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Ramana Ashtottaram

62. ॐ सत्याय नमः

Om Satyāya namah.

Prostration to the one who is all *satya*, one who embodies Reality.

The Tamil word *mei* stands both for the body and for truth. Sri Muruganar says, “Without explanation he reveals the simple truth (his bare body).” Bhagavan revealed reality by his mere physical presence. The transcendental Being (*paramartha sat*), is here present before our physical eyes as *vyavahara satya*, relative truth. His body embodied *sat*, the Being which is Awareness-Bliss.

Though we do not experience the physical presence of Sri Bhagavan, there is no doubting the abundant grace available, if we but remember his form (*rupa*) or chant his sacred name (*nama*).

63. ॐ प्रशान्ताय नमः

Om Praśāntāya namah.

Prostration to the one who is full of peace; serene; the embodiment of stillness.

Free from all distraction and dissatisfaction, he is all peace and calmness. His presence spreads tranquility. This is the external sign of the true guru. His peace passeth all understanding. We cannot grasp it with our minds but we can surrender to its noble activity which spontaneously cleanses our hearts and minds. ▲

EDITORIAL

Prayer

I have seen a wonder, [this] magnetic hill which forcibly attracts the soul! Having suppressed the mischievous [mental] activities of the soul who has thought of it [even] once, having drawn [that soul] [inwards] to face itself, the one [reality], and having made it motionless (*achala*) like itself, it feeds upon that sweet [pure and ripened] soul. What [a wonder] this is! O souls! Be saved by thinking of this great Arunagiri, the destroyer of the soul, who shines in [our] heart! ¹

It is often assumed that Bhagavan was a strict jnani whose entire focus was intent on conveying the subtle erudition of Advaita, the basis of which is that there is no sense of other, there is only one Brahman in the apparent world of difference. He systematically pointed out the delusions of our mind and brought home to us the necessity of remaining still in the awareness of ‘I’ devoid of thought. He taught that there is no journey, there is no effort, there is only the one supreme consciousness and we are That.

¹ Sri Arunachala Patikam, v.10. Translated by Michael James.

There was another side of Bhagavan which is equally important and valid. Bhagavan, like Adi Sankara that other giant of Advaita, was also a *bhakta* and his hymns to Arunachala reveal a heart pouring out both its anguish and ecstasy in the presence of the Beloved. He revealed by the example of his own mortal life how we can approach and be absorbed into the divine light of what he called Arunachala, the supreme consciousness.

Bhagavan showed us a way through prayer to open up our hearts to the saving grace of Arunachala. But how can we follow in his footsteps? For many of us prayer is a challenge. We may have the habit of saying certain traditional prayers each day which can become a stale ritual. Or when the need arises out of confusion or suffering, our heart breaks out with an inchoate cry for help and we call it prayer. Ambrose Bierce, the American 19th Century satirist defined prayer as it is commonly perceived: “The act of beseeching the Almighty to suspend the laws of the universe on behalf of one supplicant, confessed unworthy.”²

There are also times when prayer can be a hymn of gratitude for unexpected blessings. We read in the Vedas the most vigorous invocations and expressions of delight in the divine. These hymns are prayers which inspire, for the mantric recitation has a deliberate power to elevate us.

There is another approach which is that by calmly waiting in silence, we are receptive to a higher power which may enlighten our present darkness. By opening our minds and hearts to the great silence within we create the space for insight and blessings to be born. Prayer implicitly affirms that there is a purpose to our lives and that there is a higher compassionate power to which we can connect.

For the most part all these activities are sporadic. How can we remain in continuous prayer or contemplation, like the steady flow of oil that Bhagavan described in *Upadesa Saram*?

Prayer as we generally know it, is a supplication. But it also can be an affirmation. It all depends on our attitude. Prayer if one considers

²The Devil’s Dictionary in various editions.

it carefully is an act of attention or giving. We give our attention to that which is ‘higher’ than us. We offer up our minds and hearts until we reach the stage of pure meditation when we are at one with the object of our quest. We are however in a state of duality which implies effort, and until we establish within ourselves a strong sense of direction our efforts will be nullified by a lack of consistency. The name or image of Arunachala-Ramana effectively assists our concentration both outwardly as well as inwardly through the mysterious workings of Grace.

Ananda Mayi Ma has said: “Whenever you possibly can, sustain the flow of a sacred Name. To repeat His Name is to be in His presence. Just as a human friend opens his heart to you and tells you all about himself when you come to him, so, if you associate with the Supreme Friend, He will reveal His true Being to you. Do you refrain from bathing when faced with waves of the sea? Surely, you plunge right into the midst of them and take your bath. Similarly, in the very thick of tempests and difficulties of worldly life endeavour to maintain the remembrance of Him by the repetition of His Name.”³

We begin with sporadic acts of prayer until the strength grows to the point where the act of prayer is sufficient reward in itself. We do not yearn for more but rather revel in the silent sense of completeness where one needs for nothing.

We have seen in the brief descriptions above that prayer can assume a different function according to one’s temperament and maturity. There is in general a series of steps through which the individual passes in the ascent to union with the Beloved.

Prayer can be compared to the act of archery: There are many similar analogies using the bow and arrow. In our version we can say that the archery of prayer happens when we place our best foot forward — a declaration of firm purpose; and we assume a comfortable stance. We raise the bow which is our mental ability, and draw the string, our skill, to bend energy or desire to one purpose. We aim the straight arrow, our concentration, to hit the target.³

³ See the section ‘Ma’s Teachings’ in the website www.anandamayji.org

⁴ *Mundaka Upanisad*, 2.ii.4-5.

Like Bhagavan we clearly hear the call. It may not be the name of Arunachala; it may not be a single startling moment but we do hear the urgency of the heart to respond to something greater than ourselves. This can be caused by emotional suffering and mental bewilderment when we realize that our minds cannot grasp the immensity of life's challenge. It can also be the result of sharp physical distress due to illness or some other causes and we conclude that there must be a better way to live. There is suddenly a clearing in the debris mind — the clutter of useless thoughts and negative, dark emotions. For a moment a higher purpose is revealed and a possible alternative to our predicament. We are touched by a ray of light. There is a leap of faith and without realizing it, we have taken the first step. There are endless variations on this theme and none of us is an exception.

The second step is a realisation that our efforts are inadequate and a higher power is necessary to transcend our limitations, though for the present we are blind to the intelligent effort required. Without this realisation we would turn in endless circles of tired thoughts and blind emotion that have no purpose and no end. Like a tedious machine our mind churns out thoughts that have neither relevance nor depth. We live on the surface and die a slow death of boredom for there is no meaning, no connectedness although there is usually a razor-sharp recognition that there must be another way.

With this second step comes the instinct to pray. It may be patchy, it may not be completely sincere, it may even be outright begging, but it is a beginning. Initially, we pray for fulfillment of the needs of the hour and forget to pray for that which frees us from need. Sri Ramana instructs us to seek the source of the 'I', and we should not be distracted by short-lived satisfactions but move on with either the pulsating holy name alive in our minds or the splendid image of Arunachala-Ramana ever in our sights.

There is wisdom in the maxim that even if we but imitate a skillful process, one day, with diligence and through grace, there will inevitably arise the ability to achieve the skill itself. We should never give up.

We should be careful that once we tread a particular path we should remain loyal to it otherwise there is disorder and unnecessary

bewilderment because there are crucial moments when we need to focus all our energy and intention on one goal to the exclusion of all else. Like a ship we cannot afford a leak of inconsistency on this adventure. We are building, through prayer, a seamless vessel to carry us safely across the ocean of *samsara*.

For those of us who follow Arunachala-Ramana, the radiating power is so subtle that quite often devotees wonder if they are making any progress at all. Naturally it is easier to feel the presence of the Divine Power when standing by the Samadhi or under the benign gaze of Arunachala, but the majority do not have that luxury as they must work for a living elsewhere. We should remember that once irradiated by that divine presence it is not only unforgettable but also unstoppable. Once we get the taste it starts to work invisibly to purify our minds and hearts. We begin to question previously accepted assumptions and conventional wisdom. This process is not usually obvious as there are rarely any dramatic moments. It is incremental and for the most part unobserved by others, and paradoxically even by oneself until some defining moment opens the eyes. A poor swimmer is one who thrashes about in order to stay afloat, while a good swimmer moves smoothly on the water and uses the natural currents to take him. The more we become attuned to Arunachala-Ramana the more our personality fades in importance and the more the good ship of our journey glides effortlessly through the waters unnoticed. ▲



Jnana Versus Bhakti

NIALL ANGLIN

The title of this article is intentionally flawed as the word ‘versus’ indicates a competition between two rival parties, one against the other. I have used this title to catch the eye of two kinds of readers, first, the discerning aspirant who will instantly see the flaw in the supposition that *jnana* and *bhakti* could be opposed to one another; and second, the eye of the aspirant who recognizes a problem he may have encountered in spiritual life, that of being unable to reconcile the differences between the path of *jnana* (knowledge) and the path of *bhakti* (devotion) and who therefore doubts that both can be followed simultaneously without them being mutually exclusive. This apparent conflict between the paths of *bhakti* and *jnana* is one of the dilemmas that some seekers may face on the spiritual path. Some sadhakas are

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proud that they follow only the path of *jnana*, while others feel that they cannot comprehend the subtleties of *jnana* philosophy and they stick with the so-called easy option of devotion, or they fear that they are required to give up their devotion in order to practise Self-enquiry and they cannot give up their cherished love for God. A misapprehension can come about from Advaita texts which seem to imply that it must be one or the other, and that we have to make a choice and follow one path to the exclusion of the other, i.e. if we follow *jnana* we must stop our dualistic thinking and discontinue our devotion to God. This misapprehension happened in my case and I suspect that this mistaken conflict must occur to many. Yet it is seldom discussed as an expanded topic of discussion. The crux of the dilemma is the question: “If we undertake Self-enquiry are we being counselled to forget about our personal God because He does not really exist and is only an illusion? Is it wrong to practise Self-enquiry while remaining the devotee of a personal God?” And yet during Bhagavan’s lifetime his devotees worshipped Him and they were not discouraged from doing so.

This dilemma came to me while reading the *Ribhu Gita*. It is a pure Advaitic text that asserts in a long series of eloquent statements, the nature of non-duality. It is a favourite among those who enjoy chanting it, both for its pungency of expression and its direct approach to the highest Advaitic teachings. It was much recommended by Bhagavan and there are many stories about its chanting at the ashram, especially in the early days. For some devotees the regular chanting of the *Ribhu Gita* was their main sadhana.¹ Getting immersed in the *Ribhu Gita* can feel like one is in a dream in which God is whispering to us his secret nature, which is our secret nature. Its simplicity leaves no room for intellectual struggles to figure out what it means. The total inclusiveness of the Reality it presents is awe-inspiring. It drums inspiring statements about the Being of the Self into the mind, so that finally the mind is unable to think anymore and one is left in an intense

¹ See the Foreward and Preface to *The Essence of the Ribhu Gita* translated by N.R. Krishnamoorthi Aiyer, 1999. And Chapter 34 of *At the Feet of Bhagavan* by T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, 1998.

but thought-free awareness, the essence of Being and Consciousness without limitation, a state that includes all. In fact, Bhagavan indicated that reading the *Ribhu Gita* can lead to samadhi. For sadhakas not released from *samsara* the rapture may not last and when we finish our reading and our absorption in it, the tumultuous world reappears with our bodies and names, our pains and pleasures, our likes and dislikes. What to do then? Lord, what to do?

I agree wholeheartedly that this type of approach, following the absolute Oneness of pure Advaita Vedanta, which rejects even the gods with their implied dualism, is inspiring, and there are times when I read the sacred Advaitic scripture with the fullest faith in Bhagavan for such inspiration and insight. But for many of us, who live in a world where we are engaged with what, to us, seems an all-too-real dualism, it is a major adjustment to the arrangement of our minds to make the whole-hearted declaration “I am the absolutely non-dual Self.” Life is often hard and challenging and we mortals, with our weaknesses, take great comfort in calling upon our Lord for support, guidance, protection, intervention and spiritual blessings.

For those of us who are still battling with doubts and the intrusive demands of the world where we have to support ourselves in the market-place, there is invariably a niggling doubt: are we fooling ourselves by chanting these absolute verities? Is this just blind faith and merely a way to allay our pesky reservations?

The glorious words of the *Ribhu Gita* resonate inside me, but their power is such that I have in the past sometimes been afraid to follow their admonitions to give up my old way of thinking for fear that they will radically upset that carefully organized trolley of ideas and attitudes accumulated over the years, and force me to give up what is most precious to me, devotion to my Lord.

The *Ribhu Gita* declares in the most concise words the basic tenets of Advaita Vedanta: “I am Brahman” and “All is Brahman only”. As in all the teachings of Advaita, the world and our thoughts are declared to be illusory, and the extreme position is taken that the Guru and Lord Siva are also illusions. The context of this extreme position should always be understood as coming from the state of the absolute

unmanifest pure non-dual Being which is our goal in Self-enquiry but not to be comprehended by the mind. These are essential matters of faith as we strive towards our goal, but for daily living in the manifest world with our ego and our involvements with other separate individuals, and daily decisions to be made in our material lives, the attitude 'All is One' does not provide us with the help we need. For the *jnani* a constant flow of guidance for everything comes from within but the *jiva* (soul) has to reach out for such guidance.

As long as we are still stuck in this dualistic world, if we can ask our friend to help us to lift a heavy box or to lend us a cup of sugar, then can we not ask God for His blessings and support when we need it? We have to have the right perspective on what it means to say that God and the world are illusory. He is not more illusory than our neighbour. A primary difference between *bhakti* and *jnana* is this: in devotion we approach the Lord carrying our burdens, our minds, our bodies and the world along with us, but in Self-enquiry we attempt to shed all these things and realize our true nature as pure awareness without adjuncts. While practising Self-enquiry we must relinquish all thoughts including thoughts of God and concentrate on the pure awareness of 'I'. In this our goal is to vanquish the menacing mind, the trouble-maker.

There are intense challenges in moving from the traditional dualistic forms of religion where there is a loving and nurturing God and we are His children, to Advaita Vedanta that declares 'I am that'. In life's worst moments we can feel like poor helpless souls, and it is more than consoling to have a God to call upon, to lift our spirits and help and guide us through our trials and tribulations, our doubts and ignorance. Until and unless our mind comes under control, and we find the inner peace to realize the Divine residing as pure Consciousness in our heart, we cannot go about declaring 'I am not the body' and yet still remain vulnerable to every vicissitude this tricky world sends our way. 'I am not the body' is a final truth, a realization, the ultimate release from bondage. It should not be adopted as a way of living when we still have not realized exactly who we are, though faith in the idea, 'I am not the body' as absolute truth is essential to the sadhak.

Can we practise Self-enquiry and still remain devoted to our God and worship Him? Why not? As long as we retain the 'I am the body' notion we should continue to worship and pray to God. Saying 'I am not the body' because we believe it by faith certainly does not mean we are rid of the notion that we are the body.

Many of us have heard something similar to the following verses from the *Ribhu Gita*: "I, indeed, am the supreme Brahman-Bliss ever. I, indeed, am the supreme Brahman-Bliss, which is changeless."² From my reading, understanding and faith in Bhagavan's teaching, I accept the truth of these statements because Bhagavan says they are true and because in his secret way, he blesses us all and awakens our hearts to his call so that we might gain a glimmer of understanding of these truths.

Intellectuals who have been dissatisfied with traditional religion because they just can't accept what they have been taught, and who have perhaps adopted a somewhat atheistic outlook often find the teachings of Bhagavan very appealing as they search for a higher meaning to life, but I would claim that the devotee of God has a head start on the path to Self-realisation.

No doubt we are well off worshipping Our Lord who seems to be other than ourselves. But our own Bhagavan, the supreme embodiment of Him whom we worship, told us it is possible to go even deeper than this dualistic worship — if we are capable of doing so. I admit to getting confused between the two paths at times, but when calmness prevails, I feel a natural inclination to abide as close as possible to pure awareness, transferring the utmost reverence to the cause as if I am in the presence of the Lord Himself.

Any thoughts that *jnana* overrides *bhakti* and that *bhakti* is an inferior path, should be dispelled even when confronted with the statement that *jnana* is the highest path. God is Love; the Self is Love; devotion is pure Love. Bhagavan loved devotion and he encouraged it. How could it be otherwise since he is so adorable, so fit to be worshipped? He was totally devoted to Arunachala and he declared it directly and through his poems of devotion. We should never be misled

² *The Song of Ribhu*, Ch.16, Section 2, p.236. SAT, USA, 2003.

into believing that he discouraged devotion. An idea I have come across only recently through several recent articles in the *Mountain Path* is that devotion and love soften the heart and that softening is a prerequisite to Self-realisation, according to Bhagavan.³ It may therefore be concluded that *bhakti* is a building block or stepping stone to *jnana*, and I am convinced that *bhakti* never disappears in the *jnani*, and the *bhakta* attains the same indescribable non-dual transcendence in the state of union with his Beloved Lord.

According to Sri Ramakrishna, Hanuman said, “O Rama, sometimes I think that you are the Whole and I am a part, and sometimes that you are the Master and I am Your servant. But when I have the knowledge of reality, I see that You are I and I am You.”⁴

Shirdi Sai Baba said, “Meditate on me as pure *Anand Nirakara*, but if you cannot do this, then meditate on this Sai Body exactly as you see it.” He also said, “I am the bond slave of my devotee. I love devotion. He who withdraws his heart from the world and loves me is my true lover and he merges in ME like a river in the sea.”⁵

When in the mood of devotion, I cannot look for Him in pictures and images, though they help to concentrate and focus the mind. (Who would believe it seeing all the images surrounding me?) Inevitably I seek Him within and pray to Him to reveal Himself, knowing by faith that the only lasting revelation He can give me will be as my own Self.

‘The Self’ as a term in English does not arouse any feelings in me as do many of my favourite names of God used in devotion. ‘Atma’ has a more spiritual ring to it, though it does not arouse the fervour that the names of God do. The name ‘Brahman’ does not have as magic a sound to me as ‘Bhagavan’ or ‘Lord’ in English. The harsh-sounding name ‘God’ is also uninspiring to me. The French ‘le Dieu’ and the Spanish ‘el D os’ have a more spiritually moving sound. I am

³ See Swami Sadasivananada, *Practical Sadhana* Part Two, *Mountain Path*, July-Sept., *Advent*, 2008. p.94.

⁴ M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Sri Ramakrishna Math, 6th ed. 1974. “The Master in Various Moods”, p. 565.

⁵ Mani Sahukar, *Sai Baba: The Saint of Shirdi*. Somaiya Publications Pvt Ltd., Bombay, 1971. p. 59-60.

jealous of those who feel a surge of reverence for the name ‘Brahman’ which is repeated throughout Advaitic writings. It is not exactly that I don’t feel reverence — I do — but just that it does not strike a magic chord as do certain names. These names and the sounds and effects they conjure up are just aids because I know from experience that attainment is possible without magic names. If the name ‘Brahman’ is awe-inspiring for some devotees as the names Bhagavan, Ram, Krishna and Jesus are for other devotees, then so much the better. It is a *sattvic* name and it softens the heart.

Especially for devout Christians who have accepted the authority of Bhagavan it is hard to break away from the duality of orthodox Christian theology, with its concepts of sin and guilt followed by punishment and the issue of free will. Well, maybe not so hard to break away from the notions of sin and guilt, since that is what some of us ran away from in search of a deeper truth.

Let us assume that the reader of this magazine has already accepted the legitimacy of both *bhakti* and *jnana*, and has already given up the idea of God being a far away super-being who rules by remote control and who will look down on us from above in stern judgment after we die. That instead, an all-loving and tender God is near and dear to us, is a beautiful way to express it in a way not contradictory to the Christian teaching. He is closer than we realize, but Advaita takes it to the next step: He is ourselves, the substratum of our own consciousness. I think of Christians as being more faced with this dilemma, but Hindus, who come from a background of *bhakti*, will have the same challenges to break away from their heart-felt devotion in favour of the seemingly mechanical and sterile proclamations of non-duality which seem to have no heart. The head is necessary but so too is the heart. Many devoted spiritual aspirants have had communion with their chosen deity. Naturally in their intense devotion they never want to let go of the holy feet of their Lord. Did not Sri Ramakrishna encourage that eternal conviction?

Recently I tried to read passages from the writings of a Christian saint but stopped because of the dualistic language, yet in picking it up again I could find union and intimacy with God as the underlying

theme. St. Thomas Aquinas is a Father of the Church and he wrote profound and detailed volumes on complex theological issues. He also had experiences of angels and he told us about them. Later he got so enlightened that he said, “All I have written now seems like so much dust.”⁶

The purpose of an ashram publication such as *Mountain Path* is to inspire and enlighten and it is a bonus when it can guide as well. Many aspirants may suffer from the intellectual conflict between notions of duality and non-duality and some may try to give up totally on dualistic devotion. I think that creates unnecessary problems for many. They should be guided not to give up totally on simple worship and prayer, but rather to cling to the feet of their God. We know it works, and that the Supreme Being is well pleased being worshipped and surrendered to. Those who are particularly strong *bhaktas* will probably not even entertain giving up their devotion but they still might have doubts about Bhagavan’s teachings on Self-enquiry, and worry that they may have to give up what is most valuable in their spiritual life.

The bliss of Sri Bhagavan is beyond logical thought or expression in words. In Him we seek the resolution of the conflict between our heart and our mind. In Him our devotion is transformed into pure knowledge, understanding and totally peaceful and thought-free abidance in pure awareness of the consciousness of being, peace that surpasses all understanding.

Pure continuous awareness. Pure consciousness.

Pure being. Stillness of Being.

I Am.

Consciousness of being by intense yet peaceful one-pointed abidance in self-awareness without thought.

Om Namah Sivaya. ▲

⁶ “Such things have been revealed to me that now all I have written appears in my eyes as no greater value than straw.’ So spoke St. Thomas Aquinas, the ‘Prince of Scholastics’, in answer to his secretary’s anxious urgings that *Summa Theologiae* be completed... St. Thomas experienced a profound mystical insight. The glory of divine knowledge so overwhelmed him that henceforth he took no interest in intellectuality.” Swami Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, p. 189. Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1982.

Three Boons and Nachiketas’ Needs

NEERA KASHYAP

The *Katha Upanishad* is among the most famous of the Upanishads, well known for its powerful, poetic and evocative dialogue between young Nachiketas and Yama, the god of death. This dialogue dwells on profound themes: the true nature of Atman, Brahman as witness and Brahman as participator in Its own *lila*. It also discusses how to attain the supreme joy and the state of supreme joy, the qualifications for *atma vidya* and the *Atmajnani* as teacher, and seeing Death as the teacher of life and the teacher of the deathless state.

Equally profound is the fact that the seeker is such a young boy with a rare aspiration and a unique depth of understanding. Nachiketas watches his father Vajasravasa give away his possessions with an ulterior motive — the hope of heavenly reward. This happens at the *Visvajit*, a one-day sacrifice during which all of the performer’s possessions are

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MOUNTAIN PATH

given away. When Nachiketas observes that all the gifts his father has offered are of poor quality, he realizes that a joyless giver can reach only a joyless state. As an eight year old, Nachiketas has what his father never achieved: *shraddha* (faith) and the desire to know the truth. This desire for truth being higher than his father's desire for heaven, Nachiketas offers himself — his *shraddha* and his desire for truth — to his father for the sacrifice. He makes this offering in the form of a question, "Father to whom will you give me?" He repeats his question three times, to his increasingly irritated father who finally enraged, shouts: "I will give you to Death."

Nachiketas views his father's anger with dispassion. Wondering why his father would want to send him to Death, he first evaluates himself as foremost among his father's sons and followers in the discharge of his filial duties, middling in terms of his intelligence but never the worst. His conclusion is that there may be some work in relation to Death that has to be done through him. This also exemplifies his *shraddha* (his conviction regarding divine justice) and his calm unflinching surrender as an instrument of God. And by insisting that his father keep his word by sending him to Death, he ensures that his father adheres to the truth.

The young Nachiketas walks alone to the house of Death, but does not find Death at home. He waits there for him for three days and three nights without food or drink. The penance of this young Brahmin boy makes him as radiant as fire (*vaishvaanaraha*) filled with the power of his quest, his *shraddha*, his dignity and his fearlessness. Yama's followers are aware that the sincerity of a fasting Brahmin is a fire that can destroy his host, "his future hopes, his past merits, his present possessions: his sons and all."¹ On Yama's return, his ministers and followers make Nachiketas a peace offering.² Yama

¹ All translations from the *Katha Upanishad* used within quotes in this article are from *The Upanishads*, translated by Juan Mascaro, pp 55-66, Penguin, 1994.

² The ancient Hindu peace offering to a stranger seeking hospitality was based on him being viewed as an embodiment of God. He was first offered water for washing his feet, then a seat, then worshipped with sacred offerings, and finally, plied with food and gifts.



then grants him three boons for each of the nights Nachiketas spent fasting.

The first boon that Nachiketas asks relates to his duty towards his family: he asks that his father be freed from anger and anxiety and that his father should welcome him on his return. Underlying this wish is his confidence that he *will* return home even though his encounter is with Death. The second boon Nachiketas asks concerns the welfare of humanity: that humanity should gain knowledge of the sacred fire sacrifice which leads to heaven — where goodness reigns free from sorrow, want, old age and death. Nachiketas's third boon concerns his own quest for the Self: "When a man dies, this doubt arises: some say 'he is' and some say 'he is not'. Teach me the truth."

Yama quickly accedes to the first two boons but resists disclosing the mystery of Death embodied by the third, offering Nachiketas instead wealth, power and pleasure, successively increasing the repertoire of temptations. But Nachiketas rejects them all as ephemeral and dissipating and says, with moving spirit, "When a mortal here on earth has felt his own immortality, could he wish for a long life of pleasures, for the lust of deceitful beauty? Solve then the doubt as to the great beyond. Grant me the gift that unveils the mystery. This is the only gift Nachiketas can ask."

By rejecting earthly treasures which is merely the result of good *karma* (actions) Nachiketas reveals his understanding that the Eternal is not attained by the non-eternal (namely actions). While Yama concedes this, he also confesses that he himself has used the fire sacrifice in the hope of attaining the eternal state, implying thereby that "even he (Yama), though fully aware of the ephemeral nature of *karma* and its results, performed the Naciketa fire-sacrifice³ to attain the Yama state, but Nachiketas was able to withstand all such temptations, (emerging) superior even to Yama."⁴

³ The means of attaining the eternal heaven and the support of the macrocosmic physical world.

⁴ Suggestion of the commentator Anandajana in *Kathopanishad* by Swami Sarvananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, pp. 39, 1973, 11th edition.

What does the young aspirant with *shraddha*, dignity, radiance, fearlessness and discrimination wish to learn from Death (Yama)? He wants to learn how to access a 'heaven world' that is free from sorrow. He wants to know the true nature of Brahman.

The idea of a 'heaven world' has fascinated the human mind. For Nachiketas, heaven has no fear, no old age, and no death. It is the good who rejoice there, beyond hunger, thirst and sorrow. Swami Sarvananda refers to heaven as "a particular plane of conscious life," in which the soul "enjoys the bliss of the universal life, having realized *Virat*⁵ in his own self."⁶ To achieve this, the bonds of death have to be destroyed while in the body: they are the bonds of "vice, avarice, attachment, ignorance and hatred."⁷

The idea of *swarga* (heaven) is also the idea of a sort of eternity of perfection, of effortlessness, of rejoicing. In her lectures on the *Katha Upanishad*, Pravrajika Vivekaprana sees the idea of heaven stemming from the 'I am the body' idea. "Since the body is the source of both pain and pleasure, can it become perfect? Can I be happy forever? The forces of resistance and flow reveal a tension — an opposition — that is absolutely necessary if life is to be. Nachiketas accepts that he wants to break through this tension of resistance and flow. He accepts that he wants to break through this vast automatic cycle of cause and effect, of play which again means opposition, for only one can win. This opposition — *dvandva* — was accepted by our ancients. They found a method to realize that the physical comes to one through the mind, so our experiences are finally mental not physical. Since mental time can be maintained far longer than physical time, through concentration and certain

⁵ The *Mandukya Upanishad* describes the Self as possessed of four quarters. *Virat*, the gross cosmic world is the first quarter. *Hiranyagarbha*, the subtle cosmic world is the second quarter. *Prājna*, the causal cosmic unmanifested world is the third quarter. Freed from cause and effect and existing merely as the substratum of all is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, the fourth quarter.

⁶ Swami Sarvananda, *Kathopanishad*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1973, 11th edition. p.17.

⁷ Ibid.

sacrifices, they could overcome the physical to enter another level of consciousness.”⁸

The *Katha Upanishad* provides clues for doing this: “When the wise rests his mind in contemplation on our God beyond time, who invisibly dwells in the mystery of things and in the heart of man, then he rises above pleasures and sorrow.” This *sloka* has some significant terms: *guhahitam*, *gudham pravishtham*, *gahavareshtham* and *devam*. “This truth is That which cannot be seen easily. It is *guhahitam* — hidden in the cave, or the innermost recesses of the mind. It is *gudham pravishtham* or very difficult to go into. According to Sri Sankaracharya, it is *gahavareshtham* — this *gahvara* or deep cave exists in the midst of misery. This truth, this divine shining being (*devam*) is hidden in the *buddhi* of human beings. Therefore the *guha* and *gahvara* are my *buddhi*, my intellect. So truth is surrounded by pain and struggle, to break through which one needs real desire, intensity and concentration.”⁹

The *Katha Upanishad* states that Brahman is revealed by the intuition of the intellect, which resides in the heart and controls the mind. It also states, again and again, that He is seen in a pure heart and by a mind and thoughts that are pure. Underlying Nachiketas’ wish for the ‘heaven world’ is a desire for an abiding happiness that is a natural result of the purification of the mind and senses. We are a combination of *jiva* and *deva dharma*, and in moving to *deva* through concentration and contemplating ‘our God beyond time’, the *jiva’s* grief recedes. Simultaneously, by choosing the *shreya marga* (the path of the good — beneficial and auspicious) instead of the *preya marga* (the path of the pleasant), we experience a sort of heaven of peace and well being. This also happens automatically through the process of evolution, though more slowly. At the animal level there is no opposition — just the basic urges of survival — procuring food, self protection and killing in self defense. It is only at the human level that

⁸ Based on lectures delivered at New Delhi, January 2005 by Pravrajika Vivekaprana, Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Pangot.

⁹ Ibid.

the opposition of good and evil manifests itself. Through a pattern of flow and resistance, “we are forced into unselfishness as that appears to be the only way to evolve.”¹⁰

Having rejected the earthly temptations offered by Yama, Nachiketas gains the ‘heaven world’ of abiding happiness. But even the mental purity and a fullness of feeling symbolized by this world does not satisfy the young aspirant. For his ultimate search is not for the fullness of feeling but the fullness of Being. By his remaining steady in his resolve to learn the true nature of Brahman, Nachiketas’ strength and wisdom are acknowledged by Yama who declares him “a house open for thy Atman, thy God.” For the Path supreme begins only “when the five senses and the mind are still, and reason (*buddhi*) itself rests in silence.”

At this stage, what are Nachiketas’ needs? He needs a Teacher who has realized the Atman for “He is higher than the highest thoughts, in truth above all thought.” Identification with a teacher who knows the Atman opens an aspirant to the spiritual impulses that emanate from an awakened being which spurs his own intuitive perception of Oneness. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi viewed God, Guru and Self as one. In response to the question whether the Guru can make his disciple realize the Self by transferring his own power to him, Bhagavan replied, “The Guru does not bring about Self-realization. He simply removes the obstacles to it. The Self is always realized. So long as you seek Self-realization the Guru is necessary. Guru is the Self. Take Guru to be the Real Self and your self as the individual. The disappearance of this sense of duality is removal of ignorance. So long as duality persists in you the Guru is necessary. Because you identify yourself with the body, you think the Guru too, to be some body. You are not the body, nor is the Guru. You are the Self and so is the Guru. This knowledge is gained by what you call Self-realization.”¹¹

Yama also tells Nachiketas that the Atman is only attained by whom It chooses, and not by the intellect nor by much learning. The Self is

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ M. Venkataramiah (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2000. §282. p.251.

known by the Self and by no other medium, *Atma Jnana* being knowledge of the Atman by the Atman. Sri Sankaracharya has commented: “Chosen by that very Self which the aspirant seeks, the Self is known.”¹²

Yama gives Nachiketas the means to salvation: it is the mantra ‘Om’: “The Word that all the Vedas glorify, all self sacrifice expresses, all sacred studies and holy life seek; that Word is Om.” “It is the supreme means of salvation: it is the help supreme.” The fullest explanation of AUM is given in the *Mandukya Upanishad*. The first sound A is the first state of waking consciousness. Found in the word *apti*, ‘attaining’, and *adimatvam*, ‘being first’, who knows this attains all his desires and becomes first in all things. The second sound U is the second state of dreaming consciousness. Found in the words *utkarsha*, ‘uprising’ and *ubhayatvam*, ‘bothness’, who knows this raises the tradition of knowledge and attains equilibrium. The third sound M is the third state of sleeping consciousness. Found in the words *miti*, ‘measure’, and in the root *mi*, ‘to end’, that gives *apiti*, ‘final end’. Who knows this, measures all with his mind and attains the final End. The word OM as one sound is the fourth state of consciousness. It is beyond the senses and the end of evolution. It is non-duality and love.¹³

Nachiketas also needs to learn the enormous significance of human surrender — of will, of desires, of attachments. “When all desires that cling to the heart are surrendered. When all the ties that bind the heart are unloosened, then a mortal becomes immortal.” Everything must go: the human personality with all its faculties — even the faculty of discrimination; the human personality with all its desires — even the desire for liberation.

How is this enormous endeavour to be achieved? The *Katha Upanishad* itself pronounces the path to be a razor’s edge, so sharply defined and precise that one cannot deviate. It also indicates the depth

¹² As quoted in *Kathopanishad* by Swami Sarvananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, p. 51.

¹³ Culled from the section, *Mandukya Upanishad* in *The Upanishads* translated and selected by Juan Mascaro, pp 83-85, 1994, first published 1965.

of the exploration: beyond senses to mind, beyond mind to intellect, beyond intellect to Great Atman,¹⁴ beyond Great Atman to the Unmanifest and beyond all to the all-pervading *Purusa*. Yama indicates the process, a process similar in its depth and vastness: the wise must surrender speech to mind, mind to the intellect, intellect to the Great Atman, the Great Atman to the Unmanifest and the Unmanifest to *Purusa* — the peace Supreme. The underlying message is to get beyond multiplicity to Oneness, from the many to the One. Faith is of the essence, faith is supreme. “In the faith of ‘He is’ his existence must be perceived, and he must be perceived in his essence. When he is perceived as ‘He is’, then shines forth the revelation of his essence,” says the *Katha Upanishad*.

All three states of the mind — waking, dream and deep sleep — need to be purified and surrendered. When Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was asked how Self-enquiry, which was conducted in only one of the three states of the mind — the waking state — could destroy all three states of the mind itself, he replied: “Enquiry into the source of *aham-vritti*¹⁵ is, no doubt, initiated by the *sadhaka* in the waking state of the mind. It cannot be said that in him the mind has been destroyed. But the process of Self-enquiry will itself reveal that the alternation or transmutation of the three states of the mind, as well as the three states themselves, belong to the world of phenomena which cannot affect his intense, inward enquiry. Self-enquiry is really possible only through intense introversion of the mind. What is finally realized as a result of such enquiry into the source of *aham vritti*, is verily the heart as the undifferentiated light of Pure Consciousness, into which the reflected light of the mind is completely absorbed.”¹⁶

A distinctive feature of Sri Bhagavan’s direct method of Self-enquiry is that all desires, all *vasanas*, all feelings, all thoughts, all hopes, all sensations, the mind/ego itself, must go. This is best expressed in Sri Bhagavan’s own words: “Seek the Self by meditation in this manner:

¹⁴ *Hiranyagarbha*, the cosmic dreamer

¹⁵ The I-thought, the limited feeling of ‘I-ness’.

¹⁶ *Maharshi’s Gospel*, Book 2, Chapter 6, pp 66-67. 2002, 13th edition.

trace every thought to its origin which is only the mind. Never allow thought to run on. If you do, it would be unending. Take it back to its starting place again and again and the mind would die of inaction. Go back constantly to the question ‘Who am I?’. Tear everything away until only the source of all is left. And then live always in the present, only in it. There is no past or future except in the mind.”¹⁷

Throughout the *Katha Upanishad*, Nachiketas says very little. Apart from the three boons he asks for, his only other need articulated to Yama is his need to get beyond duality: beyond right and wrong, beyond what is done or not done, beyond past and future. Yet by addressing a range of subjects, Yama meets Nachiketas’ many unvoiced needs: his need for a teacher who has realized the Atman; his need to know that Truth is deeply hidden in the cave of the heart amid great sorrow and misery; his need for the mantra OM both as means and aid to realization; his need to know the great significance of human surrender, which includes the purification and surrender of all three states of consciousness; the need for the questioner itself to resolve....even unasked questions.....so that creation itself resolves.

The *Katha Upanishad* is essentially the supreme wisdom taught by Yama to a ripe and intense aspirant. For in learning the whole teaching of inner union, Nachiketas realizes Brahman and so realizes his own immortal and pure nature. The *Katha Upanishad*’s final words to us are, “So in truth will anyone who knows his Atman, his higher Self.”



¹⁷ Quoted in the article *The Way of the Spirit* by M.A.Piggott, *The Mountain Path*, 1970, January-March, p.4.

VIDEO INTERVIEW

Salutations to the Holy Feet of Sri Ramana

SWAMI VISHWANANDA

My salutations at the holy divine feet of Sri Ramana. It was not I who came to Ramanasramam; I came to Ramanasramam because Maharshi Ramana called me in a dream.

I was born in Karnataka. From boyhood I longed to know about the purpose of life. How it is that we are born or selected for this life and if God is there, how does he come into our life. This thought churned in me at the age of 11 or 12 years. My mother’s mother began to tell me stories from *Bhagavatam*, *Ramayana* and saints like Raghavendra Swami. She sang devotional songs beautifully. As we belong to an orthodox family she did puja and parayana. I was not satisfied with this routine way of life despite its religious tone. There was something divine in me that wanted much more.

Inwardly I was impelled by the question about “What is this life?”. There that was the question mark hanging over my life. My daily routine continued but a problem arose. My family did not like my

spending what they called an inordinate amount of time in meditation and study of religious books such as the lives of saints. They wanted me to be orientated to school and to modern education.

At that point a book on Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa came into my hands and I read it once, twice, thrice. His impact on me was intense indeed. Here was the person who having seen God inspired me and I wanted further contact with him. Then I found my way to the Ramakrishna Mission and participated in all the pujas and activities. I wanted to see God as had Ramakrishna. I asked the resident swamis what precisely Ramakrishna himself had seen of God and if the swamis were making progress in that direction. However, in the end none of them were able to satisfy me.

One day, a senior Ramakrishna monk, Swami Siddeswarananda, happening to be in Bangalore, mentioned the name Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. About the same time a Kannada translation of *Nan Yar?* by Bhagavan was given to me. The question 'Who am I?' seemed to be crucial but it was God I wanted to see. I wondered how I could see God since God is not appearing in me but I am appearing in myself. This sounds egoistical and it did not satisfy me saying "who am I, who am I?". I searched through some other scriptures particularly the *Taitiriyopanishad* which made a good impact. I was longing to see just one exemplar, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. This was in October 1941.

By then I had read more writings of the Maharshi but could not understand them as their perspective was so much greater than my mind had the capacity to absorb. I read them again and again and slowly and eventually I was able to understand more. All of a sudden I decided I should see the Maharshi. First finding out how to reach the distant Tiruvannamalai I set out by train to Villupuram and then another train in which I found myself at Tiruvannamalai. Next I hired a *tongavala* (horse-cart) which dropped me at Ramanasramam, surprising me that the driver took only two annas fare. Walking into the ashram I saw so many people sitting around a swami seated on a couch in the hall. All but the swami looked at me. He was gazing through a window out into the sky. He was not looking at anyone. I gave him *pranam* and took a seat before him, and soon to my great

astonishment, my mind had become deeply calm and serene. The swami did not even seem to know that I had come. I became intensely introspective and realized for perhaps for the first time how shallow had been my life. I was a young boy of 20 years old.

Though I gazed at Bhagavan for a long time he never looked at me. As a sensitive young boy I was disconcerted that, having come all this way, he did not even make an effort to acknowledge me. I was not recognized as a living being by him and this troubled me. I sat there for an hour until 11 p.m. Then a tall swami in ochre robes came into the room and for a moment I thought he must be the swami as everyone paid him respect, so I also did *namaskar*. But having seen in a book the photo of the Maharshi who was, now I understood, sitting on the sofa, he could not be who I was seeking. Suddenly he then saw me as if he was looking at himself and as if I was not myself, but himself. Strangely I felt he had established himself in me yet I was not established in him though he was in my heart. Yes, that was my first impression of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

I came often to the Ashram during my stay of five or six days and was extraordinarily happy. More than that, when I entered the dining hall I had the privilege of the Maharshi sitting along with us when we ate. I hail from Sankaraparampara and had gone to Sringeri Sankara Math to receive darshan of the Sankaracharya, but the experience was not the same. Sri Ramana Maharshi was sitting in the midst of the dining hall and accepting to eat whatever was served to him, looking equally with us as if we were his kith and kin. It had a great impact on me. Here is a real way of life observing *samadharma*. Whatever doubts I had had in my heart was satisfied with this very look of Bhagavan. From that day onwards I saw no divisions of good, nor bad, no evil or otherwise. I began to realize increasingly that all inequalities in life are the creations of our own minds. I also realized that Bhagavan was deeply caring for me even though he seemed not to look at me.

One must remember that in those days it was not an easy thing to leave the security of the family, home and college to travel to a distant ashram. It thus happened to many who sat in his presence that they felt they had received specific personal instructions when Bhagavan

spoke in general conversation. In course of a general conversation Bhagavan indicated there was nothing wrong in continuing with education. By education was also meant the study of scriptures and philosophy and did not mean any discontinuance of school studies in order to take *sannyasa*. I was much inclined to take *sannyasa* and to renounce the world by wearing a *koupeenam*. But my mother told me, if at all I wanted to take *sannyasa* it should be according to *Sankaraparampara* or I should remain like an ancient *rishi*. There was no proper desire to take *sannyasa* but there was a very deep thought and desire that I must renounce in order to experience God face to face.

That was my object whenever I came to Bhagavan and there was a growing desire in me to do something to that end. This sort of inspiration came automatically which I could not explain. I wanted always to be with Bhagavan. Bhagavan is *Iswara* and he is everywhere, *Iswara sarvabhoothanam*. Thus, I remained happy and at ease on my return to Bangalore.

On another occasion I had lost my bag at Chengam while coming from Bangalore to Tiruvannamalai. It was about one p.m. when I arrived at the ashram, which was closed. G.V. Subbaramayya of Andhra Pradesh saw me and took me in and gave me some food. In this way Bhagavan came to my help. Once when coming from Bangalore I was unable to get a reservation and thought I would not be able to travel but, out of nowhere was offered a seat. Though these may seem like trivial incidents I felt the power of grace helping me and this increased my faith.

I would like to confine myself to relating some incidents in the ashram itself. There are so many *vyavaharas* (experiences) in the ashram but Bhagavan was only a *sakshi* (witness). I have not seen this *sakshi bhava* in anyone but Bhagavan. Bhagavan is the only *sakshi bhuta* (witness-form). And he is the *Iswara*.

When the cow Lakshmi was ailing at the end of her life I was a witness to it. Bhagavan came to gosala and called "Lakshmi." The way in which Bhagavan spoke to the cow was as if he was addressing his own mother. His body was shaking as he held on to his stick and we

were afraid he would fall down. He walked towards her with a limp and sat before Lakshmi. He patted her on the head between the horns. The cow lifted her head and looked at Bhagavan. The eyes of the cow and Bhagavan met in an intense communion. Bhagavan wanted to pour some water on the cow's head so I ran to my room, brought water in a vessel and slowly poured the water. The cow then quietly rested her head. At that moment I was touching Bhagavan's hands with water as he laid them on the cow's head. Slowly the cow's soul seemed to enter into him. By that time many people had gathered around. It was a thrilling experience to see Bhagavan so full of deep concern. Though we think she appeared to be an ordinary cow, with no learning or understanding, the cow had more attachment and love for him than us. Bhagavan was so affectionate to her just as *Iswara* who looks after us all and everything. I thought again and again, how fortunate she was. This scene has remained engraved in my memory. The *Lalitha Sahasranama* says, *Ah Brahmakeeta Jananyai Namaha*. (*Iswara* is in every life from Brahma down to the lowly worm).

There is no other place where animals are given ceremonial burials, except in Ramanasramam. The cow Lakshmi was eventually given a decent samadhi by Bhagavan himself amidst *vedaparayana* and the singing of Vedic songs. Bhagavan erected samadhis for his mother Alagammal, the cow Lakshmi and a crow, deer and dogs. This shows his *samabhava* (equal attitude) towards all. Bhagavan's *samadristi* (equal vision) is indeed peerless. Even kings, saints, and *matadipathis* did not have such a ceremonial honour of a samadhi as the cow Lakshmi.

Suri Nagamma had written in one of her letters that one day a dog came and sat in the midst of audience. Bhagavan looked at it as if he were a great scholar among those learned people gathered together. And what was the language Bhagavan had with the monkeys, squirrels, peacocks and dogs except by his look? Someone was seen opposite the hall cutting leaves from a tree with a stick. Bhagavan was very much upset and scolded him for his action. Bhagavan saw his own self in the living trees, their branches, leaves and flowers. That was his *samabhava* which I learned from watching him.

I longed to touch the feet of Bhagavan and thus do *namaskaram* (prostration) as traditionally prescribed. However, Venkataratnam, one of Bhagavan's attendants who had become a friend of mine, told me that was not possible with Bhagavan. Once he was massaging Bhagavan's legs with oil when I happened to be at his side. Venkataratnam had to go away for a little while and he asked me to hold the cup of oil. As I was standing with the cup in my hands, waiting for Venkataratnam to return, Bhagavan told me, "Hei, why do you stand, go on." I immediately applied oil and massaged his right knee. As I was new and my touch was hard or firm, Bhagavan asked me to slow down and be gentle. After a little while Bhagavan said it was enough. Before I withdrew I bowed and touched his feet with both hands. The joy and thrill I felt could not be explained by words. I had now twice touched him — at the gosala and now. On seeing me touching Bhagavan's feet, another attendant Krishnaswami, who had just arrived, drove me away.

In earlier days Bhagavan would never look or talk to anybody but simply sat gazing at space (*akasha*). And yet, we would receive correct answers suddenly without him even looking at us.

In general, Echammal brought food daily to Bhagavan and he would wait and share the food with her and others. He was so kind to Echammal — like a mother to a child. This was no special treatment and everybody was equal to Bhagavan. I had, after a while, the opportunity to be in the kitchen with Bhagavan at 4 a.m. to prepare the day's food. Bhagavan meticulously cut vegetables so that nothing was wasted.

Though Bhagavan had not studied Sanskrit, even Ganapati Sastri was in awe of his excellent Sanskrit verses which shows that Bhagavan was *sarvajna* (omniscient).

Niranjanananda Swami did not like my staying in the ashram for long periods. But nobody could be stopped from going into Bhagavan's presence. I never went to the kitchen without the Swami's permission. Once Sankara Rao, a banker, some other person and me were walking into the dining hall, the Sarvadikari stopped me for whatever reason. Once on a special occasion I was serving in the kitchen. When someone said something rotten against the Sarvadikari I went and hit him. This

came to Bhagavan's notice and he told me in a stern voice, "You have not come here to hit anybody". I shivered out of fear of Bhagavan, who so directly and fearlessly attacked the egoism of my resentment.

At about 9 p.m. on the day of Bhagavan's *nirvana* there was a sudden outburst of the voice *Bhagavane* (O Bhagavan!). Then a light was seen passing from the ashram to the hill just like a satellite. The significance of the light could not be understood by many but it was truly Bhagavan merging with Arunachala. Not only I but others also picked up the sight from all over Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka and even Bombay. It was so crowded then in the ashram that I could not get near the nirvana room.

My *anumana* (inference) is Bhagavan as a *jyothi* (light) merged in Arunachala that will always shine.

The day after Bhagavan's *nirvana* I was in the midst of a crowd far away from the samadhi site near the present old office. Somebody called me to come to the burial site and I was pushed to the left side of the pit from where I could spread sand and camphor, (as it is the custom). Thus was I privileged to have a little part in the Samadhi ceremony of Bhagavan and this filled my heart with deep gratitude. His body was buried but he is eternally present.

In 1951, I was in Ahmedabad and came into contact with Swami Madavanandaji who had visited Ramanasramam and wrote books on Bhagavan. He asked me, "Baba, you have been to Tiruvannamalai. Have you not got enough from Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi there? Is it not?" I said, "Yes." It was a similar case with Swami Ramdas when I asked him, "Papa, according to your book, you went to Tiruvannamalai in 1922 after taking *sannyasa* in Trichy, and had the *darshan* of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Why is it that you had not gone again to Tiruvannamalai?" He replied, "Ram, (he invariably addressed every one as Ram) when a river joins the ocean, does the river exist as a river itself?" The implication was that Ramdas had gone to Arunachala and merged in Bhagavan. This was the answer to my query. This is the correct idea which appeals to my mind. This also is my experience with Ramana Maharshi who continues as a fountain of love to all mankind.

Recently in Kerala I was giving a talk on Bhagavan Ramana and his philosophy. In the audience one person declared that the man in the photo, i.e. Bhagavan, had appeared before him. Bhagavan is inside of us and also everywhere and what we have to do is to put ourselves in tune so that his current can pass through us like the breeze of a fan. That is my philosophy and nothing else. From the day I met Bhagavan I had not violated his words though I moved with Papa Ramdas, Anandamayi Ma and the Sankaracharyas, in particular, H.H. Chandrasekhara Bharathi who knew that I was on the right path.

Bhagavan Ramana is Dakshinamurti to me. While taking food in the plate, a number of items are there but really, it is mainly rice and sambar. We should concentrate on what is essential and not be distracted by the unnecessary. Though it is difficult to describe the Brahman in words, it is in my experience that Bhagavan has removed my *avarana* (covering or body of ignorance). As Lord Krishna said, to leave everything and surrender to him — it is Bhagavan who is the only refuge to me.

I am grateful to the Almighty that during my lifetime I had the opportunity to be with saints. It is by the grace of Bhagavan Ramana and Papaji Ramdas that I was able to meet many saints. It was my life's purpose. When Bhagavan was in his body he was at Tiruvannamalai but today and forever he is everywhere. It is my deep feeling. I lived longing to see God and as described the God was having *sankha*, *chakra*, *gada*,¹ or Lord Siva as he is at Mount in Kailasa with *nagabhooshanam*.² All these mythological figures are concepts only. As the days passed in association with Bhagavan I realized that these are all nothing but one's mental thoughts. The importance of consciousness was injected in me by Bhagavan. It is not that I intended to pursue this orientation but it was Bhagavan who guided me to it. He is responsible for me moulding on to him. He is the *karta* (doer), I only a mud which he holds as if a play thing. I will stick with him even if it takes a hundred births, on condition that he should take hold of me forever and grant me divine

¹ The conch, wheel and mace respectively. The divine instruments held in the hands of Lord Vishnu.

² Siva is said to have serpents twirled round his neck.

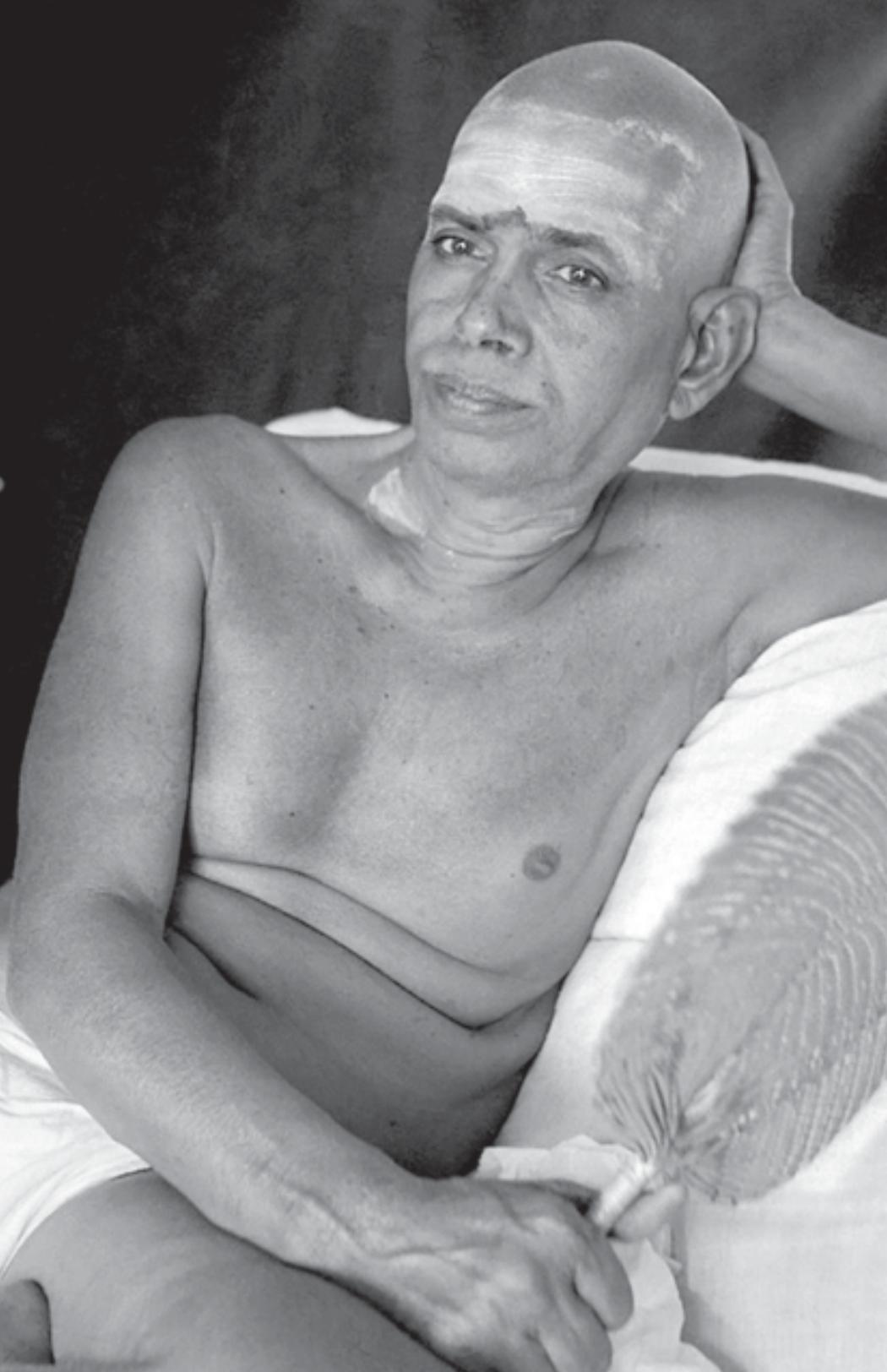
consciousness. Bhagavan is the *pratyaksha pramana* (direct, immediate consciousness) for me. After all, what is happening is that I am changing shirts, one after the other. My prayer is that he should give me consciousness. It is definite that he lifts us up stage by stage. I am only a humble devotee of the divine. As a young man, it is not I who wanted to come and see Ramana but rather Bhagavan Ramana who called me in a dream.

At the age of 80, I now begin to comprehend what Bhagavan had realized at Madurai in his paternal uncle's house. But it is only a millionth of the divinity of Bhagavan's words. Even if I don't get realisation in this birth but after hundreds of births Bhagavan will surely guide me, which is my heartfelt feeling. This is my stand. It is my firm faith and I have no more words for it. This is what is going on, everything, including the world, is going on. *Satyam* does not go anywhere. *Jnanam* and *satyam* are already there and ever present. Today I am Vishwananda; tomorrow I may be a king and afterwards a worm or a tree. These figures pertain to the body but not to the Atma. Atman is *chidakasa* which is ever pervading and limitless. For all these things I am not the *karta* — it is Bhagavan Ramana who steers.

Bhagavan's grace is ever available and we have to search and get it. This search is relevant and total surrender to Bhagavan who is Dakshinamurti and both are the same. Dakshinamurti is a crystal shining in the galaxy and to gain this knowledge we have to approach Bhagavan who as a mother is to the child, he will make it perfect. Learning and earning are portions of life. The main portion of our life should be known as we are the children of the nectar, though unaware of this. To get at this knowledge we need a light which is Bhagavan Ramana. He is *swayam jyothy aruna* (the self-originating light) and is waiting for us with an open hand even though he left his body.

So my request to mankind is let us follow the right path shown by Bhagavan, the path which leads us to divinity so may we become *amruta* — that is, deathless as the Upanishad say, *amruthasya putraha*, sons of the nectar.

The *avarana* (sheaths covering the Self) will be removed by Bhagavan's grace only. Bhagavan was never born, never lived and never died; he has always been here and everywhere. ▲



The Teaching of the *Guru Gita*

Part Two: The Practice of Guru Yoga

N. A. MOHAN RAO

The *Guru Gita* presents a graphic account of the kind of life a disciple leads in the Guru's ashram of yore while practising Guru Yoga. Some provisions of this practice may look a little quaint or harsh from the viewpoint of our times. Nevertheless, a study of this Yoga could be of value to us in terms of instilling an *instinctively* devotional attitude towards the Guru, thereby fostering an intimate inner rapport with him.

Finding One's Guru

The *Guru Gita* places the onus of finding the Guru on the young student himself. It urges the student to select a '*parama-guru*' out of

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the different kinds of gurus (see the postscript on pages 44-5), and offers him a rule-of-thumb to identify such a Guru:

*suchakadi prabhedena guravo bahudha smritah
svayam samyak parikshyatha tattva-nishtam bhajet-sudhih*
(v.272)

“Gurus are said to be of different kinds, called *suchaka* etc. The intelligent one, having himself examined them carefully, should resort to one who is established in the highest reality (i.e., a *jnani*, referred to here as *parama-guru*).”

*yasya darsana matrena manasah syat-prasannata
svayam bhuyat dhritissantih sabhavet paramo-guruh* (v.292)

“He, by the mere sight of whom the mind becomes clear (and receptive), and fortitude and peace arise (in the mind) by themselves, is a *parama-guru*.”¹

The student may further look for the traits that distinguish gurus in general and a *parama-guru* in particular:

*guravo nirmalassantah sadhavo-mitabhashinah
kama-krodha-vinirmuktah sadachara jitendriyah* (v.271)

“Gurus are without blemish, peaceable, gentle-hearted, of measured speech, free(d) from desire and anger, of virtuous conduct, and with (their) senses subjugated.”

*svasariram savam pasyan tatha svatmanamadvyam
yasstri-kanaka-mohaghnanah sabhavet-paramo-guruh* (v.294)

“He who has demolished his infatuation over woman and gold, and, seeing his own body to be a corpse, abides in his non-dual Self, is (deemed) a *parama-guru*.”

*siddhi-jalam samalokya yoginam mantra-vadinam
tucchakara-manovrittih yasyasau paramo-guruh* (v.293)

¹ When Bhagavan was asked, “Whom should one take for one’s Guru?”, he replied, “Choose that one where you find shanti or peace.” Devaraja Mudaliar, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*. Entry of 12.4.1946, afternoon. 2002, p.197.

“He who, having seen through the array of occult powers of yogis and wielders of (evil) *mantras*, treats them with contempt, is a *parama-guru*.”²

The most conclusive evidence of the Guru’s calibre is of course seen in the way he steers his students’ spiritual progress:

*sarva-sandeha sandoha nirmulana vichakshanah
janma-mrityu-bhayaghno yah saguruh paramo matah* (v.279)

“He who is proficient in clearing the (disciple’s) entire set of doubts, and destroys (the latter’s) fear of birth and death, is considered a *parama-guru*.”

*akhandaika-rasam-brahma nitya-muktam niramayam
svasmin-sandarsitam yena sabhavedasya desikah* (v.287)

“He by whom the disciple is granted the vision of *Parabrahma*,³ who is partless, homogeneous, ever-free and untainted, is (deemed) a *desika* (or *parama-guru*).”

*bhidyate hridaya-granthih chhidyante sarva-samsayah
kshiyante sarva-karmani guroh karunaya sive*⁴ (v.306)

“O Parvati, it is by the grace of the Guru that the heart-knot is broken, all doubts are destroyed, and all *karmas* are eroded.”

² The *parama-guru* (or *jnani*) may however be seen to employ supernatural powers to augment the spiritual development or material welfare of deserving people. *Jnanis* who do this deliberately, conscious of themselves having these powers, are called ‘*siddhas*’. Those from whom these powers emanate without their knowledge, are called ‘*suddhas*’. *Bhagavan Smrutulu* (Telugu), Chalam, Chalam Mitru, Bhimunipatnam, 1989, p.153.

³ Such a vision may sometimes be temporarily brought about by the Guru to give a foretaste of Realisation to the disciple. The case of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa bestowing it on Swami Vivekananda by mere touch is widely known. Vide *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. I, p.72, Introduction by Swami Nikhilananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math (1994), and Bhagavan’s remarks on it in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §252 of 30.9.1936, p.219, 2003 ed.

⁴ This verse is mentioned by Bhagavan in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §500, 10.6.1938, p.500, 2003 ed.

The good fortune of obtaining such a Guru is sung gloriously in these verses:

*bahujanma-kritat-punyallabhyate'sau maha-guruh
labdhva'mum na punaryati sishyassamsara-bandhanam* (v.280)

“It is by the merit accruing from (a great) many lives that such a great Guru is obtained. Once he is obtained, there will be no recurrence of the disciple’s bondage of *samsara*.”

*kulam dhanam balam sastram bandhavassodara ime
maranenopayujyante gurureko-hi tarakah* (v.299)

“Caste, wealth, physical strength, scholarship (of *sastras*), brothers and other relatives — none of these are of any avail at the time of death; the Guru alone can be the saviour.”

How to Approach the Guru

Having found the right Guru, the student is to break all his bonds with his householder’s way of life (*garhasthya-asrama*) before he comes to be accepted as a disciple:

*svasramam-cha svajatim-cha svakirtim pushti-varadhanam
etat-sarvam parityajya gurumeva samasrayet* (v.41)

“One should forsake one’s *asrama* (stage of life), one’s (identification with) race, one’s reputation, and (concern for) nourishment of the body, and humbly resort to the Guru.”

*sariramindriyam pranamartha-svajana-bandhavan
atma-daradikam sarvam sadgurubhyo nivedayet* (v.52)

“Body, mind, *prana* (life-principle), wealth, retinue of servants, (dependent) relatives, one’s wife, etc — all these must be respectfully offered to the Guru.”⁵

⁵This verse offers a positive approach, particularly in the light of the previous verse 41. It bears close resemblance to Ashtavakra’s teaching as quoted by Bhagavan: “... a disciple should surrender himself, his possessions and all to his Master, before being taught.” Vide *Crumbs from his Table*, R. Swarnagiri, p.31, 7th ed., 2006.

When one goes to meet a person with some standing in the society, it is customary to take a token present. The same custom is to be followed in respect of the Guru, because there is none more respectable than him in the ‘three worlds’.

*asanam sayanam vastram vahanam bhushanadikam
sadhakena pradatavyam guru-santosha karanam* (v.50)

“A cushion, a bed, a robe, a vehicle (like a palanquin, a horse), an ornament etc are fit to be offered by the disciple for the pleasure of the Guru.”

Service and Conduct in the Guru’s Ashram

Once the disciple is admitted into the Guru’s *ashram*, he must quickly adapt himself to the ways of the *ashram* and give unquestioning service to the Guru:

*gurunam sadasadva'pi yaduktam tannalanghaiet
kurvannajnam diva-ratrau dasavannivased-gurau* (v.141)

“Whether what the Guru has spoken (appears to) be right or not, the disciple should not transgress it. Carrying out the Guru’s orders day and night, he should live with the Guru like a servant.”⁶

*guru-karyam nalangheta naprishtva karyamacharet
na hyuttishthedisnatva guru-sadbhava-sobhitah* (v.137)

“One who is adorned by (real) devotion to the Guru should not skip the Guru’s duty, nor carry out any work without asking him, and never at all rise (from sitting posture) without paying obeisance in the direction (of the Guru).”

*nopasrayam-cha paryankam na-cha-pada-prasaranam
nanga-bhogadikam kuryanna-lilamaparamapi* (v.140)

“(In the presence of the Guru), one should not sit reclining backwards, nor lie down, nor sit with outstretched legs, nor comfort the limbs (by massaging etc), nor indulge in any playfulness whatsoever.”

⁶The verse actually speaks of ‘gurus’ in the plural, but is translated in the singular for consistency.

*nanritam napriyam chaiva nagarvam napi vabahu
na niyoga-param bruyad-gurorajnam vibhavayet* (v.147)

“One should not speak untruth, nor (speak) unpleasant things, nor (speak) with pride, nor (speak) excessively, nor (speak) ordering about; one should constantly think of the Guru’s assignment (to him).”

*nagurorasrame kuryaddushpanam parisarpanam
diksha vyakhya prabhutvadi gurorajnam nakarayet* (v.139)

“In the Guru’s *ashram*, one should not indulge in drinking (alcohol), nor loiter about, nor undertake any special religious observance (without being asked by the Guru), nor pass remarks (on this and that), nor assume administration, nor get the Guru’s assignment (to him) done (by others).”

*gacchatah prishtato gacchet gurucchayam nalanghayet
nolbanam dharayedvesham nalankaramstatolbanan* (v.144)

“(While accompanying the Guru), one should walk behind the Guru, and should not cross his shadow. One should not dress gaudily, and even more so, should not wear excessive ornaments.”

*guru-nindakaram drishtva dhavayedatha-vasayet
sthanam vatat-parityajyam jihvacchedakshamau yadi* (v.145)

“Having come across somebody criticising the Guru, if one is incapable of severing (that person’s) tongue, one should drive him away (from that place) or else extradite him. If not, one must quit that place.”

*padukasana-sayyadi guruna yadabhisthitam
namaskurvita tat-sarvam padabhyam naspriset-kvachit* (v.143)

“One should pay obeisance to all those (articles) like footwear, seat, bed etc which the Guru is pleased to use. One should not let one’s feet contact them any time.”

Worship of the Guru

The disciple must conduct a worshipful attitude towards the Guru at all times:

*karmana manasa vacha sarvada”radhayed-gurum
dirgha-dandam namaskritya nirlajjo guru-sannidhau* (v.51)

“The disciple should ever worship the Guru by thought, word and deed. When he comes into the presence of the Guru, he should pay obeisance by lying prostrate (long stick-like), without feeling bashful (about it).”

*dorbhyam padbhyam-cha janubhyamurasa sirasa drisa
manasa vachasa cheti pranamo’shtanga uchryate* (v.98)

“The forearms, the feet, the knees, the chest, the head, the sight, the mind and the speech — (when these eight are involved), it is said to be ‘*sashtanga pranam*’ (prostration with eight limbs).”

*srinatha-charana-dvandvam yasyam disi virajate
tasyam disi namaskuryat bhaktya prati-dinam priye* (v.96)

“O dear (Parvati), in whichever direction shine the pair of feet of the Guru, to that direction should the devotee (turn and) offer obeisance every day.”

It is through such worshipful service alone that the disciple ultimately attains the Absolute:

*drisya-vismriti-paryantam kuryad-guru-padarchanam
tadrisasyaiva kaivalyam nacha-tadvyatirekinah* (v.135)

“One should keep worshipping (contemplating or meditating on) the Guru’s Feet till the visible world is phased out of one’s conscious memory. Whoever does so alone attains the Absolute, not one who does the opposite.”

The *Guru Gita* thus shows what it means to surrender to a higher Power. It puts in perspective Bhagavan’s words: “Surrender appears easy because people imagine that, once they say with their lips ‘I surrender’ ... , they can be free and do what they like. But the fact is that you can have no likes and dislikes after your surrender and that your will should become completely non-existent”⁷

⁷ Devaraja Mudaliar, *op.cit.*, Entry of 2.1.1946 Afternoon. p.85.

Sai Baba is reported to have once exclaimed, “(Show me the person) who dares to call himself my disciple!”⁸ He must obviously be saying that in the context of Guru Yoga.

Relevance of the *Guru Gita*

Most of us, as seekers, tend to think that real Gurus are a rare breed, not readily recognized or accessible. The real problem, however, appears to be our unpreparedness to do the Guru’s bidding due to absence of the needed degree of faith, the requisite reverence⁹ and capacity to persevere.

A devout study of the *Guru Gita* is believed to correct these weaknesses and bring about the prospect of a Guru.⁹ The well-documented case of Vinayak Daji Bhawe is held as an example.¹⁰ Tradition has it that in such cases, the Guru may be one living in the present or the past (as was the case with Bhawe), and that he may appear in waking life, or in a dream or vision. The *Guru Gita*, with its charming verses, invites us to benefit through this proviso.

Postscript: The Hierarchy of Gurus

The Sankrit term ‘guru’ in its broader sense means a ‘teacher’, spiritual or otherwise. The *Guru Gita* speaks of seven kinds of gurus, viz., *suchaka-*, *vachaka-*, *bodhaka-*, *nishiddha-*, *vihita-*, *karana-*, and *parama-gurus* (verses 273-9).

A *suchaka-guru* imparts knowledge and skills needed for the student to earn a decent living in the world. In ancient days, he might have

⁸ For a reference by Bhagavan to the need for reverence in a related context, see *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §627, Entry of 9.2.1939, pp.613-14, 2003 ed.

⁹ There is a parallel, long-standing tradition, particularly in Maharashtra, of the devout parayana of *Guru-charitra* or some other biography of a Guru for the same purpose, and it is believed to be highly effective. Those who wish to pursue this line may find an exemplary choice in Bhagavan’s biography. The fact that Bhagavan himself took great pains to authenticate a biography of his (in Telugu) lends strong, if indirect, credence to this viewpoint.

¹⁰ *Devotees’ Experiences of Sri Sai Baba*, Part III, B.V. Narasimha Swami, Akhanda Sainama Sapthaha Samithi, Hyderabad; Entry of 10.6.1936; as quoted in <http://www.saillelas.org/books/exppart4.htm>

taught language, grammar, prosody, astrology, music and the like. His modern counterpart is seen in, say, a school teacher, a college lecturer or a software instructor.

The *vachaka-guru* lays the religious foundation to the child. His teaching may typically include principles of *dharma* (righteous conduct) and *karma*, and initiation into formal practices of *varnasrama dharma* (‘duties specific to caste and stage of life’). Besides, he usually doubles as the family-guru to advise the family on all matters of religious ritual. He is then referred to as *kula-guru* (‘preceptor of the caste or community’). He is socially the most active and noticed among the traditional gurus.

The *bodhaka-guru* introduces the student to the higher forms of *bhakti*, and initiates him into practices such as *mantra-japa* with the possible goal of *sakshatkara* (vision of the respective god). Some gurus, themselves misled, may instead teach occult powers and evil *mantras* meant to harm others (see v.293). Since they are to be shunned, they are called ‘*nishiddha-gurus*’.

The *vihita-guru* puts the student on the path of *advaita*. He equips him with the prerequisites of *viveka*, *vairagya*, *shadsampat*, and *mumukshutva* (discrimination, dispassion, the ‘six-fold virtues’, and intense yearning for Liberation).

The *karana-guru* takes the student onward into the practice of *advaita*. He expounds the meaning of the four *mahavakyas* (‘great sentences’) like *tat-tvam-asi* (‘That thou art’) of the Upanishads. This is called *sravana* (‘hearing’). The student then mulls over it intensely in his mind, till he is convinced of its meaning and acceptability. This step is called *manana* (recollection).

The *parama-guru* is a Self-realised person. Under his guidance, the student practises *nididhyasana* (meditation on the Self), and eventually attains the Self by his grace. ▲



Alexander Shivalov

KEYWORD

Vivarta-Vada

Sanskrit: Vivarta-vada. The theory of ‘apparent creation’; the theory of phenomenal appearance.

Sri Ramana once remarked that there are various approaches to the metaphysical problem of creation. He said, “I do not teach only the theory of non-origination (*ajata-vada*). I approve of all schools. The same truth has to be expressed in different ways to suit the capacity of the hearer.”¹ Obviously, the same logic applies to the idea of causation.

Theories of creation address the question of causality. Does the Absolute (*Brahman*) change or not? Are causes/effects real? Both, neither? Is the effect pre-existent in the cause or is it non-existent in the cause prior to its production? Every theory has its rationale, but fails outside its purview.

Theories of causation tantalize and confound human beings. They tease and disappoint because they promise something satisfactory and then cannot deliver what they promise. In the empirical world, one observes that a given cause produces a given effect — an apple seed

¹ Devaraja Mudaliar, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2002.15-3-46, Afternoon. p. 174.

always, and not just sometimes, becomes an apple tree and never a door or an orange tree. However, upon analysis, the cause and effect relation is riddled with inconsistencies.

Advaita Vedanta's theory of transfiguration (*vivarta-vada*), in an attempt to overcome these inconsistencies, states that the world is an appearance of the Absolute (*Brahman*) in the same way as the snake is an appearance of the rope. In the absence of the rope, there is no snake; in the same way, in the absence of *Brahman*, there is no world.

Sankara used the word *vivarta* to mean a 'rolling out' or 'unfolding' of creation. In his usage of the term, it had none of the 'illusionistic' connotations that would subsequently be attributed to it. However, Sankara's analogy of the rope-snake is interestingly apt to describe the nature of the creative act in that, at times the snake is outstretched while at other times, it is recoiled. The analogy can thereby be seen as envisaging the creation of the world in terms of the 'rolling out' of *Brahman*. It is only in the post-Sankarite works of Advaita that one finds the term *vivarta* used to mean 'apparent, appearance'.²

Etymologically, *vivarta* can be derived as *viseshena vartate iti vivartah*, meaning "the effect [is, in fact, not real at all but] exists only in a manner of special appearance." So *vivarta* means 'existing in a special mode of appearance' to the perceiver, which subsumes all the requirements of empirical causality. Thus the snake which never truly existed nevertheless appears with a 'special form of existence'.

However, while the 'rope-snake' phenomenon (*upamanam*) is entirely explicable, satisfying all logical requirements, the indicated

³ In the *Brahmasutra*, creation is said to be nothing more than the self-development or self-unfolding of *Brahman* (literally, 'self-making', *atmakrti*). 1.4.26. See also *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, v.2. As well, one may note that the notion of 'unfolding' need not imply any change in the thing that is being unfolded. Sankara used the term to imply 'distortion'. The creative or empirical realm is a distortion, a disfigurement of *Brahman*'s essential non-duality. It is this evaluative depreciation of the material world of multiplicity that will subsequently be emphasized by post-Sankara philosophers. Distortion implies that 'what appears is not what actually is'. Thus evolved the theory that the world appears as if it is real, but it is really nothing but a distortion, a false appearance, of the non-dual Reality. Just as at dusk, a rope can be distorted so as to appear as a snake, so is *Brahman* distorted so as to appear as the world of duality.

'Brahman-world' (*upameyam*) transfiguration defies logical grounds. For the grasping of what is clearly beyond the comprehension of logic, Advaita necessitates the positing of *Maya*, which is defined as an 'inexplicable mystery'. In a way, the rope-snake analogy is the ultimate example in Advaita Vedanta to illustrate *vivarta-vada*.

Opponents of Advaita, like the logicians of *nyaya darsana*, object, saying, "For us, creation is real but you find our theory unsatisfactory. However, your model of 'apparent creation' also suffers a similar fate. If we cannot convince you of our 'real creation', your *maya*-based model also cannot explain 'apparent creation' because you cannot explain *maya* at all! To take shelter saying that *maya* is inexplicable is begging the question because it presumes as an 'initial postulate' what is required to be proved." Sankara in his *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* counters this brilliantly and we paraphrase his riposte as follows, "Your objection is impeccable but only within the parameters of logic. But our position is that mere logic cannot grasp Truth. When we say *maya* cannot be explained, it is not a weakness of Advaita but an admission of the grandeur of Truth that surpasses all intellectual understanding. Surely logic must not be contradicted but it can be and *should* be transcended, for there is no way of intuiting Truth other than invoking the mystery of *maya* to seal all queries concerning creation."

"In the vision of the Vedas, theories of creation are discussed only as a temporary expedient with a view to eventually wean the seeker's mind away from the world and turn it within, Self-ward. To give reality to creation and its theories thereof, serves no useful purpose (*anirmoksha prasangah*). The purpose of *shruti* is not to explain creation *per se* as the final end but to deliver *moksha* from *samsara*. The purpose of *vivarta-vada*, therefore, is not to explain the mechanics and know-how of 'apparent creation' but to cut short, with one stroke, all futile enquiry into the world, which are at best, a 'red herring' in the pursuit of *moksha*. Thus what cannot be accessed by human intellect is simply lumped into one 'black box' of *maya*, in order to facilitate *atma-vichara*."

It is a wrong question to pose, "Why cannot you explain *maya*?" There can be no right answer to a wrong question on the same plane

of understanding. If *maya* can be explained, it ceases to be *maya*! Just as a magic show is unravelled by reason, it is no more magic. But creation is truly magical! It is meant only to stun human reason at the farthest limit and fold it back to its Source, the Self. Awed by the secrets of nature, genius scientists like Newton and Einstein, Heisenberg and Hawking have expressed profoundly mystical wonder at the power of God, that is *maya*. *Vivarta-vada* thus aims only at one sweeping shift of vision in our world view and warns us not to be lost in infinite details or the trappings of reason. This is exactly why Bhagavan Ramana said, in line with scriptural vision, “There may be any number of theories of creation. All of them extend outwardly. There will be no limit to them because time and space are unlimited. They are, however, only in the mind . . . creation is explained scientifically or logically to one’s own satisfaction. But is there any finality about it? Why look outward and go on explaining the phenomena that are endless?”³

There are two traditional positions with regard to the cause-effect relation: Either the effect is pre-existent in the cause or non-existent in the cause prior to its production. Those who hold that the effect is a new creation from the cause argue that if such were not the case, causation itself would be meaningless. If the effect is pre-existent, then why does it need to be produced? Thus the cause and effect must differ and the effect must be non-existent before its production from the cause.

Those who hold that the effect is pre-existent in the cause, counter the objection that if such were not the case, then all empirical order would collapse. Nothing can come out of something unless it is already existent in that something. Otherwise it would amount to disclaiming the need for a material cause for the production of an effect. Also, if the effect is not pre-existent in the cause, then anything could come out of anything. There would be no determinative cause for a specific effect. Milk could come out of sand and then, only sometimes. In rebuttal, opponents object that if the effect pre-exists in the cause, why does it need to be produced? The reply is that the

³M. Venkataramiah (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1996. §388, p. 354.

effect is not in the cause as such — it is latent in the cause and has to be brought out. Thus, what is latent must become patent. Yet, difficulties persist. Is the cause wholly transformed or only a part of it, in this process? If the whole cause is transformed, then the cause ceases to be, and what happens to the cause in which the effect is said to pre-exist? And if only a part of the cause changes into the effect, with the other part maintaining its substance, it will be like killing one-half of a hen to eat and keeping the other half to lay eggs with. Thus these theories of causation undermine each other’s position with logical fallacies. If the effect is already existent, it is redundant to say that the already existent is created. And if the effect is non-existent, it can never be produced. Either alternative fails to satisfy the demands of logic. Therefore Advaitins propound the doctrine of non-origination, of distortion, of transfiguration, as opposed to *real transformation*.

The provisional Advaita theory of causation implies six requisites: 1) There is a relation in terms of succession in the cause-effect relationship. The cause is earlier; the effect later. 2) The relationship between the cause and the effect is irreversible. The cause always precedes the effect and never *vice-versa*. 3) The relationship between the cause and the effect is a necessary relationship and not a contingent one. 4) Cause and effect are not completely identical, nor are they totally different. (Any two entities absolutely different are not related by cause and effect, and if absolutely identical, then they are the same entity.) 5) The relationship between cause and effect is a one-sided relationship. The effect is always dependent upon the cause. 6) Between the cause and the effect, the cause alone is real.

This analysis logically leads to the impossibility of a causal scheme. From the seeming reality of the causal scheme at the empirical level, one is led to discover that philosophically speaking, causation is illogical. The rope is the cause of the snake in the sense that the snake pre-existed (so to speak) in the rope. It was sustained by the rope and finally disappears back into the rope. All the while there was nothing other than the rope. The rope never ceased being a rope, even while appearing as the snake. This is the very essence of the idea — a thing

appearing differently without ceasing to be itself even during the different appearance, *svasvarupa aparityage rupantara aapattihi*.

Because empirically, every effect has a cause, *Brahman* too is cosmologically said to be the cause of the Universe. This needs some elucidation. Whenever the Advaitin speaks of causation, it is with regards to *saguna Brahman* or *Isvara*. Whenever the Advaitin speaks of appearance, it is with regards to *nirguna Brahman*. Since *Brahman* is the only Reality, and if one seeks a cause for the empirical world, one employs the language of cosmology and says, *Brahman* alone, if anything could be the cause of the world and not anything else.

Vivarta-vada declares that an effect is but an apparent manifestation, a different ‘appearance’ of its cause. The creation of this world is but an apparent change; it is not a real modification of *Brahman*. From the viewpoint of *vivarta-vada*, there is no creation. *Brahman* can in no way create the finite world since it is beyond all action. The relation of cause and effect has no bearing to *Brahman*, since cause has meaning only in relation to the finite modes of being. *Vivarta-vada* affirms the ‘appearance-only’ status of the effect and thus points the way to the sublation of the world in *Brahman*, where all questions of creation are silenced. Once *Brahman* is realized, all causality and duality are falsified and thus transcended in true knowledge. ▲

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma’s
Commentary

Verse Twenty Three

S. RAM MOHAN

Out of the three entities, individual soul, personal god and the world, we mentioned in the discussion on verse 22, the two entities, world and god.

What remains to be elucidated is the individual soul. This is explained in verse 23 to 26. The teaching of Bhagavan on this is characterised thus: Though the Self is concealed by the three entities individual soul, personal god and the world, the Light of the Self is ever-shining as I, the ‘I’ inside the Heart (This is posited in verse 8 of the *Ulladu Narpadu* supplement). When the Light of Self shines on the mind, there arises the soul, which is the ego; along with this arises

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the two entities of world and god. The form of this ego is the thought 'I am this body'. The true Self, obscured by these triad, is to be found by means of the Quest (*vichara*), 'Who am I?'. In this quest, the Self is sought either as the source of the I-Light or the substratum or Truth of it. In the first of these four verses (23 to 26) Bhagavan clarifies that the body can not be taken as the Self.

Verse 23. This body does not say 'I'. No one will say "I do not exist in sleep." When this 'I' rises, all these rise. Seek, with a keen and sharpened mind, the source wherefrom this 'I' arises.

Commentary:

The word 'I', should strictly denote only the Self. The 'I' is the real essence of the Self. By being mixed up with the mind, it shrinks and appears as the ego-sense. Thus the all enveloping Self is made to look an insignificant, small entity confined to the corporeal frame. Some erroneously refer to the individual Self as a 'fraction of God'. The infinite Being can never be cut up into fractions!

An ordinary person takes himself to be the psycho-physical entity, consisting of the body-mind-intellect complex. Life is denoted as to living in this world and experiencing it, physically, mentally and intellectually, through these three instruments. In deep sleep, these three instruments are dormant. Hence the world and even your own body are, for you, not facts of experience at that moment. In fact, the very thought 'I exist' is absent. If existence were to be equated with the functioning of these instruments, it can very well be said that you do not exist in your sleep. But on waking up, when you become aware of your body-mind-intellect and the world around you, you do not feel that you have not existed in your sleep. Even though the personality you normally take yourself to be, ceased to function during sleep, you have no doubt at all that you exist during your sleep. There is a disappearance of your normal personality: Yet you exist. The awareness of intellect, mind and body fade away: yet you are aware that some entity, the nature of which you cannot describe, exists in you.

What is that 'thing' which continues to exist even in deep sleep, when the knowledge of body, mind and intellect fades away? It is the basic 'I' consciousness in you. The ego, which is the expression of 'Self' functions in two ways: (i) It obscures the real Self; (ii) It projects itself, as something different from the Self in the form of body-mind-intellect and the world. During the two states of wakefulness and dream, it fulfils these two functions. However, during deep sleep, the ego does not project itself but the obscuration or veiling of the Self continues. That is why, even though there are no thought-currents in deep sleep, you are not aware of the true Self. When you wake up, the ego or 'I' arises first and thereafter the world and a personal God. That is, on the rising of the ego, all other things rise up. Hence, if you want to go to the root of existence, you must trace the root of 'I' notion or ego-sense. Bhagavan says that this can be done by making use of the instrument of mind itself by turning it inward. When the mind is reversed and retreats within, it traces out its origin.

The question is, "Are we the body?". Bhagavan here shows that there is clear reason for the conclusion that *the Self is not the body*. Here two reasons are pointed out. One is that, the body being insentient, consciousness is not its nature, but it has come to be associated with consciousness by reflection. The other reason is that we continue to exist in the state of deep sleep, where the body is absent. Bhagavan here points out to fact that no one that awakes from sleep, says that he did not exist during sleep. The 'I', which was experienced before sleep and is again experienced on waking, cannot have ceased to exist during sleep.

The evidence for the continued existence of the self during sleep is the fact that everyone remembers his state of sleep by the assertion, 'I slept happily'. Only he who himself experienced it can remember an experience. Further, when we resume the work that we began we do so from the point where we left off. So the same person, who did the work before going to sleep, awakes and resumes the unfinished work. If Venkataraman went to sleep, Gopala Krishnan does not awake. By these indications we understand the

MOUNTAIN PATH

continuity is not lost and that the 'I' consciousness continues in sleep in a very subtle form.

So it is made clear that we exist during sleep. Since in deep sleep we are bodiless, it is confirmed that we are not the physical body we have taken for granted. In the *Ulladu Narpadu Supplement*, Bhagavan repeats this teaching in verse 10.

“This 'I', withdraws into itself both the mind and the world, before going into its latent state in sleep. On waking it spreads out the mind and the world. By this also we can see that this 'I' is the seed of the world-appearance.”

Bhagavan says at the end of the verse that because this 'I' is the first cause of the world-appearance, therefore one should seek the source or place of origin of this 'I', and by this means find out the truth. This is the enquiry into the truth of the Self. ▲

Faith That Saves

GOPAL SARMA

MOUNTAIN PATH

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I, V.S. Ramanan, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

30/06/2009

Bhagavan's teaching was simple. He said that the only way to gain peace and happiness is to end the 'ego' or the thought 'I am the body'. Bhagavan accomplished this goal by 'Self-enquiry'. But He also gave us the *Aksharamanamalai* path, the path of unconditional love and total surrender to 'Arunachala'.

This past Deepam day, I was listening to the chanting of *Aksharamanamalai* appreciating Bhagavan's kindness — in offering 'that great hymn to Arunachala' as a life-vest to struggling souls like myself drowning in the tumultuous sea of life. I also found myself

Mr.Gopal Sarma was born in Chennai. In 1953 he met Swami Chinmayananda who introduced him to Bhagavan through *The Call Divine*. Later he and his family devoted great energies to the formation of satsanghs and Chinmaya centres across the United States. He resides in Connecticut where he is a member of the Sri Ramana Satsangh.

appreciating another important person in my life — my mother. It was through her approach to life and her unconditional love that I came to appreciate the *Aksharamanamalai* path. Bhagavan was God, Guru, and everything for her. Her faith in Bhagavan was so spontaneous, total and infectious that we were drawn in effortlessly.

My mother, Rukmani Rangaswami, was a simple woman and was spiritually inclined all her life. She was a dutiful housewife and was a great role model for our entire family. As long as I can remember she saw to it that my sisters and I prayed for at least twenty minutes daily. The whole family would have to pray every evening in our Puja room and everything else came only after that. Though we were of modest means we were happy and content due primarily to the spiritual values inculcated in us by our parents, especially our mother. My mother's unconditional faith in God helped to tide us over many vicissitudes in our life. In her earlier years, she was captivated by the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and that started her off on the path of *bhakti* which she pursued diligently for the rest of her life. We used to read Vedantic texts and Bhagavad Gita in the house on weekends and attended talks on Bhagavan's *Upadesa Saram* a couple of times. But the story of how she fell into the web of Bhagavan Ramana's Grace is fascinating and I will try to relate it to the extent I can.

In 1991 a very tragic event hit our family. My youngest sister Pavitra was diagnosed with brain cancer, and passed away at the age of 51. She was the healthiest and most spiritual person in the family and it was a rude shock to us all, especially to my mother. Pavitra's last days found myself, my mother and my sister Indira, in Bombay. The days were spent in hospital, and we spent our nights at a friend's apartment. Upon entering the apartment we were greeted by a large picture of Bhagavan Ramana. One night the three of us decided to sit before that picture and meditate for about twenty minutes. When we got up, we could see a transformation on the face of our mother. She stopped crying and became strong emotionally and spiritually ever since. She became a source of strength for me and Indira.

My mother said thereafter that Bhagavan Ramana had dispelled her grief and given her the strength to face the impending loss of her

ailing daughter in the true spirit of a Vedantin. These words were so soothing to everyone in the family because my mother was the most devastated of us all. Since that momentous day when she surrendered totally to Bhagavan in that Bombay apartment, Bhagavan Ramana was everything to my mother.

After Pavitra's passing away, we all went the first of many times to Sri Ramanasramam and had *darshan* of Bhagavan. We felt a peace that has been with us ever since. After that time, my mother, along with my sister Indira, has been regularly visiting Sri Ramanasramam every year to bask in Bhagavan's Grace. At home, she was listening to Ramana bhajans all the time and reading Bhagavan's books and thus leading a very spiritual life. I visited India every year and went with her to Sri Ramanasramam and I could see the glow of peace on my mother's face during that time. She became so strong spiritually after her transformative experience in 1991 that she became a source of strength for the entire family.

She was staying alone in her flat in Bangalore till she passed away in 1999. She used to walk to my sister Indira's house all by herself even when she was in her eighties. When asked how she was so confident to cross the busy streets in Bangalore, she used to say that Bhagavan was always holding her hand and looking after her. It is indeed true that unconditional faith in Bhagavan works wonders. She always had a great sense of humour and spread cheer and confidence to everyone, young and old. She took lessons in harmonium at age 80 so that she can sing and play Ramana bhajans during her daily prayer! Her determination to do *giri pradakshinam* in Thiruvannamalai bore fruit at 82 years of age when she decided to go with a few of her friends during one of her trips to the Ashram. Though many advised her not to do it. When I came to know about this, I called her and also asked her why she did this. She said that Bhagavan okayed it for her and that is all that matters!

When she was in the hospital during her last days, she told me and my sister that we should not let anyone come and bother her at that time as she just wanted to chant only Bhagavan's name till her last breath and that is precisely what she did. She also gave us a lot of

Bhagavan's *upadesa* asking us not to cry when she died as death is only for the body. She gave me a small envelope containing a wallet size-picture of Bhagavan Ramana and a small personal note which said, "Ramana, stay with my son Gopal and protect him always." She asked me to keep this envelope under my pillow and pray to Bhagavan before going to sleep every day. I have been following her instructions strictly ever since.

During her final moments, we were getting emotional but she was very strong and we felt that Bhagavan accepted her and blessed her soul. Strangely, this was, in a way, corroborated when one of our close friends came to offer condolences. He told us the day after her death that he had a dream that my mother went to Sri Ramanasramam and was proceeding toward a black statue and never returned! That friend had never visited the Ashram and did not know anything about a black statue in the Ashram. So we felt that it must be Bhagavan Ramana telling us through this friend that mother merged with Bhagavan after shedding her body.

How I wish I could get that kind of faith in this lifetime. ▲

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Sri Ramana Gives Rama Darshan

T.K. SUNDARESA

The following article was recently discovered in the Archives. It was in a journal entitled Wit and Humour which was published in November 1928. It was number two in the series. Sri T. K. Sundaresa Ayyar was the general editor. The journal included an article on the political situation in India plus a number of short stories by various authors. The journal was an amateur production produced on foolscap paper using a roneo machine.

This extraordinary reminiscence was included in At the Feet of Bhagavan by T.K. Sundaresa and edited by Duncan Greenlees in 1962. This manuscript was also discovered in the Archives and first published in the 1980. We decided to reprint the episode, using the original spelling and grammar as much as possible because of its importance, historical interest and the fact many readers may not be aware of the published version.

I was a boy of ten in 1908 when I contacted Sri Ramana Maharshi. He was then in the Virupakshi Cave. If you had seen him in those days, you would hardly take him to be a human being. His figure was

a statue of pure burnished gold. He simply sat and sat and sat. He rarely spoke. One could easily count number of words he spoke each day. An enchanting personality, he shed a lustre that captivated all. To sit near him is to be charged with the stream of life-giving current that flowed from His Being. His sparkling eyes irrigated the species around him with the ambrosia of His Being. Peace, peace, peace, you have lost your individuality in Him. You have no sense of body, space and time. He absorbs... you. He is your all. He is the all.

Well; well. I remember at this age the first song that I sang before Him. It was Sree Sundaramoorthi Swami's famous *namasivaya padikam* — *Matruppatrenekini*. From then He had linked me to Him inseparably. I know one and only thought and that is, He alone exists as Brahman and all else have an appearance of existing, while in reality they are not.

After my nineteenth year, I never had to leave Tiruvannamalai. Sree Kavya Kantha Ganapathi Muni was there in Tiruvannamalai. His *Vaideeka Sabha*¹ was very active. He gave us a series of discourses on Vedas. I was so struck with his magnetic personality and his exposition of the greatness of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, that as a Brahmin, I should sit and study the Vedas at his feet. He gladly accepted me as his student. In those days, he lived in the Mango Cave just under the Virupakshi Cave. For eight years I studied under him. Along with him I visited Sree Maharshi daily and had the benefit of His Presence. Later after the Mahasamadhi of Sree Maharshi's Mother (Alagamma), Sree Maharshi came down and the present Ramanasramam came into existence. From the hills Sree Kavyakanta and his chelas went daily to Sree Maharshi's abode. There used to be exhilarating discourses and conversations. When Sree Kavyakanta was in the hall, Sree Maharshi was seen in the full bloom of His Being. They discoursed on various schools of thought. It was the period of very great literary activity at the Ashram hall. Along with Sree Kavyakanta, were Kapali Sastri, Muruganar, Arunachala Sastri of Madras of Gita fame and his devotees, Munagala Venkataramayyah (now Swami Ramananda Saraswathi)

¹ *Vaideeka Sabha*: a place or building where knowledge is taught.

the author of the *Talks with Sree Ramana Maharshi*, Sivaprakasam Pillai and host of others. The hall was open all the twenty four hours. It was the *Muktha Loka*² of Sree Ramana. Sree Ramana was our Esvara, Guru and Atman, upon that one central personality rested our being. Visitors came, kept on coming. To us there was no greater joy than frequenting Sree Maharshi's presence and getting a glance of His look and charming smile and doing His bidding (*kutrevai* in Tamil)³. Thus time passed on till 1929, when Sree Kavyakanta left Tiruvannamalai for good, entrusting me entirely to the care of Sree Maharshi. One funny incident I remember in this connection. After going to Sirsi, Sri Kavyakanta wrote in his first letter to Sri Maharshi to take particular care of me. At the time the post came, I was away at school. Sri Maharshi was particular by keeping this letter under his couch and in the evening I entered the hall, he pulled out the letter from under the couch and read it out to me. He smilingly remarked, "Look here, you must not run away from here. I am answerable to Ganapati Nayana. He may come and claim you from me at any time."

Thus I continued in the presence of Bhagavan Sree Maharshi. Our feelings of joy were comparable only to the hosts of Siva in Mount Kailas. Bhagavan used to say, Kailas is the abode of Siva; Arunachalam is Siva Himself. Even in Kailas it is all like this. The devotees going to the Presence of Siva and worshipping him day in and day out and serving Him and hearing from Him the interpretation of Veda and Vedantha. So we had our *Bhooloka Kailas*⁴ at the foot of Arunachalam and *Arunachala Paramathman*⁵ in human form in the personality of Sree Ramana Bhagavan.

It was some day in the month of May in 1933. I had completed that day 35 years and it was my thirty sixth Birthday. After a bath and

² Literally 'free world', a world where its denizens always enjoy total freedom.

³ *Kutru* (small, short, light) + *eval* (command). That is, running small errands at someone's bidding.

⁴ Earthly replica of the celestial abode (Kailasa) of Lord Siva.

⁵ Arunachala the Supreme Self; Arunachala the Self and Brahman (the Supreme Reality) are one.

usual prayers, I went to the presence of Bhagavan. I sat in a pensive mood. I took up a slip of paper and wrote a prayer to Bhagavan. It was a Tamil *Virutham*.⁶ I said in it, “Oh Bhagavan, I had passed these three scores [decades] and five and yet I have not yet had a real experience of you. Pray let me have this day a touch of your grace.” I handed over this slip of paper to Bhagavan and prostrated. Bhagavan asked me to sit down. I sat while Bhagavan kept staring at me. I too was in a receptive and meditative mood. All of a sudden I was lost to body consciousness and absorbed in Sree Maharshi. I was turned inward. An endless silence serene was passing before me. Sree Maharshi’s voice said, “Look and see what all you desire.” I seemed to say, “What do I want? I shall have the fruit of my life, if I can have darshan my dear Sree Ram.” I was so much devoted to Sree Rama in those days. All of a sudden, I have darsan of Sree Rama, with Sita, Lakshman, Bharatha Sathrugna and Hanuman. Oh the ecstasy of it, how to describe, I sat and sat and sat, Sree Maharshi kept his intent look of Grace, of which I could not be conscious. This lasted from 9 a.m. till quarter past eleven. There was pin drop silence in the Hall. Just about this time, the vision vanished. I rose and prostrated at the Lotus feet of Bhagavan, with ecstatic tears and hairs upon their ends. Bhagavan says to me, “What did you see?” “Of course my dear Sree Ram” was my reply in chocking voice. Bhagavan, “Have you read *Dakshinamoorthi Ashtothra*?”

Myself: “No Bhagavan.”

Bhagavan: “Then pick up that book.” The book was there near the sofa, and I handed it over to Sree Maharshi. Bhagavan opened it at the proper page and gave it back to me. I read the last few names of Dakshinamoorthi and the fifth from the last is *Om Sree Yoga Pattabhiramayana*.⁷ Bhagavan said, “Sree Rama is Dakshinamoorthi and Sree Dakshinamoorthi is Rama. Do you know

⁶ *Virutham*: Tamil poetic metre.

⁷ Lord Dakshinamurti is here hailed as Lord Rama of Ayodhya. *Pattabhirama* is Rama crowned as king of Ayodhya.

where Ayodya is?⁸ The Vedas put it in *Soorya Mandala*⁹ and describe it as *Ashta Chakra Nava Dwara Devanam Purayodya*¹⁰ and Arunachalam is also *Ashtachakrapuri*,¹¹ Arunachalam is Sree Rama and Dakshinamoorthi. One need not go to *Sooryamandala* to see Ayodya and Sree Rama. All may have it here and now.”

Thus Sree Ramana Bhagavan gave darsan as Rama, proving the truth of the statement that the Mahathmas are capable of giving darsan in any form (vide *Ramana Gita*). In *Krishnavathara* did not Bhagavan give Rama darsan to Hanuman! Later I recollected that the darsan with which I was vouchsafed was the same as is famed in Thyaga Brahmam’s *Pancharathna* picture of Sree Rama.¹² But, dear reader, please do not accuse me of presuming to equate myself with Thyagabrahmam. Jay Sree Rama. Jay Sree Ramana. ▲

⁸ Ayodhya literally means ‘that which cannot be fought against’. Ayodhya was the capital of the kingdom of Rama and his ancestors.

⁹ Solar system.

¹⁰ Ayodhya which is the city of Gods has nine gates and is situated over eight wheels.

¹¹ The city of eight wheels.

¹² *Pancharatnam* (literally ‘five gems’) are five long songs on Lord Rama composed in five different ragas by the saint-composer Tyagaraja.

Objective Science and Nondual Knowing

ANANDA WOOD

Picturing and knowing

As scientific theories are studied and applied, it's very often taken for granted that the purpose is objective. As a theory is learned, it gives a clearer picture of what is being studied. And then the theory has to be applied, so as to achieve some desired objectives. This is a habitual view of science. But if one looks more closely, it is not quite correct. As science clarifies our theories and our pictures, they are used in two, rather different ways:

- One way is *objective and calculating*. It works outwardly, through an external picturing, so as to calculate the achievement of desired objects.

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Archives Collection: Bhagavan's Binoculars

John Maynard

- The other way is *subjective and educating*. It works inwardly, beneath the external picturing, by asking reflective questions that educate our personalities.

For example, a map is a picture that serves to calculate where someone can go, what route to take, and how long the journey will be. This calculating function is essentially technical and specialized. It uses special techniques, of map-making and map-reading, to describe and to achieve various limited goals.

But a map does something more than this. It also represents an entire territory, including many possible routes and destinations. Thus it provides a way of stepping back from the calculation of narrow objectives, towards a less partial understanding of the territory as a whole. A map is not just a calculating machine. More essentially, it is a reflective tool, which works through intuition, towards a better understanding.

When a map is thus used reflectively, it is taken to express an understanding of the territory that it represents. Where the representation is observed to have gone wrong, that observation shows an underlying failure or a lack of understanding. And this failure needs to be questioned and corrected, so as to represent the territory more accurately and more clearly. By drawing and redrawing maps, our understanding of a territory may be improved, progressively, in the course of continued experience.

In this example of a map, we see two aspects that may be found in any scientific discipline. One aspect is concerned with *objective achievement*, as prescribed in some picture of the world. The other aspect is concerned with *subjective reflection*, through questions that improve our objective pictures and our living capabilities. Each of these aspects complements the other, but they need to be approached quite differently:

- When objects are sought to be achieved through some calculated technology, a scientist must work in a restricted way, within the confines of some theory whose assumptions are here taken for granted. At this time, a scientist is necessarily dependent on these theories and assumptions. They are implicitly involved in some current work that is in progress, and their questioning would seriously distract from the targeted achievement.

- But, there are also times when it's essential for a scientist to ask unsettling questions. Such questions are essential for a truly scientific education. What's here in question is a basis of assumptions and beliefs that have been accepted habitually. It's on this basis that our theories and our pictures have been built.

So, when our habitual assumptions and beliefs are thrown genuinely into question, the questions have to be reflective. They have to ask their way back down, from objective pictures that appear at the changing surface of our minds. Thus asking down, attention turns subjectively within. It is reflected down within: from outwardly differing appearances, to common principles that are more deeply understood.

As scientists ask their unsettling questions, these questions turn attention inward, towards a subjective depth of understanding that must be shared in common, beneath our many differences of personality and culture. That depth is both subjective and impersonal. There, knowing is completely subjective. It is a pure consciousness, found utterly unmixed with all the personal assumptions and beliefs that are involved in our differing and changing pictures of an objective world.

Objective detachment

But what is the need for a subjective reflection, into the depth of our personalities? It is needed for the purpose of objective detachment.

All objects in the world are known through personality. They are known through a personal process of perceiving and thinking and feeling in our bodies, our senses and our minds. From this perspective, each person's experience can be analysed into three parts:

- First, there is a *knower*, or a knowing subject, which is each person's living self.
- Second, there is a process of *knowing*, which is effected through the personal activities of body, sense and mind.
- And third, there are objects which appear to be *known*, in pictures that have been constructed from our partial perceptions, thoughts and feelings.

This is a common sense analysis, which we take usually for granted. But if it is more carefully examined, it shows an inherent problem. The problem occurs in the second part of experience, where knowing is described as a personal process. Here, personality is being used as an intervening instrument, so as to know a world in which it is involved. Any such involvement must make knowledge compromised, with a confusing ignorance that needs to be removed.

In order to achieve true knowing, all personal activities must be included in what's known. If they are used as intervening instruments, while they themselves remain unknown, their intervention must bring ignorance into our knowledge of the world. This intervention must mix knowing with not knowing; so that we only know in part, through a confusing mixture of knowledge and ignorance.

In the end, as we use science to correct our knowing, *all* our bodily and sensual and mental activities have to be viewed objectively, as part of what is known. There has to be a standing back, subjectively, into a changeless depth from where all changing activities are known.

Returning there, what's known is not just an objective world, made up of pictured objects. Instead, what's known is a self-manifesting *nature*, which includes both the objective world and all the perceiving and thinking and feeling activities that manifest appearances in everyone's experience.

A world of objects cannot manifest itself, to anyone. In this sense, the concept of an 'objective world' is incomplete. Such an 'objective world' cannot appear by itself. For any object to appear, it has to be perceived, or thought about or felt, by some living person. In order to conceive how any world appears, we need to add on a further conception of perceiving and thinking and feeling personality. Without this added idea of 'personality', we cannot account for how the world and its objects appear.

But if this additional conception is examined, it turns out to be unavoidably confused. What we call 'personality' is a confusion of two different things. It is a confusion of knowing self with bodily and sensual and mental actions. In order to know truly, the self that knows must be detached from changing acts of body, sense and mind.

These changing actions are not rightly knowing. They are not the self that knows. Instead, they are a part of what is known. They belong to an objective realm that we call 'nature'. That realm includes all changing acts and happenings throughout the world and in each personality. It is the complete realm of all changing activity that functions to produce all phenomena – as these phenomena are perceived or thought or felt to appear and disappear, in anyone's experience.

When 'nature' has been thus conceived, it is completely objective. It has in it no personal process that can rightly be called 'knowing'. Here, 'knowing' is no longer conceived as a personal process, which intervenes between what knows and what is known. So there can be no threefold analysis: of knower, knowing and known. Instead, there is a distinction of two aspects. One aspect is a completely objective nature; and the other aspect is a completely subjective consciousness.

In this two-fold analysis, all changing acts have been taken into the idea of 'nature'. Thus, they have been removed from the idea of 'consciousness'. Here, consciousness is a purely knowing witness, completely detached from all changing activity.

The knowing of that witness is completely disinterested and impartial. It is an actionless illumination that stays on present always, deep within our changing minds. From there, it lights all nature's acts. Its knowing presence shines unchanged; while nature produces a succession of partial appearances that come and go, at the narrow surface of mind's limited attention.

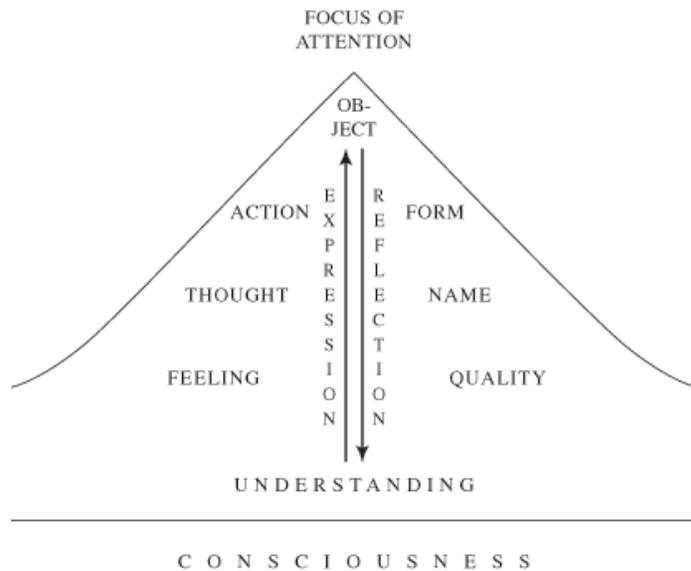
In order to be properly objective, a scientist must somehow stand back: into that knowing witness which stays unaffected at the depth of mind, beneath all superficial personality. It is from there that all sciences have been developed, in a variety of different cultures.

Here in India, nature is called 'prakriti' and its knowing witness is called 'purusha'. Similarly, in ancient Greece, nature was called 'phusis' and its knowing witness was called 'nous'. This is an old distinction, which has long been used, in many ancient sciences.

Organic sciences

From the distinction of nature and consciousness, there arises the idea of a living energy. In Sanskrit, that living energy is called ‘prana’. In ancient Greek, it was called ‘energeia’. Here, nature’s actions are conceived to arise from an unaffected consciousness, which witnesses their changing appearances.

As nature acts, its actions are spontaneous. They each arise from within, of their own accord. That’s what makes nature natural. In everyone’s experience, as nature shows appearances, its actions are not driven artificially, by objects from outside. Instead, each act of nature is inspired from within. It is inspired by a purely subjective consciousness, whose knowing stays unmixed with any changing actions.



As nature’s acts produce appearances, they are illuminated by a knowing consciousness that stays on present underneath. All nature’s energy is set in motion from that knowing presence, through the

inspiration to which it gives rise. Thus inspired, nature’s energy is basically alive. As it arises into show, it inherently expresses consciousness, through purposes and meanings and values that are understood reflectively.

That living energy of nature is experienced by each one of us, in the process of learning in our lives. This process can be illustrated by drawing a schematic diagram (see opposite page). At the top of the diagram, there is a narrow focus of attention, where each object appears and disappears. At the bottom is a common ground, where a purely subjective consciousness remains unchanged. But at each passing moment, that consciousness supports a state of understanding, from which expression rises up through feelings, thoughts and actions that turn attention to an object.¹

In the diagram, the rising of expression is shown by an upward arrow on the left. And it is followed immediately by a reflection back, which is shown by the downward arrow on the right. As the reflection goes down, the object is perceived and interpreted – through its form, its name and its quality.

By these up and down arrows, attention is shown cycling out and in. As attention goes out, a previous state of understanding is expressed,

¹ In this illustration, an idea of the ‘witness’ is represented at the bottom, by the horizontal line that separates the words ‘consciousness’ and ‘understanding’. This line shows the witness as a final limit, which is approached by returning closer and closer to it. As the return gets closer, our understanding of both world and personality gets broader and deeper and clearer. But when the witness is finally touched, all changing world and personality are completely dissolved, by their absorption into an unchanging consciousness.

Then there is nothing to be witnessed, apart from consciousness itself. Thus it turns out that consciousness itself is all of the reality that’s ever truly known, through each of the appearances which nature manifests. That is a reality which knows itself, as its own true identity. Its being and its knowing are identical. There no duality remains, between what knows and what is known.

The witness is accordingly an ideal limit of complete detachment, which when achieved gives way immediately to a complete absorption in what’s rightly known. That is an absorption into non-duality – which has to be impersonally realized, by finding knowledge to be ultimately free from all interfering personality.

in the appearance of an object. This appearance is then taken into a new state of understanding, from which expression rises up again.²

It's thus that we are motivated by a living energy, to keep on learning in the process of experience.

This process is described through an approach that may be called 'organic'. Our personalities are here described as 'organisms' or, in other words, as 'living systems of activity'. And the world that contains them needs to be described accordingly. As we experience this world, it is made up of happenings that we describe by representing them, through our actions of perception and conception.

Our worldly experience is thus mediated by our personal representations. It works through an essential correspondence, between the macrocosm of a containing world and its microcosmic representation by our smaller personalities. For this representation to be accurate, it must be co-ordinated with what is represented in the world at large.

In order to improve our representations, we need to harmonize our personalities, so as to achieve a better co-ordination in their correspondence with the world. Here, personality and world are each described as organic systems, which must develop mutually. This is the basic method of organic sciences, which are applied through their cultivation of our living faculties.

²There is a connection here with the etymology of the English words 'subject' and 'object'. The prefix 'sub-' means 'under', and '-ject' comes from the Latin 'jacere', which means to 'throw'. Thus, the word 'subject' may well refer to an underlying consciousness, which is found under the throwing up of expression into the changing appearances of objects.

And in the word 'object', the prefix 'ob-' means 'against'. There is a sense of opposition, to an act of throwing. As expression is thrown up, objects are what it gets thrown against. Each object is a surface show, produced by an upward throw of expression that has risen up from consciousness. But as this show is produced at the surface, the upward expression gets immediately reflected back, to be absorbed in that same consciousness from which it came.

Thus, as implied by ancient etymology, 'objects' are appearances, which come and go. And an unchanging consciousness is the one 'subject', which might be called the 'subject of all predicates' (to use an Aristotelian turn of phrase).

Modernization

However, there is also a rather different kind of science, which is called 'mechanical'. This kind of science has a special restriction in its discipline. It only considers mechanical actions, between one object and another. Accordingly, the world and its objects are described mechanically, as structures that are made from component parts.

It's only to this structured world that mechanical sciences apply. They do not properly apply to any living activities nor any learning processes, in which a subjective consciousness is found expressed. Where science is mechanical, it applies restrictedly: through mechanically fabricated instruments, to a mechanically structured world.

But this restriction does have an advantage, which has been greatly developed in the modern world. Mechanical sciences can be objectively standardized outside our personalities, through instrumental standards that are maintained by external institutions. Such institutions are industrially and socially and culturally organized. They have developed greatly in modern times, through the widespread use of printing and subsequent media of communication.

As a result of these modern developments, there has been a tremendous growth of mechanical sciences, which have accordingly got emphasized. This emphasis has clearly had its benefits. It has enabled a great spread of education and of scientific enquiry. Thus, it has improved our capabilities to think and to act and to ask questions for ourselves. But it is also causing problems, increasingly, as a mechanical approach to science has got overused.

One obvious problem is the environment. Through our mechanical sciences, we can engineer and calculate the achievement of particular results. But this approach is narrowing and specialized. It achieves its results by narrowing them down, in a proliferation of specialized disciplines. As each result is achieved, others are left out. So, as we increase our mechanical capabilities, they present us with more choices and more conflicts in our lives. This brings with it the need for a corresponding education, which enables us to make better choices and to organize them more successfully.

What the environmental crisis shows is a failure of our education. Our mechanical achievements have run riot, without a corresponding education of our living faculties. It is just this imbalance which has caused our environmental crisis and the mounting problems in our health services and our social institutions.

In order to redress this imbalance, attention is now turning back towards old sciences that are organically conceived. But there is a problem here, in the way that these sciences are standardized. For a science to be truly organic, it must be organically applied, through living faculties that it develops in its practitioners. This is in fact how agriculture and animal husbandry and medicine work, along with all other sciences of society and culture and counselling and human development.

But how can these sciences be 'scientific'? How can they correct our personal mistakes and partialities, so that our knowing can be truer and less personal? In one way or another, all sciences need to establish common standards that are independent of our personalities.

One way is exemplified by the mechanical sciences. Their instruments are standardized externally, through their manufacture by industrial corporations and research laboratories. This standardization is *extensive*. It has to be organized extensively, through local and national and global institutions.

Another way of standardizing is more evident in the organic sciences. They work through living faculties that must be standardized internally, in the education of each individual practitioner. That standardization is *intensive*. It has to be attained intensively; as each practitioner gets educated, by asking questions for herself or for himself.

Where standardization is mechanical, what's thus attained is the impersonality of a machine. But, as our organic sciences get modernized, we need more than machines. We need an education that asks basic questions – in search of an impersonal knowing where each one of us may stand detached, from our own personalities.

Institutions and the individual

In any science, scientists must standardize their observations and their descriptions of what it is that they observe. In a mechanical

approach, objective instruments and language are made standard, through institutions that get organized commercially, politically and socially.

But even this external organization must depend upon an inner standard of knowing that is shared by different individuals. As they communicate, they must refer back to a knowing ground that they somehow share in common. That common ground must be shared subjectively, as they engage across their differences.

Thus, learning and education must depend upon a common subjective standard, which is inherently impersonal and unconstructed, beneath all personal and cultural constructions. That is the natural basis on which we learn, in all our approaches to truer knowing. As these approaches question back more deeply, they return more directly there.

In the end, to return directly back, all written documents and instituted teaching must be left behind, for a reflective questioning that's taught by a living teacher:

Where *written documents* are read,
a reader must interpret words
and symbols that describe a world
made up of objects and events.

A cultural community
of readers thus gets trained to use
constructed forms of information
organized externally
by instituted schools of thought.

Where *spoken words* are heard alive,
a listener may there reflect
to knowing that is found expressed.
An individual student thus
is led to a discovery
of knowledge that a teacher shows.

Non-duality

But how could any individual come, through inward questioning, to a discovery of knowledge that is finally impersonal?

As nature acts to show us its appearances, in anyone's experience, all of these many different acts originate from one same source. That source is always consciousness itself: the inmost knowing principle that's shared in common by all differing experiences, beneath all difference and change of place and time and personality.

All differing appearances arise expressing that one consciousness. It is their one, unchanged reality – which they all show, through all their seeming differences and change. That consciousness is found reflectively, by standing further and further back into the depth of mind, from where the changes of appearance have arisen.

Through this reflective standing back, a more effective detachment is achieved, from bodily and sensual and mental personality. And the detachment enables clearer perceptions, thoughts and feelings – from a more deeply subjective standpoint that is less compromised by the confusions of our changeable and uncertain personalities.

Accordingly, by standing back subjectively, a duality of knower and known may be progressively clarified. Thus standing back into the depth of knowing, there is less and less confusion between consciousness and personality. Consciousness is realized more clearly as the true knower of experience, found less and less confused with a partially perceiving and thinking and feeling personality that needs to be better known.

Eventually, by standing all the way back into consciousness itself, the duality of knower and known is completed. A purely subjective knower is thus realized. There, knowing is completely impartial, beyond all confusion with the partial appearances which are produced by our perceiving and thinking and feeling personalities.

But an inherent paradox results. As soon as true consciousness is reached, it turns out to be just that one reality which is expressed in all nature's appearances. No matter what appears, the reality that's known

is never any different from the self that knows it – a knowing self that we all share in common.

As consciousness illuminates appearances, it knows none other than its own reality. When it is reached, by distinguishing it from what seems known, there all distinction is dissolved. It there turns out that there never is (nor was) any duality, between what knows and what is known. That philosophical position is called 'advaita' or 'non-duality'.

As the name indicates, that position is meant to be achieved by an uncompromising investigation into the duality of knower and known. And the investigation must be carried to such an uncompromising extreme that this duality dissolves itself, in a reality to which no difference can apply. ▲

The Archive Collection

ROLLEIFLEX CAMERA

The Rolleiflex Camera that Dr. T.N. KRISHNASWAMY (Dr. T.N.K.) used to take many of the photographs of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in various poses during the 1930's, has been generously gifted on 23rd May 2009 to the Ashram Archives of Sri Ramanasramam by his son, Sri T.K Natarajan.

The first photograph of Sri Bhagavan which Dr. T.N.K. took came out so well that he was asked by the Ashram *Sarvadhikari*, to be the official photographer of the Ashram.

Whenever he could, Dr. T.N.K. travelled to Tiruvannamalai. He was fascinated by the physical presence of Sri Bhagavan and for him photographing Bhagavan was a part of his worship. He went straight to the Ashram and remained there for the duration of his stay. It was said that his house in Mylapore, Chennai, was an extension of Sri Ramanasramam.

We request other devotees that if they have some historical artifact associated with Sri Bhagavan, to consider donating it to the Archives Collection, where it will be safely preserved.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Reminiscences of The Maharshi

SWAMI SIDDHESWARANANDA

Swami Siddheswarananda was born into the royal house of Cochin in 1897. While a student at Madras University he was initiated by Swami Brahmananda. He joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1920 and took sannyasa from Swami Shivananada. He visited Bhagavan on a number of occasions between 1931 and 1936. Soon afterwards, he was instructed by his Order to proceed to France where in 1937, he served as head of the Ramakrishna Math at Gertz, near Paris. During the dangerous conditions of the Second World War in France, he courageously continued to work for the benefit of others and spread the message of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

He always had a special place in his heart for Bhagavan and was in contact with the ashram over the years. He wrote an article on Bhagavan which has been included in many editions of Maharshi's Gospel as an appendix. He passed away at the Gertz centre in 1957. A person of great charm, he was greatly revered by those who came to him for guidance.

We are grateful to M. Patrick Sicard for presenting the Ashram Archives with a portfolio of the swami's writings and facsimiles of letters he wrote.

It is on a week-end in 1916 at the *math* in Madras that the name of the Maharshi came to his ears for the first time.



Swami Siddheswarananda

... When I was a student at Madras University, I have met in Mylapore a professor who just had seen the Maharshi. The way he talked about it inflamed my heart. I thought that if someone could rouse such a spiritual emotion merely by speaking of the Maharshi after having been in contact with him, he must be an extraordinary personality. I felt that one day I would visit the Sage, but only fifteen years later I had the privilege to be able to go to Tiruvannamalai.¹

My contact with the Maharshi was very intimate and, as my feelings towards him are very affectionate, it is very difficult for me to talk about it. It was in 1932, after finishing my studies on Sankara under the guidance/ supervision of my venerated professor, Subrahmanya Iyer, that I felt the strong desire to see a Sage who incarnates Sankara's message in the commentaries on the *Mandukya Upanishad* and the *Karika* by Gaudapada.

February - March 1932. Supported by Mahapurush Swami Shivananada and Swami Akhandananda (but disapproved by almost all brothers), Swami, who more and more felt the urge to personally meet the Maharshi, visited him for the first time in Tiruvannamalai, a visit which will be followed by many others.

One day X. told me: "What does it mean? Devotees are chanting in praise of Maharshi and he joins them!" "It is exactly what made a strong impression on me," I replied. What a detachment! One person composes a poem in his honour and he himself corrects it!

I remember an unforgettable scene. I was staying for about ten days with the Maharshi... I had asked him, "Would you please explain to me the third verse of the second chapter of the Gita? (Even the Sage acts in accordance with his nature, so what is the use to force oneself.)" He stayed calm, as if he had not heard. One morning I saw on his sofa a quantity of Gitas which an attendant was about to take away. He said in Malayalam — he expressed himself in pure Malayalam:

¹ Sorbonne, June 29, 1950.

"I wanted to see in the commentaries what others have written on this matter." And he started to talk at length about this verse...

Generally, as you know, he keeps silence. People whom I knew asked me to inform them when I went to see Maharshi because he got loquacious when I was there. So, [one day] I asked him a favour to recite us the poem of Manikkavachakar: "My heart overflows with love, my nerves, my bones merge into love." As he began, after two lines only, his eyes were full of tears. It was a wonderful moment, with rays of the rising sun falling/spreading on his sofa...And he remained silent, completely silent...

[Evoking his first visit to Maharshi]

Every time I found myself before him, I prostrated.

After some days, he asked me:

"Why all this fuss?"

"I can't help it. You provoke in me such an emotion!"

So, with an unforgettable smile he said: "Good. You can do it if you think that you offer these prostrations to yourself."

I had the privilege to live in the presence of the Maharshi, living symbol of the entire philosophy of Sankara. His Self-realisation did not provoke in him a state due to some drug; he is the most 'enlightened' being/man I have met in my life. The big difficulty of our friends at the Sorbonne is to exploit their ideas on the chessboard of *manas*...

Here is an example quoted by Suzuki from the life of a Zen master:² Once upon a time there was a man standing on the top of a hill. Some villagers were observing him from the valley while discussing among themselves the reasons that drew him up there. "He must be looking for a lost animal," said one of them; the second one surmised that he might wait for a friend and the third declared: "He simply admires the landscape." The three friends went up to see the unknown person and to question him. The first asked: "Oh, my friend, have you lost an

² *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind* by D.T. Suzuki.

animal?” — “No,” answered the man, “I have not lost anything.” — “Are you expecting a friend?” inquired the second one. — “No, I don’t expect anyone.” — “Then,” said the third, “You are breathing /enjoying the fresh air?” — “No, sir.” — “So, what are you doing then?” inquired the three men. “I am standing,” was the answer.

This is Zen: facing all things without any interpretation of the individual mind. Usually we make all sorts of suppositions and we do not want to see things ‘as they are’.

I had personally the same experience with Ramana Maharshi. While walking with him, he suddenly stopped and stayed still for about fifteen minutes.

The spot was lovely and I asked him: “Are you admiring the landscape?” — “No, he replied, I am standing.”³

...Now, after a severe coronary thromboses in 1953, constrained to my bed for long hours a day, the Maharshi’s presence and his expression of steadfast serenity always remain before me through his marvellous smile and his shining eyes which transmit initiation much more by look than by words...⁴

Everywhere, the influence of Ramana Maharshi is increasing, which is mainly due to this extra-religious attitude he had towards (the) truth and (the) reality. In a world weary of dogmas and creeds, the metaphysical position of Vedanta is a breath of fresh air.

[*To a correspondent*]

I am very happy you lead a life of silence and meditation... You had the privilege to study the doctrine and to live in the presence of the Sage. You are perfectly qualified to espouse Vedanta in Europe from the standpoint of the *avasthatraya* by separating the pure teaching from the mystical aspect. The books nowadays published about the

³ Excerpts of the Conference on February 17, 1951 at the Sorbonne [University] on ‘The Cosmic Mind’.

⁴ March 25, 1956.

Maharshi contain so many mystical implications! Europe does not possess the cultural background in order to consider the reality from the *avasthatraya* standpoint; the appeal for a personality leads naturally to devotion of the hero and the cult of the person. The Sage and the knowledge/wisdom form one and indivisible unity.

During the Second World War he wrote to a disciple about the challenge he encountered:

I have no tendency whatever to want to organize. Too much organization has been the bane of European life; advice has been unanimous on this subject and imminent catastrophe can be the only result of too much organization and of organized bodies which stifle the liberty of individual conscience. I have been sent here as a representative of a spiritual Order. My life is an open book for all. And I work with His inspiration behind me. Where all human efforts will prove unable to procure a roof, when so many devotees search so conscientiously, it is, finally, God who takes charge.

The Maharshi, or Hui Neng, or the man of satori, see the Reality as it is, which means without the action of an imaginary film. It is the message of the great rishis of Upanisadic lore...

The supreme Reality cannot be bound by the burden of discipline. If the supreme Reality gets a conditioned aspect of the discipline, the latter will be of more value than the Reality. ▲



Archives Collection: Bhagavan's Walking Stick

John Maynard

Practical Sadhana

Part Six

The Ultimate Secret

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA

Question: The *Rishis* say that *japa* (continuous repetition of *OM* or the Name of God) leads to concentration, and concentration leads to meditation, and meditation to *samadhi*, and when *samadhi* is steady one is established in *yoga*. But if the Wisdom of the Self arises only from the heart, how can I come to understand that states of mind, even exalted states like *yogic samadhi*, will lead me to the discovery of the ultimate secret which is an awakened realization of the Self? And how will I know outside of meditation, in my normal daily life, that such a permanent transformation of consciousness has occurred?

When we normally speak of going into a state of *samadhi*, we are rightly referring to its lower stages that are not close to *complete* absorption in the Self. It is a great step forward, but in relation to the final goal it is just another achievement of progressive steps, though at higher levels.

Swami Sadasivananda first came to Arunachala in 1970. Soon after he became a monk under the direction of Ananda Mayi Ma.

An advanced and skillful Buddhist will propound an understanding of this that refers to eight separate stages of *jnana* or *samadhi*, four material and four non-material. These are simply seen as high states of mind and not the Self that dwells exclusively in the heart. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of these mind states is that their movement develops concentration, which takes you within, directly to the door of the heart. The metaphysics of Hindu *dharma* agrees, differing mainly with reference to the description of separate stages.

The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, which Bhagavan has referred to, propound the Hindu view of the essential need for progressive stages of mental strength and development of acute awareness that in time lead one towards and finally into *Samadhi*.

According to the various interpretations of Patanjali's *Sutras*, there range from between six to twelve separate progressive stages, all referred to as *samadhi* (absorption in meditation).

Focusing on That which can be Seen

Bhagavan's teaching is in harmony with Patanjali in that the effort to "know the Self" is an actual experience that involves a progressive and protracted *sadhana* that culminates with the awakening (remembrance) of the immaculate nature of a Pure Mind. In this regard a devotee asked Bhagavan:

"What is that Self in actual experience?"

Sri Bhagavan tells us: "It is the Light which ever shines in the Cave of the Heart as the flame of the Consciousness 'I' 'I' — the eternal and blissful *Sat-chit-ananda*. This is the answer to the *vichara* and its fulfillment. The 'I', which has carried out a *determined* and protracted search into its own nature, has at long last found itself to be not other than the Pure Mind, the immaculate Being, which is eternally wrapped in blissful stillness. This is *Turiya*, the Fourth, or *Samadhi* (the highest stage)." ¹

This statement reveals an essential aspect of Bhagavan's teaching that is often misconstrued. Some adherents to the Ramana Way flatly proclaim that *vichara* (reflective enquiry) is effortless. They adhere to a

¹ S.S. Cohen, *Guru Ramana*, 2006, p. 73.

mistaken interpretation of Bhagavan's method of enquiry that denies the need for an active and acute awareness within the mind. They firmly proclaim that *vichara*, even in its preliminary stage, is not an intellectual process. Bhagavan's use of the word *determined* in the above quote clearly contradicts this belief. Determination in this instance is the unwavering resolve of the 'I' thought, which originated from and is residing within the intellectual mind, to seek the source of its own nature.

Therefore all effort motivated by this resolve takes place as an intellectual process, until *in the end of enquiry* the final goal is achieved and the "I" transcends the mind.

Patanjali also clarifies this error, for he declares that achievement of the lower stages of *samadhi* are essential. For in them there is a witness who experiences first the lower plane where there *distinctly* exists the knower, the object as the known and the knowledge. Ultimately the highest stage is reached when the many dissolves into the One, which connects them. Bhagavan concurred with this when in conversation with Mr. Cohen it was said:

Mr. Cohen: "There seems to be nothing but awareness, for to know anything there must be knowledge – we cannot get over that."

Bhagavan: "Certainly. Subjective knowledge – knowledge knowing itself is *jnana*. It is then the subject as the knower, the object as the known and the knowledge which connects them."

Mr. Cohen: "This last is not clear to me in this case."

Bhagavan: "Why so? Knowledge is the light which links the seer to the seen. Suppose you go in search of a book in a library in pitch darkness. Can you find it without light, although you, the subject, and the book, the object, are both present? Light has to be present to unite you. This link between the subject and the object in every experience is *chit*, consciousness. It is both the substratum as well as the witness of the experience, the seer of Patanjali." ²

First Things First

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* present a progressive advancement of effective methods for controlling the thought waves (*vrutti*) of the mind,

² Ibid., p. 75.

which will result in the focusing and strengthening of awareness. Bhagavan was often asked about the need for the establishment of progressive effort that leads to a *fully aware* and controlled mind:

“Mr. Cohen relates how the reading of *Patanjali Sutras* in 1926 had greatly impressed him. The first few *sutras* had convinced him of the truth of the teaching, but unfortunately there was no one to give him proper guidance until he met Sri Bhagavan early in 1936.”

Bhagavan: “Patanjali’s first *sutras* are indeed the climax of all systems of *yoga*. All *yogas* aim at the cessation of the *vritti* (modification of the mind). This can be brought about in the variety of ways mentioned in the scriptures through mind control, which frees consciousness from all thoughts and keeps it pure. Effort is necessary. In fact effort is itself *yoga*.”

Mr. C: “I suppose efforts have to be made in the waking state, which implies that *moksha* can be gained only in *jagrat*?”

Bhagavan: “Quite so, awareness is necessary for mind control; otherwise who is to make the effort? You cannot make it in sleep or under the influence of drugs. Also *mukti* has to be gained in full awareness, because the Reality itself is pure awareness.”³

The testimony of practically all of the disciples who lived with Bhagavan proclaims that the achievement of “freeing consciousness from all thoughts and keeping it pure,” involves constant spiritual practice and real non-dependence (*vairagya*) on the objects of the world. In rare instances, though some people seem to have achieved the state of thoughtless purity without effort, it may, as Sri Ramana himself said, be due to effort done in the past.

They were right, for they were perfectly guided to this understanding by the Guru Sri Ramana whose life was a living demonstration of supreme control and *vairagya*.

There are two aspects of controlling the mind, *abhyasa* and *vairagya*. *Abhyasa* is adopting any particular spiritual discipline and repeating it continuously. *Vairagya* is developing detachment and dispassion towards objects of the world that degrade your mind.

As one conquers one’s desires one gets a sense of mastery over the objects of the world. Objects of the world have no real bearing upon the mind, but they become important and impinge upon the mind because of the desires towards them. As we advance in our *sadhana* we begin to discover that the innermost Self is an ocean of bliss. The realization of that Self puts an end to all desires.

However, this process is progressive. As one gains insight into the transient nature of the things of the world, one comes to realize that the seeking of happiness from the objects of the world has effectively reduced one into a beggar.

The mind’s nature is to be constantly feeding on the objects of the senses. Inwardly, the mind never loses its attraction for more happiness than already has been gained and is forever on the prowl in the world for fresh pleasure. Unfortunately for most, the strongest *vasanas* (latent tendencies) direct the mind towards the lower realms of sensual attraction. Thus we end up searching, as it were, in the garbage cans of other people for the things to feed on. The mind has left its own home, and moves about in the streets of worldly pleasure feeding on that which will momentarily satisfy its craving.

The greatest burden of these irresponsible actions comes from the certainty that there is alongside the craving a complete disregard for the suffering that is produced both within oneself and within those who are the objects of desire.

How can we secure our happiness on the basis of a world that is constantly shifting? If you have illusion about the world and become its beggar, the world will always be there to dominate you. To the extent that this illusion breaks, you become the ruler of that which had previously conquered you. If you have no desire for the objects of the senses, your rulership is known as *vairagya*. *Vairagya* is not the development of disgust for the objects of the senses, but rather the discovery of the majesty of the power of rulership over them. Your revelation is that the objects are dependent on you; you are not dependent on the objects. ▲

³ Ibid., p. 74.

(To be continued)



Early Photo of Sri Ramanasramam

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

The Sanctuary of Sri Ramanasramam

KENNETH ROSE

*This article is adapted from a chapter in a memoir called *The Light of the Self* in which I tell how the influence of Advaita Vedanta and Bhagavan's teaching broadened my perspective beyond the Christian traditions in which I was raised and trained as a comparative theologian. The following selection is protected by copyright (© 2008 Kenneth Rose).*

In the summer of 1993, I was browsing in a metaphysical bookstore in the USA when my eye was attracted by the serene face of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi on the cover of a book called *The Spiritual Teaching of Ramana Maharshi*. Before I picked up the book, the thought had fully formed itself in my mind that I must go to India and take *darshan* from him. At that moment, I felt as if I had been initiated by

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Sri Ramana Maharshi personally, though his body had been dead for years, and directed to go to his ashram in India.

I took the book from the shelf and, as I studied the photograph on the cover, I had the uncanny sense of being in the presence of the divine. In Hindu religious thought, a great guru is seen as a vehicle of *shakti*, the power of the divine in its feminine form. This is not an abstract idea, since the spiritually sensitive person can encounter the vibrant, pulsating energy of *shakti* in any spiritually charged setting such as ashrams, temples, and holy mountains. As I held the book in my hands and gazed at the picture of Ramana Maharshi, I felt a golden energy of bliss, of *shakti*, touch the edge of my mind for just a moment, just long enough to prompt me to vow to the spirit of Ramana Maharshi that I would come to his ashram as soon as possible.

As if it were destined — whether through the power of Ramana Maharshi's *shakti* or because of the force of good karma I had accumulated in this and previous lives — the path to Sri Ramanasramam opened up effortlessly for me over the next months. I applied for a research grant from the university where I am a professor of comparative religion, and I wrote to the ashram asking if I could visit. I received a warm reply from the president at the time, T. N. Venkataraman, who was Ramana's nephew, inviting me to spend a couple of weeks at Sri Ramanasramam in the summer of 1994.

After arriving in Delhi in the horrendously hot season just before the monsoon, I slowly journeyed by train to Chennai by way of Rishikesh, Mathura, Varanasi, Bodh Gaya, and Kolkata. So spectacular was the array of sight, sounds, and people that I encountered along the way that I didn't have a moment to be bored or focus within.

When I finally settled in at Sri Ramanasramam during the quiet, hot season before the monsoon, I suddenly found myself without the distractions of travelling and so began to meditate intensively on the nondual teaching of Ramana Maharshi. But instead of bliss and light, I felt an overwhelming sense of horror at what I felt to be my aimless existence, a sensation made worse by a terrible head cold that hurt right down to my teeth. This sense of emptiness was unbearable, and

I was tempted to give up meditating, since it seemed only to focus my attention on my difficult mental condition.

This happened in the Old Hall at the back of the ashram where Ramana — or Bhagavan — sat for decades on a couch giving *darshan* to countless pilgrims. As I sat there over the next few days, I began to sense a living but invisible presence, which gently but persistently posed the question, 'Who is it that is experiencing this painful existence?'

When a seeker asked Bhagavan how to overcome the illusion that we are ultimately identical with our bodies and minds, he would usually ask who it was who was having this thought. Enquirers were often baffled by this question, but it was central to Bhagavan's method of *atma-vichara*, or self-enquiry, which is grounded in the ancient doctrine of the Upanishads and Advaita Vedanta that the world and mind are illusions superimposed upon Brahman, the absolute, formless spirit. More than just a verbal formula, this mystical teaching has the power to liberate the one who deeply reflects upon it from the idea that we were born with the birth of this body and that we will die with its death.

As I sat in front of Bhagavan's couch in the Old Hall during the long, quiet periods between meals, I began to trace out the place where my sense of being myself emerged from the background of the true Self. It wasn't easy, since the stream of images and thoughts that constitute the mind gushed up ceaselessly like a fountain from a hidden source. But occasionally, the stream would suddenly vanish and a clear expanse of awareness free of the stains of images and thoughts would unfurl itself crisply like a white banner in my awareness. Then I knew with intuitive directness and certainty that the Self is more real than the mental and physical worlds, which otherwise seem to be the true and final boundaries of the real.

Other times during meditation, I felt as if a door had opened out beneath my mind, and I passed over into an alternate reality, which is infinite in all directions. This change in consciousness was sudden, and the barrier between the prison of *aham*, the false self, and the freedom of *atman*, the true Self, appeared like an insubstantial film or coating, no more durable than a bubble. Then currents of bliss from

the hidden source of life, Brahman, pierced me like golden waves of light, and in the cave of my heart, *atman*, the true Self, sang me awake, and a wine of *prema*, of divine love, intoxicated me. I felt extraordinarily light, as if I could float off at any moment like a leaf lofted by a light summer's breeze.

These moments of illumination were elusive, and I fell quickly back into my ordinary mind, which was coloured by a basic theme of dissatisfaction edged with anxiety about illness, loss, and death. But at least I had seen the other country, the country without tears. And I knew now that Bhagavan was my guru, even if he was no longer present in a physical body, for I sensed that I was being inwardly guided in the practice of self-enquiry by Bhagavan, who promised his devotees that the death of his body was not the death of his presence, which would always be available to everyone who sought it.

It was a quiet season at the ashram, and I felt as if I had the place almost to myself. There weren't many visitors, so I was able to meet some eminent devotees of Bhagavan, some of whom had lived with him for many years. Talks with them shed light on what I was experiencing at the ashram.

Of the many devotees of Bhagavan that I met at the ashram, the most impressive was Sri Annamalai Swami, who had a small ashram less than half a mile from Sri Ramanasramam. When I was received by him, he was about eighty and in failing health. He was a small, radiant man, somewhat reminiscent of Bhagavan.

My companion on this outing, another guest from Sri Ramanasramam, asked the swami about how to go about finding a guru. Sri Annamalai Swami answered that since the guru is within us, there is no need to search outside. The questioner, an American earnestly in quest of enlightenment, seemed not to be satisfied with this answer, so he asked the swami if he himself was self-realized. Swamiji answered, "No doubt!" I felt a shiver run up my spine when he said that.

We sat for a good half-hour with Swamiji while he answered more of our questions. At one point, he said that just as only water will satisfy a thirsty man, so only *moksha* will satisfy the spiritually mature

person. He also said that at the moment that Bhagavan's body died, he saw a great *jjyotirlinga* — Shiva as a vast column of light — in the sky. Then someone came running from Sri Ramanasramam shouting that Bhagavan had just passed away.

When he appeared to be growing tired, we excused ourselves from his presence. Within the year, he was dead, so it was, perhaps, a sign of good *karma* that I had a chance to have his *darshan*.

One advantage of having a room almost at the centre of the ashram (the *samadhi* of the well-known early English devotee of Bhagavan, Major Chadwick, later known as Sadhu Arunachala, was behind my room) was that in the hot evenings after the evening meal it was possible to sit in the small room of Balarama Reddy, a longtime resident of the ashram and close disciple of Bhagavan. He was an impressive storyteller and spoke in a rhythmic and inspired tone of voice. He was then about eighty.

One night he gave an impromptu discourse, which I tried to preserve in my journal. I only got part of it because he spoke quickly. He fanned himself as he spoke in the sweltering room to a small group of ashram inmates who sat around his bed. He gazed over our heads as he spoke, as if he were seeing Ramana Maharshi in some vista closed to the sight of the rest of us. He said that Bhagavan was far more powerful than his teachings, and that while many scholars can teach *advaita*, or nonduality, a teacher like Ramana is rare.

Not expecting an answer, he asked us who besides Bhagavan has ever had such a complete realization. Even Buddha had to meditate for six years, he exclaimed, and even Ramakrishna took nine years to attain what Ramana experienced in a moment. The whole of Ramana's life was lived in our midst, he assured us in the consoling tone of a preacher, so he had no privacy. Yet he lived among us for all those years, eating with us and cooking for us. In his company, there was no master, nor were there disciples. Instead, Reddy said, we were his family, and his love for us was like that of a mother for her children.

Although we cannot be like Ramana, warned Reddy, because he was a once-in-a-century person, we can practise *atmanam viddhi*, the

sadhana of always remembering the Self and not swerving from the path of purity, of *dharma*. This *sadhana* of Self-remembrance is our way of not wasting our precious human life. If we practise constant attention to *atman*, to the Self, everything else will take care of itself. After all, did not even the Buddha's wife and child come to him after some years? And look how without trying Bhagavan provided for his mother and brother and his sons.

The hour grew late, and as we took leave of Sri Reddy, I saw that his eyes were glowing. I handed him a booklet containing Bhagavan's teachings, and he signed it, "With love." Moved by his love for Bhagavan and his desire to share his experience of Bhagavan with us, I bent and touched his feet — the classic Indian gesture of respect for a parent or a teacher — before going out into the darkness of the now silent ashram. Sri Reddy died a year later.

Another old devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi that I met at the ashram was Somasundaram, who was about seventy when I met him and had been coming to the ashram since 1939. Somu was his name among family and friends. I asked him what questions he had asked Ramana, and he said that he had asked nothing, for just by sitting in Bhagavan's presence, he had received all that he needed. After all, there is no end of questions, which are just a going round and round of the mind.

As we talked, he expressed the nondualistic view of Advaita Vedanta, that the way of *jnana*, or transcendent wisdom, is the highest truth and that devotion to a deity, temple worship, and theological beliefs become irrelevant as soon as one attains higher insight — though, as an example for those who have not realized *jnana*, the realized one may keep up one's practice of such customs.

He told me a story about a couple who had come to India from Peru by ship. They said that they had sold everything in order to get to Sri Ramanasramam. Hearing this, Bhagavan asked, "Why? I was with you." Then, after a moment, Ramana had a vision and asked them if they hadn't once been lying under some palm trees in a house on white sand next to the ocean. Surprised, they answered that they had. This instance of clairvoyance, said Somu, is evidence that Bhagavan is

everywhere and that it is not necessary to see his physical body because he is not limited by space and time. Somu affirmed that it had been nice to see Bhagavan when he was in his body and it is nice to come to Ramanasramam, but it is not necessary because Bhagavan is everywhere. Indeed, Ramana Maharshi is the god in the temple, the mountain Arunachala, and the Self.

As if answering the charge that just sitting about in a state of *samadhi* is of no value to a suffering world, Somu told of the visit of a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi to the ashram, who challenged Bhagavan by asking: "Why don't you do something instead of just sitting there?" Bhagavan replied, "Who said that I am just sitting here?"

Some months later, according to Somu, Gandhi sent this disciple to observe the work of a social worker in San Francisco. The Gandhian came to the man's apartment and to his surprise, he saw a picture of Bhagavan there in a place of honour. "What is this?" asked the surprised Gandhian. The social worker replied, "Without this picture, I could not do the work that I do."

The most surprising encounter that I had at the ashram was an unexpected meeting with Arunachala Bhakta Bhagavat. He was visiting the ashram from New York, with his disciple Arthur. Because I was also from the States, we began to talk. Although he had never met Bhagavan while he was in his body, he was a devotee who had long been famous in the wider community of devotees of Ramana Maharshi for his intense, ongoing sense of the living presence of Bhagavan.

As we talked, the story emerged of how he had started a small ashram in Manhattan in the 1960s. It is called Arunachala Ashram, and was first located on St. Mark's Place, then later moved to East Sixth Street, near First Avenue in the East Village, where it remained until the 1980s, when it relocated to Queens.

At the mention of this ashram, a memory flashed across my mind of a day back in 1971 when I had been wandering rather aimlessly around the East Village. I was then one of the early Western Hare Krishna devotees, but I had covered my shaved head and *shikha* with a watch cap and I was wearing jeans instead of a *dhoti*. I came to a complete stop when I passed a storefront ashram with a large picture

of the serenely smiling Sri Ramana Maharshi in the window. This was my first encounter with Bhagavan. I had never heard of him nor seen his picture before. I stopped and stood hesitantly in front of the ashram. A short Indian man with a wide smile stepped out and greeted me. I said something about being interested in Eastern religions, and the man smilingly said that he knew that because he could see Krishna in my eyes.

I objected, saying that perhaps he had seen the *mala*, the necklace made of the wood of the *tulasi* plant, which is a sectarian mark of Hindu Vaishnavas, around my neck. But no, he insisted, he could see from my eyes that I was a devotee of Krishna. He invited me to come to a meeting at his ashram, and I promised that I would, though I didn't. Soon after, I got caught up in evangelical Christianity, and I forgot about him and the ashram. Years later, long after the flaming out of my enthusiasm for that spiritual path, the results of my first encounter in New York with Bhagavan and his ardent devotee finally bore fruit in my first visit to Sri Ramanasramam.

Shortly soon after my encounter with Arunachala Bhakta Bhagavat, my time at Sri Ramanasramam came to an end, and I continued my rail journey through India. I didn't know it then, but it would be thirteen years before I would return to Tiruvannamalai, yet during that long absence, the influence of Bhagavan, his devotees, and the sanctuary of Sri Ramanasramam would slowly transform my life with the light of the nondual Self. ▲

Suranna

T.R. KANAKAMMAL

Suranna was one of those rare birds with plumes of stern *vairagya* (dispassion) and *aparigraha* (non-grasping; not possessive) who, seeking freedom soared high. He tasted the nectarine bliss of Bhagavan's grace and presence, and mission accomplished, he left no trace behind. He belonged to the tribe of silent and serious sadhaks in the mould of Bhatt Swami; he embodied perfect *vairagya* and simplicity.

He had arrived at the ashram in the early nineteen forties, a few years before I arrived in 1946 for a permanent stay. He was short and slim. His demeanour was humble and modest. He displayed an unruffled calmness. He wore only a dhoti down to his knees and was bare-chested except for a shoulder cloth with which he used to cover his head whenever he went out. None could say whether it was to protect his head from the sun or as a camouflage to escape scrutiny

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and being spoken to. This showed his intent to remain solitary and dissuaded others from conversing with him. He kept himself to himself and almost never spoke to anyone not even to Bhagavan. His dhoti and upper cloth were worn and discoloured. He always carried with him the book *Raja Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda. He originally had long black hair but always kept his head shaven by the time I arrived. In 1946 he must have been in his early twenties.

He would sit in the farthest corner of the old hall where the two walls joined together, facing the feet of Bhagavan. He would stay in the hall as long as Bhagavan was there. When Bhagavan went out to walk up the hill, Suranna too would go out but would be back before Bhagavan returned. He went to the town for *madhukari* — to collect *bhiksha* (alms) in his hands in the mornings and evenings. He spent the nights in the premises of the Arunachaleswara Temple.

When I arrived in Tiruvannamalai I stayed with a lady Lakshmi amma of the Komutty Vysya caste. I learnt of Suranna's earlier history from her. He came from a very affluent Vysya family of Komutty sub-caste who lived in Bangalore. He was a college graduate. The only son of his parents, he lost his father early. Of a very generous disposition from his childhood, he spent his pocket money regularly to help poor and needy boys. His detachment was remarkable. He left home and ran away to Arunachala without informing anyone. His mother came to know that he was at the ashram and arrived suddenly one day to take him home. In those days there were no guest rooms and visitors had to find their own lodgings. Such lodgings were very scarce and people who came had to make their own arrangements if they wanted to be near the ashram. Lakshmi amma accommodated such visitors in her house and also fed them. Though she would accept money for services rendered, she was generous in feeding the sadhus who lived on the hill.

Suranna's mother stayed with Lakshmi amma and sought her counsel. Lakshmi amma suggested pleading with Bhagavan to advise her son to return home. She followed this advice. She went up to Bhagavan and prayed for his intercession to persuade her son to return home. Overcome with grief she wept bitterly before Bhagavan — a

scene that was reminiscent of the moving sight witnessed at Pavalakundru, when Alagammal broke down, after pleading with her son to return home with her to Madurai. Bhagavan twice asked the young man to go back with his mother. This was very unusual because Bhagavan usually let visitors do as they wished and never advised but merely listened.

But the young man showed no inclination to return home. And when he heard that arrangements were being made to take him home by force, he simply vanished. Eventually a sadhu in the temple premises informed his mother that he had left to visit Pandarpur.

Broken-hearted she left Arunachala after requesting the ashram administration to inform her when her son returned.

Rajagopala Iyer, who was in charge of the library, had been away for some time and had just returned to resume work. There was no proper and elaborate library then. Other than the revolving bookshelf that stood next to Bhagavan, there were just two wooden glass-fronted bureaus (*almirahs*) so that books could be clearly seen from the outside. They were in the corner of the room. 'Ramanasramam' would be written on top of them. That was all the library consisted of in those days.

When he returned to the ashram he noticed Suranna sitting in his usual corner in the old hall. He said to Bhagavan, "The young man who went to Pandarpur is back. His mother left her address and asked us to inform her if he came back here." Bhagavan said, "Yes! Yes! He's back. I noticed him about ten days ago. He hasn't spoken a word. (*Ah ledhu, hoon ledhu*). He hasn't even said that he's been to Pandarpur. So how can I ask him to give us Pandarpur *prasadam*? What can we do?" People who went on pilgrimage when they came back normally brought *prasadam* to be offered to Bhagavan and the devotees. Bhagavan continued, "We have to go according to their *chitta vrittis* (mental inclinations)," meaning let us leave him alone. Nothing further was said.

But Rajagopala Iyer appears to have informed Suranna's mother of his return, as she came back and renewed her attempt to take him home. He repeated his earlier trick of disappearing. She stayed on for

some time fondly expecting him to come back but it was in vain. After she left he surfaced again. He stayed on at the ashram until Bhagavan's nirvana, observing his old routine.

One of Bhagavan's attendants, Venkataratnam, was the only person whom he talked to. Though Suranna accepted food he was never known to accept money from anyone. Sometimes I had the privilege of offering him food.

After Bhagavan's nirvana Suranna left, but came back once, when he stayed with Venkataratnam. He was not seen at the ashram thereafter.

It was a wonder to observe ripe souls such as Suranna, who were drawn from far and near, to Bhagavan's feet. They absorbed the infinite blessings of his glorious presence and then, at his nirvana, simply melted away. ▲

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION

What is Self-Attentiveness?

SADHU OM SWAMI

This article is the third in a new series of practical instructions to assist seekers. Some of the more general instructions such as on breath or mantra practice are not meant as a substitute for Self-enquiry but are secondary exercises to help purify the mind. This is the first article on the actual practice of Self-enquiry. It is a letter written on 18.9.1982 by Sadhu Om in response to enquiries about Bhagavan's teachings.

You ask whether being attentive to the feeling of one's existence-consciousness is (a) feeling one's existence or (b) watching the feeling that exists. Both are correct, for they are one and the same. Feeling, watching or attending is consciousness (*chit*), which is the same as being or existence (*sat*).

So long as we feel our attention to be other than our being, we are told to make effort to attend to our being, but when we do so correctly (that is, when we turn a full 180 degrees towards our being) we will find that our very being is itself attention to our being. In other words, we will realize that *our existence and the consciousness of our existence*

are one and the same, after which we will find that no effort is required to attend to self, for self-attention (*sat-chit*) will be known to be our effortless and natural state. That is why verse 990 of *Sri Ramana Sahasram* ends by saying, “... But why even attend, when my very existence (*sat*) is itself attention (*chit*)?”¹

You ask how the body is to be felt when one is being attentive to the feeling of one’s existence-consciousness — whether (a) it is to be felt as a part of existence-consciousness, or (b) it is to be felt as a container for our existence-consciousness, or (c) it is not to be thought of at all. Only choice (c) is correct. I have explained that attention itself is attachment.² The mind or ego, the consciousness ‘I am the body’, grasps (attaches itself to) the body only by attending to it, and that is how it rises or comes into existence, as Sri Bhagavan says in verse 25 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

Grasping form [a body], it comes into existence. Grasping form [thoughts or perceptions], it endures. Grasping form, it feeds and grows [flourishes or expands] abundantly. Having left one form, it grasps another form. ...

It is this tendency to grasp or attach itself to the body and other forms that is to be destroyed. Of all attachments, this attachment to the body (*dehabhimana*) is the root. Therefore to destroy all attachments, it is sufficient if we destroy this root-attachment. Unless this root-attachment is destroyed, no other attachment can be permanently destroyed, for like the leaves and branches of a tree they will continue to sprout out so long as the root remains undestroyed.³

If we in any way attend to, think of or feel the body, we cannot give up our attachment to it. That is why Sri Bhagavan gives us the all-important clue, “Attend only to the mere feeling ‘I.’” The mind

can attend to second and third persons only after it has risen by grasping the body as ‘I’, and hence the mind can never give up its attachment to the body by attending to any second or third person object. The only way to give up one’s attention to (and attachment to) the body is to attend to the mere first person feeling ‘I’.

Though that first person feeling may be taken to be the ego, the mixed awareness ‘I am so-and-so’, ‘I am this body’, *what you must try to attend to during self-enquiry is the ‘I’ portion in this mixed awareness.* In *Maharshi’s Gospel* Sri Bhagavan says:

... The ego is therefore called *chit-jada-granthi* [the knot that binds consciousness (*chit*), ‘I am’, to the non-conscious (*jada*), this body]. In your investigation into the source of the *aham-vritti* [the ‘I’-thought or ego), you take the essential *chit* aspect of the ego. ...⁴

That is to say, in the mixed awareness ‘I am the body’, you must try to attend to the ‘I am’ portion (which is *chit*) and not to the ‘body’ portion (which is *jada*). When you thus attend to the feeling ‘I’ or ‘I am’, then the ‘body’ feeling, which is only an unreal adjunct, will automatically subside or slip away (since no one is there to attend to it), and the pure ‘I am’ alone will remain shining.

Therefore, when trying to attend to ‘I’ (the feeling of your existence-consciousness), the body (which is a mere second person object) should not at all be thought of or felt in any way. Then only will your attention be a correct and true first person attention. If the thought of the body comes to your mind during self-enquiry, see ‘who knows this body?’ and thereby turn your attention back once more to the mere feeling of ‘I’.

Though it is true that the body cannot exist apart from or outside of existence-consciousness, it should not really be considered to be a part of existence-consciousness, because existence-consciousness is in absolute truth the one undivided and unlimited whole, which admits no parts. And to think of the body as a container for our existence-

¹ Sri Sadhu Om, *The Path of Sri Ramana, Part One*. Sri Ramana Kshetra, Tiruvannamalai, 1990. p. 84.

² Ibid., p.101.

³ Ibid., pp. 44-5.

⁴ 3rd ed. p.82, 9th ed. p.85.

consciousness is still more wrong, for the reason given by Sri Bhagavan in verse 3 of *Ekatma Panchakam*:

When in fact the body is within self, [which is] existence-consciousness-bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*), he who thinks that self is within that insentient body is like one who thinks that the cloth [of the screen], which is the substratum of the [cinema] picture, exists within that picture.⁵

The experience of a *jnani* is that he (the existence-consciousness 'I am') alone exists, and that the mind, body and all else are mere false appearances, which have no real existence. How can that which is unreal and truly non-existent, be either a part of or a container for that which alone really exists?

You ask whether what one feels as 'I' will be either the ego or self. Truly the feeling 'I' is only one. When that one feeling 'I' remains unmixed with adjuncts it is called 'self', and when it appears as if mixed with adjuncts (such as 'the body' or 'so-and-so') it is called 'ego'. But since the adjuncts which make up the ego are truly unreal, the ego is only a false appearance (like the seeming snake seen in a rope) while self alone really exists (like the rope which is the base on which the unreal snake appears).

If you are able to understand this truth even intellectually, then you will be able to understand that what one feels as 'I' is truly only self and not the ego. But since many people are not able to grasp this truth, and since they believe that what they feel now as 'I' is only the ego and not self, Sri Bhagavan used to advise them to attend to the ego-feeling, and he said that if the ego is thus attended to, it will disappear, as he says in verse 25 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

... When sought [or scrutinized], this formless ghost, the ego, takes to flight.

This is just like saying to a person who is frightened on seeing a snake, "Look at it carefully and it will disappear." If he thus looks

⁵ See *The Mountain Path*, January 1982, pp. 9-10.

⁶ Sri Sadhu Om, op.cit., p.112.

closely at the snake, it will disappear, being found to be nothing but a rope.

Therefore, even if you now think that what you feel as 'I' is the ego, if you attend to it vigilantly you will find that it is not really the ego but only your real self. That is why it is written, "Moreover, it is not necessary for sincere aspirants even to name beforehand the feeling 'I' either as ego or as self."⁶ Since all people know clearly and without doubt that they have the feeling 'I', it is also written, "Thus it is sufficient if we cling to the feeling 'I' uninterrupted till the very end. ... What is important to be sure of during practice is that our attention is turned only towards 'I', the first person singular feeling."⁷

The reason why the difference between enquiry in the form 'whence am I?' and enquiry in the form 'who am I?' has been analysed elsewhere⁸ is not to suggest that there is any difference between attending to the ego and attending to self, but is only to show that — even though the 'I' in 'whence am I?' can only be the ego and not self (since self can never have a source or a place of rising) — enquiry into the source or rising-place of the ego (by investigating 'whence am I?') is the same both in practice and in result as enquiry into self (by investigating 'who am I?'). That is why it is written, "In either of these two kinds of enquiry, *since the attention of the aspirant is focused only on himself*, nothing other than the real self, which is the true import of the word 'I', will be finally experienced."⁹

Another point to be noted is that whereas in the question 'whence am I?' the word 'I' denotes only the ego, in the question 'who am I?' it may be taken to denote either the ego or self. But whichever one may take it to denote, it will make no difference either to the practice (which is to attend only to the feeling 'I') or to the result (which is to know the true nature of 'I'). ▲

⁷ Ibid., p.112.

⁸ Ibid., Chapter Seven.

⁹ Ibid., p.111.



Sri K. Natesan

DAVID FRAWLEY

Sri K. Natesan, who recently passed away at the age of 96, was one of the oldest living disciples of both Ramana Maharshi and Ganapati Muni. He had been in frequent contact with both of them since he was a boy and up to the time of their passing. He lived at the Ramanashram for many years after his wife passed away, alternating staying with his children in Bangalore and Pondicherry. He was in Tiruvannamalai, in fact in a car driving by the ashram at the time he expired.

Natesan spent the last years of his life editing and publishing the eleven volume collected works of Ganapati Muni, with the last volume finished shortly before his passing, which works were released at the ashram. He took painstaking detail in making sure the works were as

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accurate as possible and were passed on for future generations as well as could be done. While the Muni's works were collected only in the Sanskrit, it is likely that they will be translated in the future and gain the recognition that they deserve owing to his efforts.

I first met Natesan in 1991 as part of my search for Vedic works of Ganapati Muni. I had been in contact with M. P. Pandit, the secretary of the Aurobindo Ashram for many years. I learned through him that his guru, Kapali Sastri, who was himself a disciple of Ganapati Muni for many years, noted that a few such writings of Ganapati might exist. I was told at the Ramanashram that Natesan was staying there and might have such works and was eager to meet him.

Meeting Natesan, he showed me many neatly handwritten copies of Ganapati Muni's works that he had copied and collected over the years, travelling to various parts of South India, where the Muni or his disciples had resided in order to get them. He had a number of such volumes in his collection. He most graciously gave me several volumes that he had extra copies of. I took them back to America and over time was able to gradually study the Muni's works through them.

I had known of Ganapati as the great disciple of Ramana who put Ramana's teachings into beautiful Sanskrit verses, and as the author of the great *Uma Sahasram*, an epic poem of 1000 verses on the Devi that revealed many great secrets of Yoga, Shakti and Self-realization. Natesan showed me Ganapati's Vedic works, which were much more extensive than Pandit knew of or than I suspected.

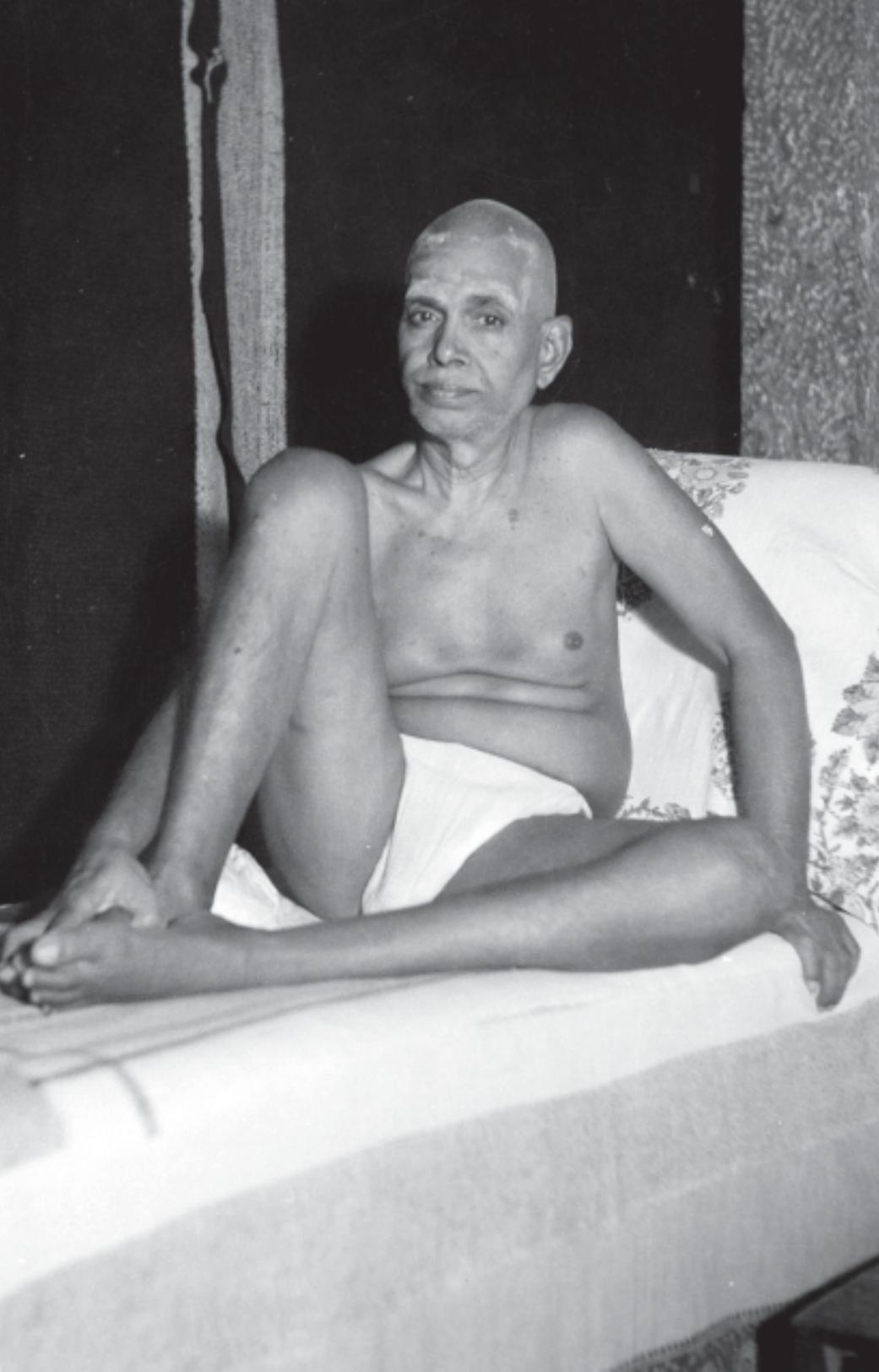
In Ganapati's works there were also many special Sutras on Vedanta, Tantra, Yoga, Vedas, Ayurveda and Vedic astrology, all covered in great depth and detail, from an inner experience, a profound anubhuti, not simply some intellectual study. In fact, he revived the old Sutra style in a way that had not occurred in India in centuries. Ganapati's philosophical writings proved to be quite amazing, covering all aspects of Advaita sadhana that he had learned through the Maharshi but as further connected to Raja Yoga, mantra, Pranayama and many special methods of focusing the awareness and the inner vision. He was not at all limited to Bhakti and mantra as some have thought but had numerous secrets of Jnana Yoga that one only finds in works like Vijnana

Bhairava. His Stotras to the deities were works of the highest poetic value, in the most complex meters, such as one only finds in Sankara's Stotras.

Natesan proved to be the main preserver of Ganapati's works and the full range of his teachings that cover all aspects of Santana Dharma. That he was able to bring the Muni's work to print with little support, encouragement or resources and at such an advanced age is a sign of the great power of his Samkalpa and his Bhakti. Yet Natesan was not just a collector, he carefully studied Ganapati's works and brought them into his own meditations and sadhana. Many of them he committed to memory.

I visited Natesan over the years and continued to appreciate not only his regard for Ganapati's work but his own personal wisdom and insight. He had a clarity of mind and great sense of humour, as well as certain detachment and humility that made his company both insightful and pleasant. He encouraged all who visited him, including many young people from the West, who he would relate his stories with Ramana and Ganapati in the good old days before the crowds came. Natesan had known all the great devotees not only of Ramana but also many in Pondicherry who had been around Sri Aurobindo and had much that he could relate to receptive listeners.

Fortunately, I was able to meet him just a few weeks before his passing, after not having seen him for a few years. One could see a glow in his eyes, though he could hardly move his body. He talked as if Ramana and Ganapati (Nayana as he affectionately called him) were present with him in the room. Clearly he prolonged his life to finish his work and with the work completed he could move on to the higher realms. ▲



Sri Ramana Nama Mahimai

The Glory of Sri Ramana's Name

SADHU OM SWAMI

TRANSLATION BY SADHU TANMAYA CHAITANYA

Translator's Preface: *Bhaja Govindam* is a popular hymn of *Adi Shankara*, giving a graphic description of the vagaries of life and the importance of enquiry in developing discrimination. It guides the path of *sadhana* with invaluable counsel to navigate through life, while exposing the subtle fallacies that can beset the attitude of even a genuine seeker. Embellished with charming poetic beauty, it is set to an easy gallop in a lilting metre. It has enthralled generations of spiritual aspirants and its evocative appeal remains undiminished till today, being an inspirational and complete work. It is also called '*Moha Mudgara*', as it hammers at all human delusions, born of universal ignorance.

Sadhu Om Swami was the prolific author of poetic works in praise of Sri Bhagavan. His principal work, *The Path of Sri Ramana*, is an exemplary treatise on the practice of Sri Bhagavan's teachings.

The present work is set to the *same tune and metre* and serves the same purpose for devotees of Bhagavan Ramana, where devotion and knowledge fuse in an inimitable blend. It is no exaggeration to say that it is the Tamil equivalent of *Bhaja Govindam*, in view of its similarity with regard to its majestic style, powerful contents and the heart-melting appeal it exerts on *Ramana bhaktas*.

The original Tamil work may be found in *Ramana Geetham*, page 46, published by Sri Ramanasramam, 1996.

Refrain

Ramanaya Namō, Ramanaya Namō,
Ramanaya Namō Namō — May we ever chant thus;
For Bhagavan Ramana is none other
Than Lord Arunachala Siva,
Adored by the Lotus-Seated Brahma, the Creator,
And the dark cloud-hued Vishnu.

Text

1. Can anything match the glory of the Sadguru's Name?
Can there be true bliss here or hereafter,
Without chanting the same?
Is there anything that cannot be accomplished by His Grace?
Is there an iota of doubt in the Compassion of the Guru?
2. After countless births in the journey of the soul,
We have come to the Holy Feet of the Sadguru at last,
By clinging to them in loving devotion, may we attain salvation
By learning from the Heart, the *supreme Art of Unlearning*.
3. Scriptures and Vedas are indeed a hard torture to learn,
They are hardly a match for the Sadguru's teachings;
For atheists, surely there is no salvation ever;
With faith in Guru's words, we shall attain Deliverance.

4. However long we may live in this body,
Whatever wealth and relationships we may enjoy,
Like a stone hurled up in the sky, falls back to the ground,
This body that we cherish so dearly, will also fall off one day.
5. Into whose blessed tongues, the Grace-bestowing
Ramana's Name enters unceasingly,
Those devotees will never fear Death approaching,
For their pure hearts are truly the abode of the Lord.
6. Endless questioning, sterile logic and puerile debates,
Sacrifices and Vedic rituals for gaining heavenly pleasures —
Will these ever bestow the true Knowledge of the Self?
Devotion to the Holy Feet of the Sadguru
Speedily fetches the Liberating Wisdom!
7. Righteous life, charities, pilgrimage, the staff
And the water pot — the insignia of ascetics —
Can these alone give the Final Knowledge?
Binding *karmas* and latent *vasanas* need to be pulverised,
The missile of the Sadguru's Grace alone can accomplish these.
8. Bookish knowledge, vain degrees and honours trivial,
Or the cunning schemes of a selfish intellect —
Never can these redeem us from the clutches of death.
But all misery will end in the chanting of "Ramanaya Namō"!
9. By merely growing old, does one become wise and exalted?
Do tenacious desires, dormant *vasanas* depart with age?
Can a life devoid of purpose be called a well-lived life?
Without the Grace of Bhagavan Ramana,
Can the malaise of *samsara* be cured?
10. The merits of chanting all divine Names,
And the pining love for all divine Forms,
All these gained easily by the Light of Ramana Consciousness,
For all deities merge in the Form of the Sadguru !

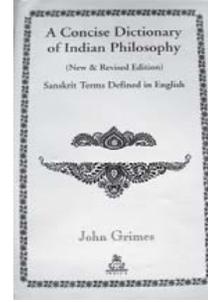
11. The holy waters of Ganga wash away one's sins,
Worshipping the Lord in Kashi bestows great merit,
The blessings of the family deities pleased by ardent worship,
Chanting the name of Sadguru confers all these at once.
12. Hoarding wealth, thinking "Thus shall we enjoy,"
Is but surely inviting misery;
Every name of Guru Ramana is a pillar of gold,
Boldly we aver that this is the matchless treasure over here!
13. We are not this human encasement; believing otherwise,
The death warrant from Lord Yama arrives tomorrow.
If we constantly chant in our hearts "Ramanaya Namu,"
What business shall we have with even Yama?
14. All we see here is in the grip of Lord Yama,
Effects of all *karmas* are the scorching heat of *samsara*;
Truly all our needless anxieties and sorrows will vanish,
If only we chant 'Ramana' without break.
15. Sharpness of intellect, fame and wealth, merits
And learning — all lie in the domain of darkness,
Siddhis (occult powers) too are mere delusions of one's mind,
Grace truly manifests by chanting the name of Ramana.
16. Name and fame, seats of power and pelf,
Of what enduring use are all these?
Can public discourses ever elucidate the Truth of the Self?
Worshipping the Guru, clarity dawns upon us!
17. Choking the breath and suppressing the speech
Disorients the mind and cranks one up in distress;
Without *vichara*, these can never reveal the subtle Truth,
The Name of the Guru guides us safely without fail.
18. Through the Grace of the Guru, one can attain Bliss
Temporal or timeless, whichever one seeks;
Like the wish-fulfilling heavenly tree (*kalpa vrksha*),
His Grace fulfils the wishes of the heart soaked in His Love.
19. By His mere Glance, Guru Ramana will nullify the
sanchita (accumulated) and *agamya* (newly earned) *karmas*,
The *prarabdha karma* will lose all its sting and bite,
He will forever remove the delusion that 'we are the body',
And shall serve us the nectar of Grace with playful ease.
20. All the power of penance that one gathers in crores of *yugas*,
Is easily accomplished by the Gracious Glance of the Sadguru,
Those who have experienced the power of His Grace
Shall revel in delight, chanting "Ramanaya Namu"!
21. Even the dumb will sing lilting poetry of vibrant power,
Even a lame person will vault over mountains;
The creeper of evil *karma* withers away too,
Accomplished by the sweet Grace of Ramana.
22. Meek seekers like me will also be saved by the Guru's Grace,
By His command, even the sun changes its course,
A sod of clay gets transformed into a bar of purest gold,
Even a wretched mind attains *Brahman* by His Mercy!
23. Gender and numbers bandied by pundits
Will vanish in Enlightenment by His Grace;
The Guru, who unites with the Self of His loving devotees,
Is alone our very life-breath, refuge and solace.
24. The triads and the dyads, arising from the ego,
Countless *vasanas* of earlier births, endless thoughts —
One wonders how will these get erased? Despair not thus,
For Lord Ramana alone is our spiritual Father!
25. All the *karmas* of our past births will take aeons
To get worked out, — such is the mystery of *karma*;
Attaining the Grace of the Guru this day,
Our cycle of births ends in a trice.
This is the *Dharma* of the Guru, to sunder our bondage!
26. Using our hands, can we swim across an ocean?
Can we measure the span of the sky with our bare legs?

Without the Grace of Ramana, can we cross over *samsara*?
So do we say, "*Arunachala Ramana, Nama Om Om!*"

27. Whose cosmic Form exceeds the endless skies,
Such Lord came with the mantle of human form upon earth,
And blazed like a sun, showering spiritual wealth
— Thus do we recognise Sadguru Ramana!
28. Like the care and concern we have for our own welfare,
Sadguru Ramana seeks us with a million-fold greater care;
He lived in our midst as a god nonpareil,
Dancing in our hearts as the Self all the while!
29. O Lord Ramana! You manifested upon the earth
When worldlings raved about, saying there is no God;
Your immeasurable Grace can never miss its target!
With your advent, can Self-Knowledge ever die?
30. Oh, my Father! I reached Your Feet upon the sacred sands
Of Arunachala; surely no grief can ever touch me again;
Please do take me over as Your willing slave and servant
To serve Thy purpose and wait upon Your sweet Will!

Om Tat Sat.
Sri Ramanarpanamastu! ▲

BOOK REVIEWS



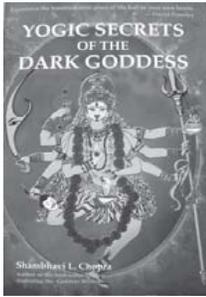
A CONCISE DICTIONARY OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY (New and Revised) Sanskrit Terms Defined in English by John Grimes. Indica Books, D40/18, Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP. pp. 455, Rs795 (HB). ISBN: 81-86569-80-4 www.indicabooks.com

The book under review satisfies a keenly felt need for a sure English reference book in Vedanta and other major philosophical systems including Jainism, Buddhism, Saiva Siddhanta and Vira Saivism. John Grimes who studied under the eminent TMP Mahadevan among others at the University of Madras, is an acknowledged expert in the academic west on the philosophy of Vedanta. This book originated from a series of notes made during that time which have been expanded into an authoritative book which has become a standard reference text in American universities. The book was originally published by the State University of New York Press and now is available in India at a reasonable cost, considering the size and the depth of knowledge it provides.

The Dictionary gives first the word in English, then the *devanagari* and lastly, an explanation of the word or concept. While the definitions are philosophically precise, the book will also be very helpful to the layman as the words and concepts are elucidated in a simple, apt language. There is a belief that the language of Advaita is archaic and obscure but this book shows how in the right hands this idiom can prove to be very specific, simple and clear.

The compiler has made a difficult subject easy without compromising its subtlety and complexity. I would recommend this Dictionary to anyone interested in deepening their understanding of Vedanta. It is a valuable reference book which is a delight to consult, dip into or read through.

— Amrit Ray



YOGIC SECRETS OF THE DARK GODDESS by Shambhavi L. Chopra. Wisdom Tree, 4779/23, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002, 2008. pp.326, Rs345,US\$19.95. ISBN: 978-81-8328-096-9 www.wisdomtreeindia.com

It takes a special kind of mind to write about the dark goddess, Mother Kali. There are more than sufficient scholarly, dare one say obscure and impenetrable books on the ten *mahavidyas* but few written by a practitioner who obviously has direct experience of Kali and is willing to pass on this knowledge. The author understands both the dangers and joys of exploring this little understood world and has presented a guide book like no other in this field. For one, it is erudite without being boring; two, she infuses each chapter devoted to an aspect of the goddess with a subtle enthusiasm. This unfoldment is not a static manual but a living demonstration of the power of the feminine. It is poetic; it is dense with arcane knowledge which in the safe hands can lead a dedicated seeker on the right energetic path to that which is beyond manifestation.

Mother Kali is generally portrayed as standing astride of a prone Lord Shiva, holding a severed head in one hand and a sword in another, while her tongue sticks out and dribbles drops of blood. It is not an appealing image. In fact, it is frightening. There has been a perverted perception of her role in this universe. If one wonders what Ramakrishna Paramahansa saw in the divine Mother Kali, this book will help explain how there is also a radiant beneficence to her that is rarely understood. “I viewed Kali in a different light, or perhaps Mahadevi Kali chose to manifest her softer golden hues of benevolence before me... as long as we see Kali as terrible we remain in the distance from her.”

To ignore the feminine is to do so at our own risk. Too often Kali has been associated with dark impulsive forces and not the transcendent power of light. We see Mother Kali as dark because her light is so sharp our minds are blinded by her power.

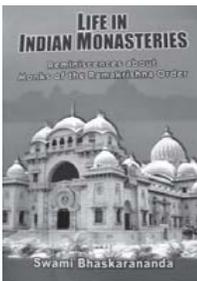
There is the danger we can become dry and rigid. Before the strong winds of inevitable change which is the rule in life, such an attitude is

foolish and stultifying. Like the young bamboo sapling we can bend according to circumstance and yet retain our centre of gravity. The feminine is that force which not only cleanses the mind but also reveals the hidden mysteries of our soul. Ma Kali, if one it to believe Chopra, is the catalyst that liberates us. For some reason I am reminded of Tagore’s idiosyncratic but intensely vibrant translations of *The Poems of Kabir*. In the same way Chopra gives us not the dry parchment of dead instructions but a living map. — Christopher Quilkey

THE ETHICS OF DECONSTRUCTION by Simon Critchley, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2007. pp 293, Rs 495(HB). ISBN 978-81-208-2764-6. www.mlbd.com

Who *doesn't* enjoy seeing Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) wunderkind of ‘Deconstructionism’, taken down a peg or two? This is the salutary effect of turning the cat in the pan against the thinker whose Zen-like tool of ‘turning text against itself’ ended up in a generation of students “rejecting hopes in logo-centric anchor points in consciousness”—all well and good ... though somehow premature without Zen training, or Sri Ramana’s assiduous exercise of asking, ‘*Who am I?*’ The warm-blooded Simon Critchley now returns Deconstructionism to the core of being: *love*, where Derrida’s elder (and perhaps spiritual better) Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) supplies answers to what he calls *ethical* demands placed on a Derrida reader who is of Derrida’s lineage—Heidegger and Husserl, philosophers of phenomenology. In the late 1940s Levinas was already beginning where Derrida’s 1960s deconstruction of our grasp of Being left off: at a moral impasse, since Derrida’s *différance* (neologism for slippage of meaning in attempts at reality), yes, exposes a void, but without salvation, or, rather, without justification for living. The erudite and endearing Professor of Philosophy, Critchley, recalls that skepticism *is not* philosophy, and, in an ongoing struggle to define culture, climbs aboard the careening caravan of Deconstructionism and helps steer it away from foundering in a morass of *moral skepticism*. Indeed, the *prima philosophia* of oft-time Derrida mentor Levinas restores the notion of a “socio-political order of organizing and improving our human survival” ... returning us from the trap of analytical gambits to direct ‘experience’. One might

say Derrida too wants us to purely 'experience' but he seems coldly and loftily to refuse commitment, even to this. Elder Levinas is ready however to commit, rejecting "why is there *being* rather than *nothingness*?"—in favor of, "*how does being justify itself*:". His proposal, that one's *being* justifies itself in the same non-judgmental "*aporia*" of Derrida *but* in an ethics of the self, *the same*, coming face-to-face with *another*, where one gains access to "the interior" — or true anchor. In contrast with an empty skepticism, this *aporia* or state of perplexity while face-to-face with the Other, even with Nature, removes us from our slumbering dogmatism, or *doxa*, and returns us to *philosophy*. Thus from Derrida's skeptical cul-de-sac — the *aporia*, perplexity, or unknowing, becomes the bridge to *love*. This *particular* route-map to *love* under review might seem tortuous to those comfortable with more homely guide books; however, readers intrigued with the mid-twentieth century Deconstructionist phenomenon, and, moreover, *who can enjoy a shift of consciousness through logo-centric anchor points such as these ...* who would like to know more about an underappreciated Levinas ... and, who grasp the mystical basis of modern philosophy's analytic search for truth, from Parmenides, through to Socrates and Plato, this book is a keeper. — Sadhu Govind



LIFE IN INDIAN MONASTERIES
Reminiscences about Monks of the Ramakrishna
Order by Swami Bhaskarananda. Sri Ramakrishna
Math, Chennai, 2009. pp204, Rs70. ISBN: 978-
81-7823-502-8 www.sriramakrishnamath.org
There is more wisdom and joy in this small book
under review than that of a whole flotilla of weighty,
learned tomes.

The book is a happy collection of anecdotes about the first generation monks who were direct disciples of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the second generation monks who were disciples of the disciples. The third part is a collection of general reminiscences. The book is a record of events which occurred in the various maths of the Order and give us an insight into how the monks applied their knowledge to everyday

events. There are quite a large number of passport size photos of the relevant monks. My only regret is that the book did not go on and on.

Here is one gem: "When Swami Vishuddhananda, then vice-president of the global Order, was asked to give spiritual initiation to devotees by the then president, Swami Sankarananda; out of genuine humility, he responded, 'I can't play the role of a guru. I don't think I'm fit to give spiritual initiation to anybody.' Swami Sankarananda replied, 'None of us are fit to be a guru, but Sri Ramakrishna likes to play with counterfeit coins. Even though we aren't fit, he gets his work done by using us. That is his glory!'" — Christopher Quilkey

MATHRU DARSANAM. Translated from the English version of an original text *Matri Darshan* by Bhaiji (Bengali). Ma Anandamayee Foundation, Ahmedabad. Niveditha Publishing House, 4/8 Muthukrishnan Street, Pandu Bazar, T. Nagar, Chennai 600 017. pp. 192, Rs 70.

This is the first book on Sri Ma Anandamayee translated into Tamil. Ma Anandamayee (1896-1982) hailed from East Bengal. She is little-known in the South, having undertaken just two tours. In 1952 she laid the foundation stone for the samadhi shrine of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In the North there are more than 30 ashrams in her name. She was widely acclaimed and recognised by all levels of society as a seer, who from her very birth had the fullest realisation.

The self-effacing author had an understanding of Sri Ma, which was probably greater than any other devotee. This book covers the period 1924 to 1932, and Bhaiji relates many of his personal intimate experiences and interactions with Sri Ma during that period.

In his own words: "Although tiny portions of the wide sky are mirrored in pools and lakes, these reflections cannot give us an idea of the immensity of the firmament. Similarly it is impossible to become aware of the infinite magnitude of Mother's true Being by what has been reflected by her Grace through this very imperfect instrument."

This very self-effacement has enabled something of the magnetic and extraordinary attraction that all her devotees felt for her, to be conveyed to the reader of this text. It is hoped that this small book will serve as an introduction to this great saint for the Tamil-reading public. — Christopher Pegler ▲



Homa Athi Rudra Maha Yajnam

An exceptional *homa* was performed at Sri Ramanasramam from the 15th March to 22nd March. A special area was created in the open space adjacent to the dining hall with all the necessary *yantras* and *mandalas* drawn and constructed for the sacred ritual.

The *Athi Rudra Maha Yagna* was performed by some 175 Brahmin priests, many of who came from Sri Sankara Mutts of Kanchipuram and Sringeri. The *yagna* consisting of 1008 *rudrams* chanted over eight days. The ashram resounded with the sacred Vedic chants and many felt blessed by the occasion. The *homa* was organized by the Sri Chandrasekhara Bharathi Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Veda Vidyalaya Trust and dedicated to world peace and prosperity.

The *Homa Athi Rudra Maha Yajnam* is a significant form of ritual devotion to Lord Siva, who is worshipped as the root of cosmic energy

for creation. He is the embodiment of infinite mercy, compassion and love. The *yagna* offered up prayers in praise of Lord Shiva requesting his blessings for all.

It should be noted that Bhagavan encouraged the chanting of the Vedas in his presence each morning and evening. Tamil parayana chanting on a regular basis started much later. The ashram instituted the Veda Patasala during Bhagavan's lifetime.

Tamil New Year

Tamil New Year is celebrated on Tuesday the 14th April by people of Tamil Nadu, and Tamil people throughout the world.

The traditional greeting on this day is *puthandu vazhtu*, which means Happy New Year. This auspicious day is also popular as *Varusha Pirappu*. According to Hindu myth, it is on this day that Lord Brahma created the Universe.

Traditionally on this day the *panchangam* (almanac) is read. In the ashram this is an annual event that happens in front of Bhagavan's Samadhi. One of the ways to celebrate the new year is with special dishes. The dish associated with New Year is *Maanga Pachadi*, that consists of raw mangoes, jaggery and neem flowers which tastes sweet, salty, sour and bitter. This symbolises the different conditions one has to face in one's life.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's 59th Aradhana

The 59th anniversary of the *Brahma Nirvana* of Sri Bhagavan was celebrated at the Ashram in the usual elaborate manner on the 22nd April. It is on this day we particularly remember Bhagavan who was born on this earth to help and guide us towards liberation.

The proceedings on *Aradhana* Day commenced in the early hours with the recitation of *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* and *Ulladu Narpadu* of Sri Bhagavan. This was followed by chanting of *Ramana Chatvarimsat* and the first *puja* (during which milk is offered to Sri Bhagavan). Devotees were offered breakfast.

After *Ekadasa Rudra Mahanyasa*, *abhishekam* was provided with to Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam. Simultaneously *Mahanarayana Upanishad* was chanted. Special *puja* was performed, followed by *arati*, the finale around eleven. Devotees were given lunch after the *arati*.

A special chanting of the *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* was performed in front of the Mahanirvana room on 14th of April. The chant culminated at 8:47 pm, the minute Bhagavan shed his mortal body.

The Mahapuja of Bhagavan's Mother

The Mahapuja of Bhagavan's Mother was celebrated on the 18th May. It commemorates the *mukti* of Sri Bhagavan's mother on *vaisakha bahula navami*. This special ritual is regarded as a major event in the ashram and many devotees gathered for the function in honour of Alagammal who was privileged to be the mother of Sri Bhagavan and received *mukti* at his hands.

