagavan is stressing the graded practice of concentration that ultimately produces a one-pointed intellect. Every learned devotee of Bhagavan knows that this takes time because of the very fact that it is not theory. For God is not a theory, and thus it takes effort to think of Him with concentration at least equal to the effort we put forth in forgetting Him.

Though we forget God with apparent ease, the devotion required to attract the grace of remembrance of Him develops slowly, and deepens only with our ardent perseverance in concentration, meditation and prayer.

Bhagavan affirmed this by saying:

“If *bhakti* is sufficiently developed, *vairagya* (dispassion for objects of the senses) and concentration follow as a matter of course. If devotion to an Ideal is also lacking, the seeker may resort to *japa* (repetition of the Name of God) or *pranayama* (awareness and control of breath) to arrest the restlessness of the mind. All these practices specifically aim at stopping the *vrutti*, the ceaseless modification, the wanderings of the mind, so that the latter may be nailed to itself and may eventually cognize its own native state. Mental diffusiveness resembles a mixture of gold dust with sand, earth, ashes and dirt of all sorts. Concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*) are the sieve, which sifts the gold dust from the others. They churn the *nadis* (nerves) along which consciousness flows to the whole body and tracks them down to their source, the Heart. Relaxation of the nervous system then takes place, denoting the ebbing of the consciousness from the *nadis* back to the Heart. The ebbs and flows of the consciousness,

¹⁰ *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* by S.S. Cohen. p.134-135. 2006.

which constant practice renders increasingly perceptible to the meditator, gradually loosen the consciousness from the body and end by separating them in *samadhi*, so that the *sadhaka* (spiritual practitioner) is enabled to perceive the consciousness alone and pure. This is the Self, God the Absolute.”¹¹

Our constancy in *sadhana* involves both a persistent development of focus and a deepening of devotion. The Lord is attracted not by the thoughts of the mind, but rather by the movement of our heart. We are reminded that we also have a skillful part to play in this act of grace when Bhagavan said:

“Grace is always there, it is only you who have to make yourself receptive to it.”¹²

Effort and Grace

Bhagavan’s close disciple, Arthur Osborne, clarified the meaning and tradition of this statement saying:

“To do this constitutes the effort of which the teachers and scriptures speak. The mind has created the obstruction; the mind has to remove it. But merely to recognize this, to recognize, that is to say, that the ego is (according to the *Advaitin* or non-dualist) an illusory self or (according to the dualist) a creation of the Spirit, to which it should be totally submissive and passive, is far from constituting the full effort required. Indeed, it increases the obligation for total effort and therefore, so to speak, the guilt in not making effort.”¹³

Though grace is always there, it is natural and simply human to pray to Bhagavan for a physical support of grace. We know that in Bhagavan’s physical presence a glance was enough. Though many have come to love him, there are those who feel ‘born out of time’, lacking that heartfelt devotion produced by the power of his presence even though he assured us that:

¹¹ *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* by S.S. Cohen. Notes on §27, p. 133. 2006.

¹² *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings* by Arthur Osborne. p. 74. 2000.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 73. 2000.

“They say that I am dying but I am not going away. Where could I go? I am here.”¹⁴

Through our *abhyasa*, *vichara* (enquiry into one’s true Nature) and devotion we will experience him and thus know that he is eternally with us. He is for all a *jagat guru* (world teacher) who even today for many, through their love of him, is still a physical support of grace. He declared that if we “put his teaching into practice” our qualifying ripeness would be even his very embrace! For those of us whose love for him is still ripening we live with the assurance he gave:

“*Mount Kailas* is the abode of *Siva* but *Arunachala* is *Shiva* Himself.” “He saw the sacred hill as the form assumed by pure Spirit for the support and guidance of men. Now that the physical body of Bhagavan — the most precious of all supports of Grace — has been withdrawn from us, the Hill emits power and Grace for his devotees even more than before.”¹⁵

Following in His Footsteps

Perhaps even more assuring will be that through “the crown of our achievement” Bhagavan will declare to us when we come away from his *Ashram* and *Arunachala* the very same words he spoke to Arthur Osborne when he once left for Madras:

“He is taking the *Swami* with him.”¹⁶

For through our seeking with patient perseverance in transformative *abhyasa* and *vichara* and our heeding Bhagavan’s call to “think of the feet of the Lord”, we will discover the abode of those divine feet. Even though physically for us there is:

“No more the beloved face, no more the sound of his voice; (but) henceforth the *lingam* of polished black stone, the symbol of *Siva*, over the *samadhi* as our outer sign; inwardly there will be his footprints in the heart.”¹⁷



(To be continued)

¹⁴ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* by Arthur Osborne. p. 222. 2006.

¹⁵ *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings* by Arthur Osborne. p. 78-79. 2000.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* by Arthur Osborne. p. 225. 2006.

Experiencing God as ‘I Am’

MICHAEL JAMES

The following is an edited version of an article recently posted on the 5th June at the author’s website www.happinessofbeing.com

In order to experience the *nirguna* form of God — that is, God as he really is — we must experience ourselves as we really are. In our essential nature we are the one absolutely non-dual self-conscious being, ‘I am’, which is devoid of all *gunas*. Therefore only when we remain steadfastly as our infinitely clear self-conscious being, ‘I am’, thereby refraining from rising as this imaginary object-knowing consciousness that we call our ‘mind’, will we be able to experience God as he really is — as our own true self, the one infinite *nirguna* reality.

This truth is clearly expressed by Sri Ramana in verses 24, 25 and 26 of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

By [their] *irukkum iyarkai* [their ‘nature which is’ or ‘being nature’] God and souls are only one *porul* [substance, essence]

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or reality]. Only [the soul's] *upadhi-unarvu* [adjunct-consciousness] is [what makes them appear to be] different. Knowing [our real] self, having relinquished [all our own] *upadhis* [adjuncts or *gunas*], itself is knowing God, because [he] shines as [our real] self.

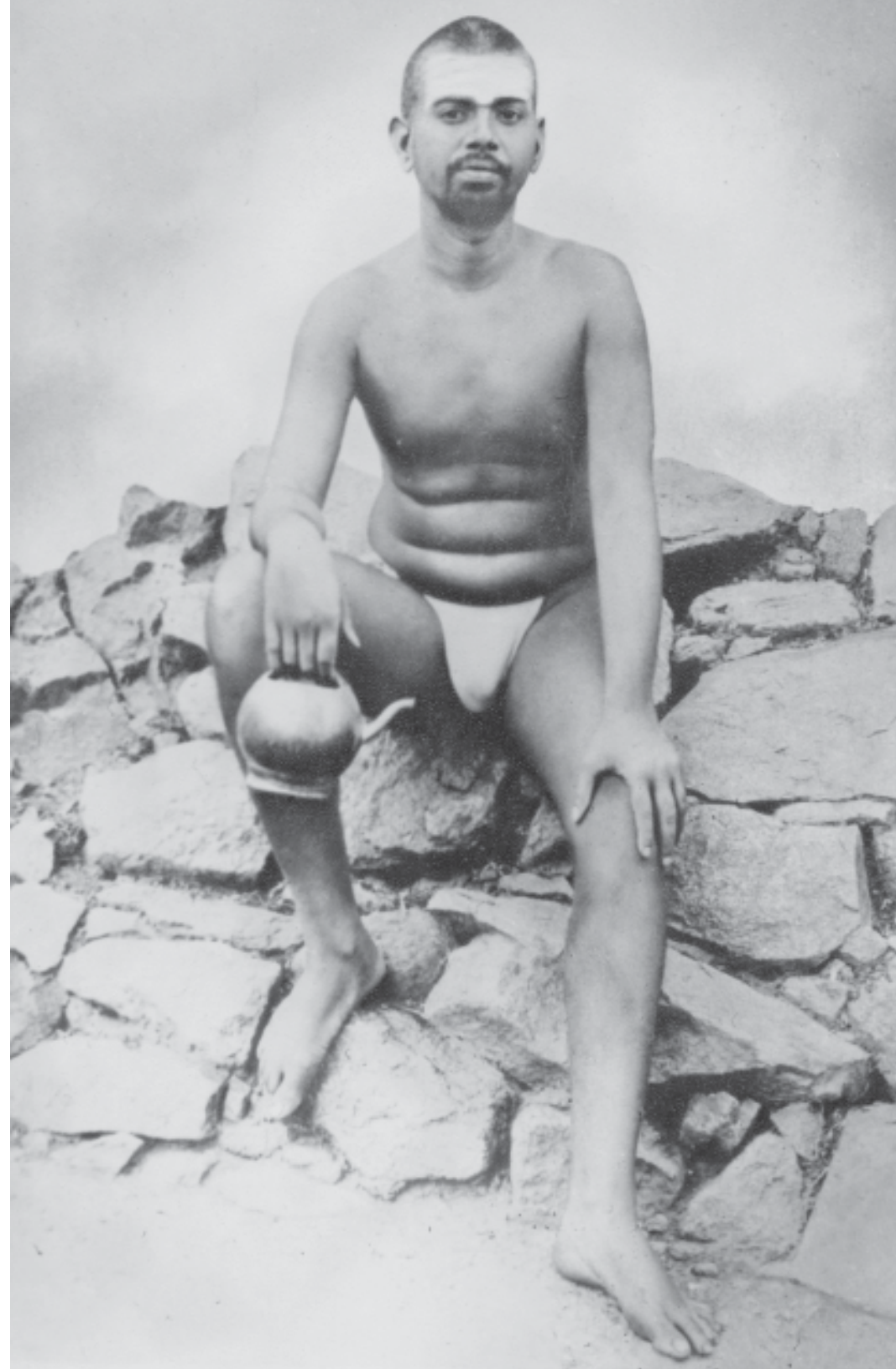
Being [our real] self is indeed knowing [our real] self, because [our real] self is devoid of two. This is *tanmaya-nishtha* [the state of being firmly established as *tat* or 'it', the one absolute *nirguna* reality called 'God' or *brahman*].

When we experience ourselves without even the least superimposition of any adjunct or *guna*, we will truly be experiencing God as he really is, because he is in fact nothing other than our own essential adjunct-free and therefore *nirguna* nature — our *iruppu-unarvu* or *ulla-unarvu*, that is, our 'being-consciousness', our simple non-dual consciousness of just being, 'I am'.

The state in which we experience ourselves and God as the one self-conscious reality that we always really are is not a relative or dualistic state of objective knowledge, but is an absolute and non-dual state of non-objective self-knowledge. Any form of objective knowing — that is, knowing anything that appears to be other than ourselves, the knowing consciousness — is an action or 'doing', because it involves a seeming movement of our attention or consciousness away from ourselves towards that other thing. Self-knowledge, on the contrary, is not an action or 'doing' but only a state of just being, because it is a state in which our attention or consciousness does not move anywhere but rests only in itself — in our own eternally self-conscious being, 'I am'.

Therefore in verse 26 Sri Ramana emphasises this truth that knowing ourselves is nothing other than just being ourselves, because we are absolutely non-dual being, which is ever conscious of itself as 'I am'. This essential self-conscious nature of our being is emphasised by him both in the first sentence of the first *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* and in verse 23 of *Upadesa Undiyar*.

In the first *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* he asks rhetorically, "*ulladu aladu ulla-unarvu ullado? ...*", which means, 'Other than *ulladu* [that which is or 'being'], is there [any] *ulla-unarvu*



['consciousness which is', 'being-consciousness' or 'consciousness of being']? ...'. Our consciousness of our being, 'I am', cannot be other than our being itself, because if it were, we would not know ourselves as 'I am', but would be known only by some consciousness other than ourselves as 'it is'. We experience our being as the first person 'I' because our being is self-conscious and is therefore the very consciousness that is experiencing itself.

We are both being and the consciousness that experiences our being as itself — that is, as ourselves, 'I am'. This truth is clearly stated by Sri Ramana in verse 23 of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

Because of the non-existence of [any] *unarvu* [consciousness] other [than *ulladu*] to know *ulladu* ['that which is' or 'being'], *ulladu* is *unarvu*. [That] *unarvu* alone exists as 'we' [our essential being or true self].

In this verse Sri Ramana uses three key words, *ulladu*, *unarvu* and *nam*, which respectively mean 'being', 'consciousness' and 'we', and he clearly emphasises the absolute oneness of that reality which each of these three words denote. Being itself is consciousness, and consciousness itself is 'we', our real and essential self. We are both being and consciousness, and others than us there is no real being or consciousness — nothing that really is, nor anything that really knows.

Therefore in verse 26 he says that since we, our real self, are 'that which is devoid of two', simply being ourselves is itself knowing ourselves. That is, since our being and our consciousness of our being are not two different things, but are just 'we' ourselves, in order to know ourselves we just have to be ourselves. That is, we just have to 'be as we are' — as the one absolutely non-dual and therefore thought-free self-conscious being, 'I am', which is our real self.

He concludes verse 26 by stating that this state of 'just being as we are' — the state of *summa iruppadu* or 'just being' and *ullapadi ullade* or 'only being as we are' (as he describes it in the first *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu*) — is *tanmaya-nishtha* or 'abidance as God'. The word *tanmaya* is a compound of *tat*, which in Sanskrit is the neuter third person singular pronoun, 'it', 'this' or 'that', and which in philosophy is used to denote the one absolute reality or *brahman*, and

the suffix *maya*, which means 'composed only of' (or in this context 'as'), and *nishtha* means the state of 'abidance', 'steadiness', 'being established' or just 'being'. Thus *tanmaya-nishtha* is our natural state of just being, in which we remain firmly established as *tat* or 'it', the one absolute *nirguna* reality that we call 'God' or *brahman*.

We can experience God as he really is only by ourselves being what he really is, which is absolutely thought-free and therefore actionless non-dual self-conscious being, 'I am'. If we experience him as being anything other than our own essential self, we are not experiencing him as he really is, but are only experiencing a *manomayamam katchi* or 'mind-made vision', as Sri Ramana says in verse 20 of *Ulladu Narpadu*.

Since God is in reality our own essential self — our self-conscious being, 'I am' — no objective experience of him can be knowledge of him as he really is. Only by being and knowing nothing other than our own essential self-conscious being, 'I am', can we experience his absolute non-dual *nirguna* reality. Therefore being God alone is knowing God as he really is.

So long as we experience ourselves as being anything other than God, we cannot know him as he is. Only by experiencing ourselves as the one infinite *nirguna* reality, which alone is the real nature of both himself and ourselves, will we experience him as he really is. Therefore in order to know God, we must consciously be God — that is, we must be conscious of being nothing other than 'I am', the one absolute non-dual self-conscious reality or *nirguna brahman*.

In order thus to be God and thereby to know him as our own self, we must cease experiencing ourselves as this finite body-bound consciousness that we call our 'mind'. We must subside and merge completely in him, thereby becoming one with him. This truth is emphasised by Sri Ramana in verses 8, 20, 21 and 22 of *Ulladu Narpadu*. In verse 8 he says:

Whoever worships [the absolute reality or God] in whatever form giving [it] whatever name, that is a path [or means] to see that [nameless and formless] reality in [that] name and form. However, becoming one [with that reality], having carefully scrutinised [or known] one's own truth [essence or

‘am’-ness] and having [thereby] subsided [or dissolved] in the truth [essence or ‘am’-ness] of that true reality, is alone seeing [it] in truth. Know [thus].

If we worship God as something other than ourself, we may thereby be able to see or experience him as something other than ourself. Seeing him thus is not ‘seeing him in truth’, that is, it is not experiencing him as he really is, but is only seeing him as we imagine him to be.

To contrast such imaginary worship and seeing with true worship and seeing, the second sentence of the verse begins with *ayinum*, which means ‘however’. Only by worshipping God in truth can we see him in truth. The only means by which we can truly worship him is to subside and become one with his reality, which is our own reality.

In order to become one with God we must subside in his ‘truth’ or reality, and in order to subside thus we must scrutinise and know our own ‘truth’ or reality, because in truth we do not exist as anything separate from or other than him. That is, if we scrutinise and know ourself as we really are, we will cease imagining ourself to be this finite mind, and thus we will subside in our own reality, which is nothing other than the reality of God.

The word Sri Ramana uses here to denote the reality both of God and of ourself is *unmai*, which I have translated here as ‘truth’, but which etymologically means *ul-mai*, ‘be-ness’, ‘is-ness’ or ‘am-ness’. Therefore the second sentence of this verse could be translated as:

... However, becoming one [with the ‘am’-ness of God], having carefully scrutinised our own ‘am’-ness and having [thereby] subsided in the ‘am’-ness of that true reality, is alone seeing [God] in truth. ...

Since God is the one absolute reality, which always shines within us as our own essential being, ‘I am’, in order to experience him as he really is we must scrutinise and experience our own ‘I am’. When we thus scrutinise our own essential being, we will subside and merge in it, thereby losing our separate finite self and becoming one with the only real ‘I am’, which is God. Becoming one with God in this manner is alone ‘seeing him in truth’ or experiencing him as he really is. ▲

BOOK EXCERPT

A Woman's Work

The Spiritual Life and Journey of Ethel Merston

MARY ELLEN KORMAN

In all genuine spiritual teachings one must eventually come face to face with one's own shortcomings, weaknesses and immaturities. It is a part of the spiritual quest that has been rarely written about. One harrowing account was that of Ethel Merston, related by Fritz Peters in his book Boyhood with Gurdjieff, chronicling his time with Gurdjieff in France. In the late summer of 1922, G. I. Gurdjieff had agreed to take Ethel Merston as a student, inviting her to live at his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man near Paris. As Peters relates, she was at the centre of two important teachings involving many students. Here stood a woman shown in all her imperfection. Yet through that could be felt the courage and intelligence of an exceptional woman. I wondered about her, and then I came across the manuscript of her memoirs, written near the end of her life, based on her diaries.

Editor/writer Mary Ellen Korman has long been interested in spiritual transformation and its many approaches. She teaches a yoga of body impressions and lives in Pennsylvania.

Her time with Gurdjieff was the beginning of her life-long spiritual quest, one which eventually would lead her in 1934 to India where she would meet Ramana Maharshi, J.Krishnamurti, Anandamayi Ma, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Of all the great sages she met, it was Bhagavan with whom she felt most connected.

In 1938, while in Europe to attend Krishnamurti's talks, Ethel met Pascaline Mallet, who asked her to help in the translation of Who Am I?. The next year, after attending talks at Krishnamurti's Rajghat College near Benares, Ethel, an avid gardener, arranged to manage the village farm that supplied food for the college. But before settling there she went to visit Ramanasramam before travelling on to study Indian agriculture, attend another series of Krishnaji's talks in the Rishi Valley, and sightsee in Ceylon. So affected by Bhagavan was Ethel, usually the extrovert, that she spoke to no one. "The peace of his little hall, the beauty of the great hill towering up behind the ashram and the dynamic look and peace of the Maharshi all held me." On her second visit she felt "the peace and relaxation in Bhagavan's presence, his loving care for everyone, the magnetism of his emanations, all aroused one to an effort to self-remember and enquire within — watch and pray... The atmosphere radiating from him drew me yearly thereafter to his feet." She finally settled at Ramanasramam, making it her home until her death in 1967.¹

For some time Ethel had noticed that without her asking a question Bhagavan would make some enlightening comment relevant to her work, whether on radiations, stillness, death or attention. She now found that even when she was not present, a remark addressing her work of the day would be made. Her young friend Ramanananda²

¹ *A Woman's Work with Gurdjieff, Ramana Maharshi, Krishnamurti, Anandamayi Ma & Pak Subuh: The Spiritual Life Journey of Ethel Merston* by Mary Ellen Korman. \$24.95. Softcover 330 pp. Arete Communications ISBN 978-1-879514-07-2. www.Gurdjieff-Legacy.org email: Arete@Gurdjieff-Legacy.org mail: Arete Communications, 773 Center Blvd. # 58, Fairfax CA 94978-0058 USA.

² We are unable to ascertain exactly who this Ramanananda is. It may be the Swedish sadhu, who was generally known as Swami Ramanagiri (1921-1955).



would often report to her Bhagavan's remarks during the evening talks with the men. One evening Bhagavan had spoken on one perennial subject of Ethel's work — activity of the mind and mind's relationship to the Self. "Quieting the mind and stilling the mind are different," he said. "A *jnani* [A Self-realized soul, living in a permanent state of God-consciousness] is like the screen of a cinema on which the picture [mind] plays: the picture scenes [mind-thoughts] go on, but the *jnani* pays no attention to them; just as, to the screen, the changing pictures are immaterial to it, it pays no attention to them."

The next day Ramanananda told her that Bhagavan had also said:

"In broad full sunlight we cannot see the radiations, which do not mean that it is not radiating, but simply that we cannot see it, we can only see a limited beam of it. Into the Self, the senses cannot come, so with our senses we cannot see the full sun. This does not mean that the radiations, because sensed, are stronger than the full radiations unsensed. Contrariwise, it is because it is limited that it cannot be sensed."

Ethel understood from this that full light is complete stillness, a vibration so fast it seems still; complete stillness neither heard, seen, nor sensed.

Bhagavan spoke on the death of an old devotee: "Why worry whether he has a body or not and what happens to it? You know he is. Speculation about what we can't know only gives material for doubt. The body is more or less transparent, and, finally, so transparent that even form is not seen but lost."

Ethel remembered her childhood conception of death, which, with the intuition of a child, was close to Bhagavan's words — that people became less and less, until nothing remained to be seen.

The subject of attention had long interested Ethel since her Prieuré days. One evening Bhagavan gave Ramanananda lined paper, on which Ramanananda was to transliterate some Sanskrit. Ramanananda asked Bhagavan about the lines, would they not interfere, what he should do about it, but subconsciously, he said to Ethel, he was really asking about passing thoughts, which impede sadhana or real thought.

Answered Bhagavan: "Pay no attention to them and then they won't matter; the blackness of the Sanskrit will make them seem so faint that you won't be aware of them and they won't hamper you."

Two years earlier, his instruction to Ramanananda had been to use lines, which to Ramanananda meant outward scriptural regulations. The day after being told to just see through the lines, the instruction was to use his discretion as to when to use lined paper and when not, and when to draw his own.

Ethel was trying to use her will to concentrate. Bhagavan spoke to the men of the danger of strengthening one's will in this way, since the ego can also use it. Speaking metaphorically of the mind-chamber, he said:

"[it's] an open space which first we have to protect by high fencing against outside thoughts — intruding pigs. Then, when the space is well fenced, we have to chase out the pigs [thoughts] already in, by surrendering them to the Self. In the open space then, within the fence, a bush of Self will each time grow up. When the whole space is covered with bushes, nothing can then come in, there is no room."

Hearing this from Ramanananda the next day, Ethel tried visualizing it. She first visualized a fence in the center of which was a chalice which grew into a lake. With 'I-thought' Ethel herded the pigs into the lake, for the water led to the heart. A drop of water — meaning a drop of the Self — fell onto the ground, and in time the drops would water the whole ground with 'I-thought'. As Ethel watched, she felt the impulse to attend to the pigs rather than the water-centre. Only when the pigs intruded should they be noticed. Ethel wondered if this was the meaning of the Biblical story of the Gadarene swine. The next day she continued visualizing the theme, and saw that as one offers flowers in homage and does not smell or savour them, so should intruding thoughts be offered without toying with them. They should be passed right to the centre.

That evening Bhagavan addressed the ashram peacock. "The wire netting fence is not for you, but to protect you against outsiders. To the outsider the netting makes a crisscross pattern on your body,

but in reality your body is not affected by it, you are free inside the cage.”

(He said in his previous life the white peacock had been a very close disciple, and was reborn in this form to be near Bhagavan. The peacock would come into the hall to the couch, spread its tail, and dance before Bhagavan, everyone watching as though it were a formal dance programme. At its conclusion, Bhagavan would solemnly acknowledge the performance, and the peacock would then leave. At night he kept the peacock in a cage near him.)

Ethel thought the netting, the fence, was will; the cage the chamber of the mind, the temple; the peacock, the intellect and highest power of the soul; the peacock's perch, the Self. Outside things attract the peacock who then tries to leave the perch to go to them.

As Ethel worked on concentrating, she began creating verse-prayers to chant.

“Sing, sing, O Lord, within/Sing within the heart/Draw me in, oh draw me in/Until I'm but a part/Of the song Thou sing'st within./Love is the song, the song is Life,/Life is action, direct, complete.”

A few weeks later, praying for dissolution of the ego, Ethel changed the third line to *Draw me in until there's nought of me*. One morning after many weeks of praying for the Lord to draw her in, to swallow her, she remembered suddenly how Gurdjieff had said men are food for the Moon, and that Bhagavan wrote in the *Ulladu Narpadu* (Forty Verses on Reality) that we are food for the Lord, neither of which she'd had any conscious memory of when writing her verse-prayer.

Many years later, she wrote, the chant had become:

“Call, call, O Lord,/Call, O lord, to me/Sing, sing, sing within the Heart/Sing, sing and draw mind in to Thee./Draw mind in/Till outward thoughts do cease/And inwardly mind's fixed on path t'ward Thee./Call, call, O Lord, and draw mind in.”

One evening Bhagavan spoke about Bhattacharya's commentary on the *Brigopanishad*, which speaks of the heart and which heart,

whether the organ or intelligence, whether sentient or insentient. Bhagavan explained how ridiculous were the theories on every word. There are, Bhagavan said, two hearts, the inner, which is knowledge or awareness, and the outer, which are the senses. But all are *vrittis*, or projections, that the mind projects and, at the same time, it is the aggregate of all projections. The fundamental projection is the 'I'. Mind and 'I' are the same. One person asked how they could be the same. Bhagavan replied, “There are two 'I's, an inner and an outer one, the former pure awareness, the latter included in the former and projected outward.”

A few days later in the hall Ethel suddenly had an impression of a beautiful wild day on the moors with wind and glorious sunshine — of going out into unlimited space, a feeling of joy, galloping on a horse in the wind. She wanted to embrace everyone. She felt very happy. Just then — it was January 30, 1948 — news came of Gandhi's death.

“His death was a terrific shock, it seemed almost as though the world had come to an end; it was so unexpected and left such an irreplaceable void. For him, so deeply disappointed with his own followers, one could not be sorry, but for his devotees and for India, for one yet hoped against hope that he had some influence over those who would take over.”

For days afterward the atmosphere was suspenseful and restless. Ethel could not concentrate, and finally came to Bhagavan, asking — “How can I meditate in order to get peace of mind?”

Bhagavan told her: “How can you meditate to get peace of mind if you don't know what mind is. To find out from where worries come, what they are, is meditation.”

Later that day, an image of Bhagavan came to her: “[He was] light and incandescent, seated in a circle of light slanting behind or within the heart, as though the other side.” As the image began to fade, she tried to get it back, and then saw there was a door to the heart. Words came: “Knock and it shall be opened unto you. Call and Grace will pour forth.”

Ramanasramam. November 1948.

Ethel had returned to her cottage under the coconut palms, at night climbing the ladder to sleep on the roof, the stillness of Arunachala close by.

That month Sri Krishna Prem came to see Bhagavan. During his three-day stay, he sang to Bhagavan “so gloriously,” said Ethel, “I wept with emotion.” Bhagavan was “very gay over his visit and kept referring to it.” Impressed, many people spoke with Krishna Prem privately, even longtime devotees of Bhagavan. When he left, Ethel felt a sense of flatness and blankness with Bhagavan which she wondered about. She thought perhaps Sri Krishna Prem’s strong physical and emotional quality was more accessible to her and others, that Bhagavan’s was too subtle for her to feel as strongly.

Bhagavan’s *Jayanti*, his birthday, was celebrated on December 18th. He was as cheerful as always, his routine continuing as usual.

A week into the new year the Shankaracharya of the Govardhan Mutt, Puri came from North India to ask Bhagavan’s help in resolving a doubt.

“Acharaya: How can one be realized and have a body?

Bhagavan: The pictures, shadows, are all the screen, the Self; the light too.

The Acharaya sat next to the couch facing Bhagavan and went into samadhi, his body poised, hands to the fire and later dropping to his knees, completely motionless except for a very slight shaking of the head. Presently it was as though the body were a separate thing, entity-less, a mere utensil, and all around, Bhagavan fluid, vaporous. He remained like this for about twenty minutes until, spoken to, he came back with a jerk and a start.” ▲

SRI ARUNACHALA VENBA

Part Three

SADHU OM SWAMI

TRANSLATION BY SADHU TANMAYA CHAITANYA

39. If anyone cleverly claims, “Yes, indeed I have done the self-enquiry, delved deep within myself and finally known the Self,” know that it is a total lie. For such a claim can emanate only from the false ego which can never know the Self. The ego can only perish and its victory consists in perishing gracefully without resistance. For from its very ashes springs forth, like the mythical phoenix (and reminiscent of the resurrection of Christ), the knowledge of the Self. Being the Self, Arunachala alone knows the Self, never ever, the ego, the non-Self.

40. Truly speaking, the ego has no independent existence. In delusion, it appears to possess an existence. Arunachala annihilates this darkness of primordial delusion and thus restores the truly non-existent *status quo ante* of the ego by arising as the sun of Self-knowledge in the bosom of the seeker. Thus Arunachala bestows the supreme gift of union with Lord Siva, which is the ineffable bliss of ultimate silence and liberation. (Such is the reward for the total surrender of the ripe

MOUNTAIN PATH

soul and which cannot otherwise be won by any other effort, however mighty it may be.)

41. For those loving devotees who adore Arunachala as their beloved personal God (*Ishta Deivam*) and hold on to His Feet tightly in all their thoughts without ever wishing to even stir out of the vicinity of this divine Hill, Arunachala bestows unasked all they need, ruling over their lives as a benevolent king of great munificence.

42. Arunachala is not the place of residence for wicked, cruel people or hedonists in mad pursuit of contemptible sense pleasures or men intoxicated with brute physical strength bullying the meek, or those drunk with the wine of wealth and power. Such demoniacal beings are fit prey for the lord of death. Arunachala is the dwelling place for *sadhus*, seekers and ascetics.

43. The extroverted mind easily gets infatuated with the power of wealth, fame, and ephemeral sense pleasures and is thus ever lured outwards. Arunachala by the power of Its Grace dries up the taste for all such extroversions and draws the mind inward and immerses it in unswerving Self-attention and exerts Itself tirelessly in maintaining such an inward gaze of the ripe seeker.

44. Lord Siva who remained unattainable even to celestial beings such as Brahma and Vishnu, came down and assumed the human form of Sri Ramana, out of immense compassion for his devotees, and thus bestows fearlessness upon them by enabling them to cling to his holy feet in total surrender. Such is the Grace of Arunachala.

45. However learned in scriptures one is or however severe one's austerities are, yet the sincere seeker is repeatedly tormented by the misery of body consciousness, which is the root cause of all human afflictions. Tired and vexed with this tyranny of ignorance, the seeker finally surrenders at the divine Feet of Arunachala as the ultimate refuge. Arunachala protects such devotees unfailingly, without ever abandoning their care.



46. Even my despicably unrestrained mind has been slowly but surely tamed by the Grace of Sri Ramana. He has melted my heart and brought me to his feet and kindled the divine desire that has taken hold of me, to spend the rest of my life in the proximity of his shrine ever radiating his Grace. This surely is the working of Lord Arunachala.

47. Atheists who constantly denigrate the Lord and His devotees while preening themselves to be the sole purveyors of rational thought do not realise that in such a bargain they are only cheating themselves of infinite bliss, while settling for petty worldly gains. Arunachala takes pity on such people too, and shatters their foolish pride in ever so many ways and awakens their hearts to a higher power that rules over all, making them submit to His sovereignty and eventually melts even their stony hearts in loving devotion. Such indeed is the power of Arunachala.

48. Our Lord Ramana has indeed called Arunachala by the universal name, Heart. Devotees attracted by his teachings come from all corners of the globe and eventually gravitate to his lotus feet in utter surrender. They do not need to formally convert to Hinduism in order to follow the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana. Here as the quest is purely inward-driven, everyone is assured of reaching the goal of knowing the Self and thus inhering forever in the Heart through self-enquiry as revealed by Bhagavan. Since there is no external validation through formal sacraments in this unique path of Bhagavan, it does not disturb in the least the original faith of the seeker. Eliminating thus even a hint of psychological violence inevitable in any process of religious conversion, this path is truly the reconciliation of all faiths and thus it is the essence of all religions, promoting harmony and unity.

49. Sometimes in a sattvic mood, the mind feels, "Alright, let me abide quietly in the Self" and at other times it rebels, "Enough, let me rise and entertain myself." Thus the ego is continuously tossed in the fiery battlefield of the two-fold modes of the mind (*pravrtti* vs. *nivrtti* that is, activity and withdrawal). The Grace of Arunachala triumphs in this battle royal of the mind-field and takes the loving seeker into

the stillness of the *samadhi bhumi* and enables him to settle down in perfect tranquillity.

50. "Oh Lord Arunachala, only those fortunate souls blessed and ripened by your Grace can turn inward and quickly enter the Heart within and settle in the *samadhi nishtha* of blissful repose. Where is the hope for meek and weak souls like me who are utterly unworthy to receive your Grace? You alone should take pity on us and make us fit to receive your Grace."

51. "Do not read this Arunachala Venba at the half-way point and start enjoying right away; look back at your composition only after completing all the 100 verses," thus goading me onward to complete the job undertaken, and supplying the Venba first word for every verse, from within is Arunachala's Grace indeed.

52. The mother herself teaches her child her own name and upon hearing the lisping of her name by the child, the mother rejoices. (What credit can the ignorant child deserve?) In the same way, Arunachala alone nourishes me, a mere prattling child, forcefully with Its Grace akin to mother's milk and prompts me to sing onward supplying chaste Tamil words for composing this hymn and rejoices with pride at my feeble attempt!

53. The unrivalled Grace of Arunachala bestows Liberation upon those who merely think of It (*smaranat Arunachalam*). In accord with this unique way of salvation, Arunachala drew the immaculate Sadguru Ramana unto Itself by giving him Its remembrance even at a tender age and settled him in Its very lap for the rest of his entire life, so that all seekers (*mumukshus*) might be inspired by his towering example to similarly dwell upon Arunachala lovingly in their minds and attain liberation by the mere Power of Its name. (The present age is truly blessed as devotees from far-flung corners of the earth are also enabled to remember Arunachala inescapably while thinking of Ramana Sadguru, for the two are indeed inseparably linked forever.)

54. Seekers complain in the initial stages “Where is this Supreme Self which is utterly invisible? I keep seeing only this wretched world full of misery”. To such souls who moan and groan under the yoke of ignorance, Arunachala initiates them to inquire as to who is this complaining entity in the first place and leading them further in self-enquiry, eventually reveals Itself as their true blissful Self, thus destroying their tormenting sadness which was never real as in the story of ‘the missing tenth man’.

55. Misguided people who seek *siddhis* (occult powers) with the perverse desire of gaining name and fame in the process are no better than mad men running after pebbles because even if they perform the most austere penance for aeons of ages, Arunachala will not reveal Itself to them. For such deluded souls, Arunachala remains ever unattainable.

(The *Katha Upanishad* states that the Self reveals Itself only to that person who seeks the Self alone to the exclusion of everything else. Arunachala chose Sri Ramana to reveal Itself because as a lad, he chose to know who he was and faced death fearlessly like Naciketas.)

56. All the vasanas arise from the causal ignorance namely the ego or the I-thought. Their extinction can be achieved only by exterminating the root cause, the source of all calamities, which is the *dehatma buddhi*. The Grace of Arunachala is unique because It is intent only in destroying the ego, which is the root illness (or the original sin) so that all samsaarik afflictions are put to an end once for all (that is, Arunachala is not for providing only *placebo* treatments or palliative remedies). After eliminating the fundamental ignorance, Arunachala settles down in the Heart of the seeker and abides as the Self for good, thus ruling over us as a benevolent monarch. ▲

(To be continued)

RAMANA KIDS' CORNER



Should I prostrate to Bhagavan? How many times should I prostrate every day? Will Bhagavan be pleased with me if I prostrate to Him numerous times? Read on to find out what Bhagavan thought about prostrations...



Dear Children,

Here are some anecdotes relating to *namaskarams* (prostrations) to Bhagavan. They are not only humorous, but also convey a deep message to us all.

“On one occasion a man appeared in the Old Hall and started a cycle of hundred *sashtanga namaskars* (prostrations) to Bhagavan. Bhagavan looked at him for some time and said, ‘Where is the need for all these gymnastics? It is better to show your devotion by keeping quiet!’” (Taken from *Moments Remembered* by V. Ganesan, page 54.)

“Muruganar had a unique relationship with Bhagavan. Often, the moment Muruganar entered the Old Hall Bhagavan would commence talking to him. Muruganar would start replying even before prostrating to Bhagavan. While prostrating too he would continue talking. Often, he would even forget that he was lying prostrate on the ground and would just go on talking to Him, lifting his head like a chameleon

and continuing to reply to His queries. Others in the Hall would be amused at this strange sight. Muruganar narrated this to me and added: ‘Vishwanatha (Swami) used to jokingly request me to quit such “lizard-talk”; as my words were not audible to anyone including Bhagavan! What to do? I was not at all aware of such happenings. On such occasions my sole thought would be to reply to Bhagavan immediately and I would forget the environment, everything else, including my body!’ Muruganar, the ‘shadow of Bhagavan’, had the highest devotion for Him and would never fail to express this by prostrating to Him a number of times and when Bhagavan left the Hall standing up reverentially.” (*Moments Remembered* by V. Ganesan, page 56.)

Arunachala Pati:-

Children, from the above anecdotes, what can you conclude about *namaskarams* to Bhagavan? In the first story, Bhagavan was clearly not impressed with a show of devotion by the devotee who started on his *namaskaram* exercise regimen. Bhagavan can read each of our minds. He knows very well our intentions. He knows our ways.

Did you enjoy the story about the ‘lizard-talk’ about Muruganar? Muruganar, also known as the shadow of Bhagavan, is an outstanding example to each of us as to what it takes to be a true devotee. Muruganar was so immersed in the love and devotion of Bhagavan, that he lost awareness of himself or his surroundings, in the presence of Bhagavan. Muruganar was accustomed to prostrating numerous times to Bhagavan. Each *namaskaram* was drenched with utmost devotion to Bhagavan, and was not intended to impress Bhagavan or anyone else.

Prostrations to Bhagavan should be an expression of our devotion to Bhagavan. They should be an outpouring of our Hearts. They should not be done mechanically or in a distracted manner. We are after all prostrating to Bhagavan, the Lord of the Universe, the Lord of Our Hearts!

Here is Bhagavan’s characteristic summary of *namaskaram*: “To engage in your duty is the true *Namaskar*.....and abiding in God is the only true Asan.” (*Maharshi’s Gospel*, page 3.) ▲

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Are There Two Bhagavans?

When Arthur Osborne founded Sri Ramanashramam’s quarterly publication *The Mountain Path* in 1964, he declared: “The aim of this journal is to set forth the traditional wisdom of all religions and all ages, especially as testified to by their saints and mystics, and to clarify the paths available to seekers in the conditions of our modern world.” And then he added: “*The Mountain Path* is dedicated to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.”

The dilemma of many, who have come to the point of only occasionally reading *The Mountain Path*, is that at times articles appear which instead of providing clarification, only leave the sincere reader with a deepening confusion regarding the teachings of Bhagavan and the way to practise them.

Nowadays (in our modern world), many of the main articles appear to be inspired by the new wave of interpretation commonly referred to as “Neo-Advaita”. From the attempt of these self-appointed mystics and philosophers to present and instruct their readers on the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, one would have to conclude that there were two Bhagavans. The fault cannot be laid upon the Editor and Publisher, for what they present, as is seen in Editorials, clearly adheres to “traditional wisdom and... clarifies the paths available to seekers.”

A clear example of such an Editorial emphatically states: “The crucial word is application...the practice of the instructions requires persistence and conviction.” (*The Mountain Path*, October-December 2007, Editorial). These statements surely confirm Bhagavan’s

statements, “Practice is necessary, there is Grace.” (*Guru Ramana* by S.S. Cohen). And further, “Know that the wondrous jnana vichara is only for those who have attained purity of mind by softening and melting within. Without this softening and melting away of the mind, brought about by thinking of the feet of the Lord, the attachment to the ‘I’ that adheres to the body will not cease to be.” (*Padamalai*). In addition, Bhagavan when asked to define ‘yoga’ declared, “Effort itself is Yoga.” (*Guru Ramana*). This is most clear and full of tradition; this Bhagavan teaches practice, effort with persistence and conviction, purity of mind and thinking of the feet of the Lord. (§ 91, *Talks*).

Though the above quotes are inspiring and uplifting, they appear to be refuted by articles which propound teachings from a seemingly altogether different Bhagavan.

From the inception of the *Mountain Path*, its intention seems to follow in the footsteps of Bhagavan, attempting to only clarify and never contradict. Nevertheless, when authors make statements that, even to the untrained eye, appear alien to the Bhagavan that made the above statements, one must be on guard against misrepresentation. By leaving out Bhagavan’s guidance of ‘*practice and then further practice*’ exemplified by the Maharshi’s statement: “People have all sorts of notions about *nirvikalpa*... All this is due to their viewing it intellectually. *Nirvikalpa* is Chit — effortless, formless Consciousness... To some whose minds have become ripe from long practice in the past, *nirvikalpa* comes suddenly as a flood, but to others it comes in the course of their *sadhana*, which slowly wears down the obstructing thoughts and reveals the screen of Pure Awareness ‘I’-‘I’. Further practice renders the screen permanently exposed. This is Self-realization, *Mukti*, or *Sahaja Samadhi*, the natural, effortless State,” (*Guru Ramana*), authors might qualify themselves for misrepresentation of the truth, and perhaps such a serious omission can be deemed shameful.

There is, undoubtedly, a readership that would be pleased to see in print support for their misinterpretation of Bhagavan’s description of the ‘effortless state’, though as is seen from the above quote, it is clearly depicted as the goal of long and protracted effort.

These fringe but non-the-less loud voices from certain quarters are tending to over-determine the absolute aspects of advaitic teaching.

This phenomenon is typified by such hackneyed phrases as, “*you are the self; there is nothing you need to do.*” While on the absolute level this statement is true, as a teaching on practice, it can even be dangerous.

Lamentably, people will even quote Bhagavan to defend such a position but it is, as the majority of Bhagavan’s followers will agree, a misuse of Bhagavan’s teaching. They have not understood that when Bhagavan spoke like this, he was addressing an audience that may have over-determined the other side, having become too formalistic and ritualistic in their approach to spiritual life.

From the establishment of the *Mountain Path*, the basic appeal was for the necessity of *sadhana* — and effort — and tapping into the wisdom of the ages, the great teachers, who gave us solid foundations on which to build our practice. As stated by the original editor, the journal provided a means to clarify the paths available to seekers in the conditions of our modern world. A revitalization of the “Statement of Purpose” originally given by the Ashram and it’s founders is now all-the-more sorely needed. Let this teaching instrument of Sri Ramanashramam once again give voice to the badly neglected central feature of spiritual life emphasized by the Maharshi, namely, *sadhana*.

— Vera Lee, Florida, USA

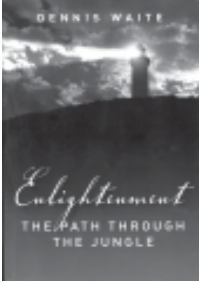
Congratulations

After many years I saw a copy of *Mountain Path*. The format as well as the printing of the journal is excellent. Let me first of all congratulate you and the editorial board for this marvellous achievement. Please keep it up. I was happy to go through some of the articles in this issue of the *MP*. They bring out, each in its own way, the message of the Sage of Arunachala and that of the Indian tradition.

I enjoyed reading Sadhu Tanmaya Chaitanya’s paper on *Adhyasa*. The exposition of *adhyasa* is clear, cogent, and lucid. The role of avidya as the cause of *adhyasa* and the way in which the latter functions in our day-to-day life have been brought out with examples. Everyone interested in Advaita and the Indian tradition should read this journal.

— Professor R. Balasubramanian, Chennai ▲

BOOK REVIEWS



ENLIGHTENMENT The Path Through The Jungle by Dennis Waite. O Books, Winchester, UK. 2008. 186pp, US\$22.95 ISBN 978-1-84694-118-4 www.o-books.net

Dennis Waite is well known to readers as an exponent of traditional Advaita in a modern setting. We have recently reviewed favourably several of his able and knowledgeable books. His latest offering is a distillation of the tenets of Advaita with a specific view to counter the dis-information and plain falsehoods of the movement commonly called neo-advaita. One could not find a better book for those who are puzzled by the intricacies of Advaita in its pure form and the variances and declamations of many self-proclaimed teachers in the west who have misused this noble tradition out of egotism and ignorance.

In fact, one could call this book a primer of Advaita with a western audience in mind. The book is laid out in a series of numbered statements which succinctly give intelligible definitions and explanations of Advaitic ideas and teachings free of the long-established verbiage and obscurity that comes with centuries of exegesis.

The author has divided the book into sections which tackle direct/indirect knowledge, ignorance, experience, ego, scriptures, the seeker, the guru, traditional teaching and satsang teaching. In particular the author exposes the many misconceptions as to what exactly is enlightenment. The chapters relating to what is and is not enlightenment are the heart of the book. Many of us are baffled by the various interpretations of *maya*, *Brahman*, *mithya*...the list is long. Dennis Waite has studied for many years the original texts in Sanskrit. He has learnt from recognised teachers and has now distilled this knowledge particularly for the western audience who are either new to the tradition or confused by the conflicting opinions voiced by so-called gurus.

He clearly defines enlightenment as the ceasing to identify oneself with the belief of being a separate individual and seeing that the world of objects is *mithya* (dependent or false reality). It is the recognition of

Brahman and is not an experience in time and space. It is the recognition that one always is one with *Brahman*. Enlightenment is freedom from self-ignorance. It is not something to attain but that which is always present. The author demystifies the whole process and exercises a sharp intelligence to sift the truth from the vague and plainly misinformed pronouncements of unqualified pretenders.

I would recommend this book to all who want a clear and informative guide to the basic tenets of Advaita. There are none better available.

— Christopher Quilkey

BHAMATI AND VIVARANA SCHOOLS OF ADVAITA VEDANTA A Critical Approach by P.S. Roodurun. Motilal Banarsidass Delhi 2002. 297pp, Rs495. (HB) ISBN 81-208-1890-3 mlbd@vsnl.com Website: www.mlbd.com

Although all Advaita Vedantins subscribe to the doctrine of absolute non-duality, they differ in their mode of expounding such. After Sankara, there arose two distinct philosophical schools of thought within the Advaita tradition which interpreted his thought. These two *prasthanas* or 'ways' arose either by way of a sub-commentary or a gloss on Sankara's *bhashyas*. The *Bhamati-prasthan*a has its roots in the *Brahmasiddhi* of Mandana and the *Vivarana-prasthan*a has its roots in Suresvara's works. However, though the post-Sankara Advaitins may differ in their interpretations of certain aspects of the doctrine, it must always be remembered that these differences are of an exegetical and not doctrinal nature. Both of these schools are based upon, and owe allegiance and inspiration to Sankara. In their attempts to clarify, elucidate, and answer objections, these different views arose. As far as the essentials of Advaita are concerned, all Advaitins are in complete agreement.

The three most important works of the *Vivarana-prasthan*a are by Padmapada, Prakasatman and Vidyaranya. Likewise, there are three important seminal works for the *Bhamati-prasthan*a by Vacaspati, Amalananda and Appayya Diksita.

This book has a summary of the historical development of the Advaita tradition and then covers various doctrines such as: *maya*, *avidya*, *adhyasa*, *anirvacaniya*, *bimba-pratibimbavada*, *parinamavada*, *vivartavada*; the problem of error; the individual (*jiva*); the world (*jagat*); God (*Isvara*); liberation-while-living (*jivanmukti*).

It is a must for all scholars of Advaita.

— K. Vasudevan



HARIKATHA. Samarth Ramdas's Contribution to the Art of Spiritual Story-Telling by I.P. Meera Grimes. Indica Books, Varanasi. 2008. 183pp, Rs250. ISBN 81-86569-76-6 indicabooks@satyam.net.in

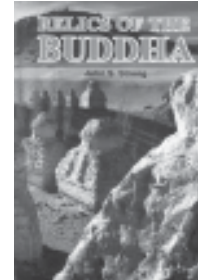
Meera Grimes is a recognised authority and exponent of Harikatha. It is a performance art using narration, singing, music, dance, humour and philosophy based on a religious theme, usually the life of a saint or it could be a tale from a Hindu scripture which demonstrates spiritual values. This art originated in Maharashtra with the appearance of Samarth Ramdas who used it to spread Hindu dharma. It was brought to Tanjavur by disciples of his in the 17th century and was a significant instrument in the cultivation and propagation of Hindu lore in the villages. The purpose of Harikatha is to awaken devotion to God and encourage the audience to live a righteous life. In bygone days it was the entertainment of the people.

The author presents selected verses on the theory of Harikatha from Ramdas's *Dasabodha* which is the only recognised historical text to evolve the theory of Harikatha. The author then goes into some detail about the format of a Harikatha performance: *dhyana slokas*; *samkirtana* (singing); set of five songs in praise of Vinayaka, Rama, Krishna, Maruti and Guru; *pundarikam* in which both the *bhagavatar* (the performer) and the audience participate in a recital of the Lord's name; the *prathama padam* in which the *bhagavatar* takes up the *cipla*, an instrument similar to castanets, and sings the source song of philosophical intent of the main *katha* to come; and a *tillana*, a musical composition set to fast music. The second part of the Harikatha consists of the main body of the story, an exposition of the fruit of listening to the *katha*; a *mangalam* or concluding verse and finally a *pundarikam* in which the audience join in a song.

The author then gives a sample of the stories which are used, notably the lives of the great Maharashtra saints, Jnanadev, Namdev, Ekanath and Tukaram.

Today unfortunately, the popularity of the art is diminishing as the number of performers and appreciative audiences dwindle. This book is a valuable survey of this endangered art and hopefully may spur readers to attend performances and keep the tradition alive.

—T.V. Ramamurthy



RELICS OF THE BUDDHA by John S. Strong. Motilal Banarsidass Pub. Delhi, 2007. 290pp, Rs595 (HB). ISBN 978-81-208-3139-1 www.mlbd.com

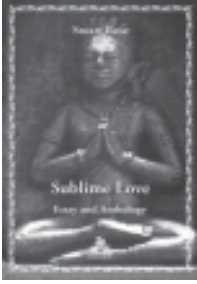
Every great creed embraces an element of veneration for those who exemplified the highest aspects of the tradition but were no longer alive in this physical universe. This includes Buddhism which was founded on the basis of a rational and detailed exploration of the way the mind functions and how we can be free of suffering by self-effort. In the Theravada school one of the criteria of what constituted a proper monastery was the possession of some sacred relic.

The author has argued that the reverence for relics plays a crucial part in living Buddhism both within the monasteries as well as among the laity. An essential pre-requisite before one embarks upon the path to enlightenment is to meet a Buddha. Altogether there have been 25 Buddhas of which Gautama was the latest who set the wheel of Dhamma in motion. In this day and age there is no Buddha whom we can meet. However there is the chance through venerating the stupa within which are the relics of a Buddha. Some argue that the relics of a highly evolved being can initiate or stimulate one to tread the path to enlightenment.

We are given detailed and exhaustive account of the death of Gautama the Buddha and the consequent scattering of the various relics available such as hair, finger nails, footprints, teeth and bones which are spread out on the Indian subcontinent and beyond, including Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Laos where the Buddha is said to have sojourned according to popular local legends. There are systematic retelling of the stories attached to some of the significant items as to how they arrived at a particular destination by the force of destiny. The myths attached to the relics are rich and various which are extensions of the Buddha's biography. They were in the end effective means to spread the teachings and a focus for the local sangha which was established. The best known relic, the tooth at Kandy, Sri Lanka has a story of original theft immediately after the mahānirvāṇa of the Buddha, attempted destruction by persecutors and miraculous retrieval. It eventually became a symbology of sovereignty whereby a pretender to the throne could not claim power unless he possessed the holy tooth.

It is a fascinating book for those interested in Buddhism and its historical evolution.

— Amrit Ray



SUBLIME LOVE by Stuart Rose. Indica Books, Varanasi. 2007. 335pp, Rs395. ISBN 81-86569-68-5 indicabooks@satyam.net.in

Love is a tricky business. We all at some stage of our life have been in love at least once and for some, many times. Love can be instant or gradual. There are no hard and fast rules. We all love somethings and remain indifferent to others. We love objects till eventually, when we become disappointed with them, we refine our mind and hearts through spiritual teachings to the point when we love love. There are songs, poems, books and music written about love or inspired by it. But what exactly is love has never been properly defined and probably never will be. It can only be experienced. In spirituality, love is centred round *bhakti* and its generation. But what is it? Can it be defined? And can we create it or discover it so that it fills our hearts?

The author gives us a wide, sincere and informative perspective on this essential subject, for with love we are whole, and without it — whatever our accomplishments — we are basically empty. Sceptical at first, I gradually warmed to his elucidation of the subject. The book is divided into two sections, the first is his investigation of the subject through the various major religions and contemporary thought, and the second part is an interesting anthology of writings by teachers and philosophers through the ages on love.

Ultimately spiritual love is associated with 'bliss' and the stage where there is neither an experience nor an experiencer. It cannot be shared, one can only be one with that. The most interesting chapter is 'Features and Nuances of Spiritual Love', which details, the differences between men and women in their approach to love and what it means to them. He used Simone de Beauvoir who says that women have a wider range of possibilities to express love than men; he admits that one cannot make any definite conclusions about the differences between the sexes. He discusses *agape* (transcendent or divine love) and *eros* (human or sensual love) and further clarifies the types of love available to us for expression: friendly, familial, sexual and spiritual.

Stuart Rose has thought long and hard about this topic and we have the benefit of his reflections on the subject. Though seemingly dry, for a book about a passionate subject, there is much food for thought for the reader who persists.

— Amrit Ray ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN



Mastan Swami Samadhi

Aradhana Celebrations for Cow Lakshmi

According to the Tamil calendar this is the year of *Sarvadhari*, which occurs every 60 years. Devotees will be reminded of Sri Bhagavan's composition in June 1948, mentioning *Sarvadhari* as the year Cow Lakshmi attained *mukti* and had the epitaph inscribed on her samadhi. At the ashram, on the 18th June there was a celebration at Cow Lakshmi's samadhi observing the 60th anniversary of her 'liberation' and devotees participated in the function to receive her blessings.

The priests conducted a solemn puja, during which the song composed by Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer about Lakshmi and a song specially composed for the occasion were sung. Both songs highlighted the unique place of Lakshmi among Bhagavan's countless devotees. After *arati*, *prasadam* was distributed among those present.

The annual aradhana celebrations for Cow Lakshmi this year were performed at her samadhi on 14th July, 2008. A new book *Bhagavan Ramana: Friend of All*, which contains many stories of Bhagavan's kindness towards animals, was appropriately released to mark the occasion.

Muruganar Samadhi Day

Sri Muruganar's samadhi day was celebrated on the 30th August with chanting from *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* and *arati*. There is a special atmosphere of peace under the surrounding neem trees at his samadhi, as devotees honour this great devotee of Bhagavan.

Bhagavan Advent Day 1st September

One of the four principal celebrations in the ashram commemorates the arrival of Bhagavan at Arunachala on the 1st September 1896. It is a significant date in the calendar year of the ashram, for with Bhagavan's arrival in Tiruvannamalai we mark the beginning of a new outpouring of Grace from Arunachala in the form of Sri Ramana Maharshi. The day began with the traditional *Mahanyasa* puja and *abhishekam*.

After the centenary celebrations in 1996, it has now become an annual event that devotees from Madurai, re-enact this historical journey. About 50 devotees from Madurai arrived by bus on the 31st August at Mambalapattu. They walked along the railway tracks and

participated in the special pujas conducted at the Arakandanallur and Kilur temples and in Muthukrishna Bhagavathar's house. In the evening they all reached the ashram to participate in the ashram celebrations on the 1st September.

Consecration of Mastan Swami Samadhi (Matam Village)

The old dilapidated Samadhi Shrine of Mastan Swami at Matam Village has been renovated by Sri Ramanasramam with financial contributions from devotees.

The consecration of the Shrine of Mastan Swami took place on Sunday, the 14th September 2008 between 9 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. Many devotees attended the function to receive the blessings of Bhagavan.

Mastan Swami holds a special place in the assembly of Sri Ramana devotees. The first ever Centre in the name of Bhagavan Ramana (Sri Ramanananda Matalayam) was started in 1914 at Desur village (70 km from Tiruvannamalai), by Akhilandammal (Desuramma) with the help of this Muslim devotee, Mastan.

Mastan Swami was born in Desur in 1878 in a family of weavers and worked at the family loom. Akhilandammal of the same village who often visited and served Bhagavan from 1903 onwards took him with her whenever she visited Sri Bhagavan.

Mastan's first darshan of Bhagavan in Virupaksha cave put him into a state of Samadhi as he stood looking at Bhagavan for eight hours. He later would weave loin cloths and towels in his loom at Desur for Bhagavan's use. In 1914 Mastan and Desuramma established a mutt in Desur with the blessings of Bhagavan encourage the local devotees in spiritual sadhana by conducting poojas and recitation of Bhagavan's works. In June 1924 when thieves beat Bhagavan and other inmates with sticks Mastan too got his share of the blows.

In 1928 Mastan shifted to Matam village and started living near the temple tank where a hut was constructed by one Muniswamy Gounder of the village. On 8th November 1931 (*Deepavali*) Mastan attained Samadhi after a brief illness. But he knew that his end was near and even said that the Sivaganas were beckoning to him to go

with them. His body was taken in a procession around the village in the newly made temple palanquin. Samadhi rituals were attended by Kunju Swami from Sri Ramanasramam at the behest of Bhagavan who took an unusual interest in the proceedings.

On 6th December 2006 a simple puja was performed by the then chief priest of Sri Ramanasramam to enable renovation of the Samadhi Shrine of Mastan Swami. Generous donations from devotees of Bhagavan enabled the complete renovation with the addition of a caretaker room and the fencing of the huge area for creating a garden around the Shrine.

For those who wish to visit the Samadhi, Matam is on the Tiruvannamalai – Wandavasi road, some 65 kilometres from Tiruvannamalai. *Mountain Path* readers may find a detailed map of the locations in the January-March 2007 issue, page 61.

Obituaries

Richard Rigos passed away quietly around 5am, the 2nd May on the island of Poros near Askeli, Greece, where he had been living with his wife Therese for the past few years. He was 79 years old. It happened quickly without suffering. Richard and Therese came to Aruanchala in the early 1970s after ten years at Pondicherry and spent over a quarter of a century residing close to Arunachala.

G.H. Daswani was absorbed in Bhagavan on 7th May. He was 84 years old. Born in Karachi in 1919, he first came to Bhagavan in 1948. For more than 36 years he engaged in charitable work for the poor in Mumbai. He also contributed articles in Sindhi and published bhajans on Bhagavan.

We regret to inform readers that **Swami Chidananda** of Sivananada Ashram, Rishikesh, attained *samadhi* on the 28th August. He had visited the ashram during Bhagavan's lifetime and in 1994 gave *sannyasa diksha* to Sri T.N. Venkataraman, the former president of our ashram.

He was born in Mangalore in 1916 and studied at Loyola College in Madras. He met Swami Sivananda at Rishikesh in 1943 where he took *sannyasa* in 1949. Swami Sivananda later said, "He is the *Kohinoor* (Crest Jewel) of the Mission." He was president of the Divine Life Society for more than 40 years after the *samadhi* of his guru in 1963. ▲