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Ramana Ashtottaram

64. ओं अमितविक्रमाय नमः

Om Amita vikramāya namah.

Prostration to the boundless victor, the one of immeasurable heroism.

Peace or *santi* is the inner or awareness aspect and Power or *sakti* is the outer or active aspect of reality. Perfect peace is boundless power. The power of Being and the energy of Awareness are potential in stillness and visible in movement. *Prasantah* is *amita vikramah*. The top surface of a very high column of water may be still, but the stillness holds and hides an enormous force. Bhagavan's living peace brings active power and moulds heroes out of common clay.

65. ओं सुकुमाराय नमः

Om Sukumārāya namah.

Prostration to the comely Son, Muruga, ever fresh, ever fair, ever fragrant, ever young.

Pranava means ever new. *Om* is the symbol of *jnana*, the awareness which is perennially fresh, spontaneous, creative, unpolluted by any contact and purifying everything it touches. Muruga, god of beauty, god of youth, god of the future, is born of the perennially renewed union of sunlight and the Ganga at its source, both ever fresh and immaculate. *Amita vikrama*, the ever victorious warrior, and *Sukumarah*, the ever youthful hero full of courage and wisdom, delights in action every moment as he faces the future, joyous, free and unafraid. ▲

EDITORIAL

Grace Under Fire

It is a necessary rite that we pass through at certain points of our lives when we are faced with a crisis that has the capacity to define who we are and will inexorably influence the way we think and behave for the rest of our lives. We are faced with situations over which we have little or no control and the stark choices contain an air of inevitability. We are in the dark and rely as much as anything, on hope to get us through the troubling time. The confrontation with the childhood school-yard bully which we generally lose because we lack the cunning or brute strength; the inevitable pangs of adolescence; sibling rivalry; the predictable battles between fathers and sons as the latter seeks to assert their individuality. Few can escape these challenges without a scar. They all seem terribly real at the time but when we look back we realise that all of us at some time faced these dilemmas. It lessens the bitterness and helps us see that our lives though distinctly individual, are all part of a pattern that has been repeated from the beginnings of human history. That is why myth is just as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago, be it in Hindu, Greek or Mesopotamian.

Sri Ramana's journey to seek his father is also part of myth. His act was a leap of faith. It was the inevitable result of the extraordinary death experience which catapulted the young Ramana out of his comfortable filial setting for all its financial insecurity, into the ascetic life of abandonment which held onto nothing whatsoever, and that included the safety of his physical body. It is impossible for us to understand what exactly occurred for the simple reason that it is unrepeatable in the original context. By that one means we cannot communicate it using concepts and second hand comparisons. To understand it we have to experience it for ourselves. Who has the courage to do that; to face one's own annihilation with equanimity?

To lesser degrees we die each day as the ideas and emotions we hold dear are shown to be inadequate, foolish or redundant. Our victories and defeats are as insubstantial as vapour. We are reborn each day, each hour, each minute, and each second. There are three principle theories of creation in Advaita Vedanta: *ajata vada* (non-causality), *drishti-srishti-vada* (simultaneous creation) and *srishhti-drishti vada* (gradual creation). The first is the experience of the jnani and is beyond our purview while the third is the conventionally accepted view of objective reality with its cause and effect, and need not concern us. The second theory says that we create the world each instant: the concrete world and our sense of identity as an individual. The visual symbol of Lord Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, is a representation of pulsating creation and destruction.

With the rise of the 'I thought' the world appears. There is simultaneous creation and destruction. We are the world. The world is a reflection of our thoughts. From the standpoint of Atman this imaginary world is no creation at all but for us who take ourselves to be real with our abundance of thoughts, the world definitely exists. How then did we arrive at our imaginary world and what does it tell us?

The purpose of meditation is to purify the mind to the point where ultimately we can 'see' in the 'now' the rise and subsidence of thought. The development of *sattvic* qualities through right living and right attitudes are all meant to clear our power of attention of all distractions

so that we may be fully aware of our existence at each moment. And there will eventually come a time when we unexpectedly transcend the narrow confines of our mind. These are so-called lesser samadhis and are necessary preliminaries before the more profound encounters with the Absolute. It is not in our hands when and how the great experience may happen. Krishna in the Gita says it chooses its own time. In other words, choice is not in our power and to fantasise about it is useless, a delusion. What we can do is to be conscious of those moments which test our mettle and resolve to remain true to our quest. There are those famous lines from Robert Frost:

"I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less travelled by,
And that made all the difference."

Those cross-roads are the predicament; a source of confusion and anxiety, unless we are fully established in the teachings of the guru, then the choice is obvious. We move not in the direction our minds tempt us, with dreams of satisfaction, but into the unknown for we are not expected to go round in circles, repeating ourselves but rather to pursue that which is beyond our conditioning (*samskaras*). Like the modern search for intelligent life in outer space, or ancient Yudhishthira's frustrating pursuit for territory to establish a dharmic kingdom that was rightfully his in the first place, we too are on a quest and that voyage, though it appears perplexing, is all part of a whole. There is meaning in our lives when we fulfil the purpose which impels us and not otherwise. Only we ourselves can know what our *svadharma* (destiny) is. What may appear to be a failure in the eyes of others, may actually in the view of the player, be a victory.

One of the oddities of history is the glamour with which defeat can be invested. It is not so much the accomplishment or lack of, as the symbolic value of the event which means so much. We all have suffered tragic events which on reflection have redefined us dramatically.

The British commemorate the tragedy of Scott's ill-fated expedition to the Antarctic with a quiet fervour that other nations normally reserve for victory because it signified a triumph of the human spirit over adversity. The dignity of the expedition members was undiminished, however fraught the circumstance. The last words of the crippled Sergeant Oates exemplified it all as he deliberately walked out into the cold and dark so as not to impede the desperate scramble back to base of the rest of them: "I am just going outside and may be some time." The degree of self-sacrifice is astonishing. Is this defeat or is it victory?

The search involves heroism, sacrifice, nobility and tenacity. These qualities take various shapes and forms. Heroism is that which takes us out of ourselves. It drives us to take the road less travelled. A hero is one who overcomes fear, not one who doesn't feel it. A brute who mindlessly tramples the opposition is no champion, but one who conquers fear by doing what is right is brave. This applies in all aspects of life; after all if we follow the reasoning of the *Bhagavad Gita*, our life is a battlefield on which we face our relatives every day, teachers and companions who would deter us from fulfilling our duty to our higher selves. We reserve respect for those acts of our nation, of others and ourselves which live up to a code, spoken or unspoken. In our personal lives, it is not so much what we accomplish as how we go about it. It is grace under fire.

We do not necessarily need to go out and find some dragon to slay in order to prove how brave we are. For instance one's opinion of oneself is often somewhat finer and grander than the world perceives and we need the clear, ruthless eyes of truth to fight our delusions. Self-importance or false-pride, be it crass or refined, comes from the failure to listen carefully. Sometimes others gift us with their own opinions of our characters, gossip and slander come under this heading, and learning to ignore malicious intent is a dragon to be slain. We should in turn, resist the temptation to gossip, for all it does is make one feel supposedly superior and, in a subtle way, arrogant.

Lies are the privilege of the lazy, the irresponsible and embittered. They are prepared to sacrifice anyone on the altar of their own self-regard. One person's truth is another person's sham. Even Bhagavan

suffered from this when Perumal Swami who, after faithfully serving him for years, turned against him, causing endless trouble but all the while declaring that even if he went to hell he would not leave Bhagavan. Typically Bhagavan replied with a smile that he himself would go to hell to retrieve the errant swami. For us, even if we may not have it in us to forgive, to be the recipient of another's blind animosity is an opportunity to annihilate one's own predispositions and biases. We all in our own way have betrayed others and if we are gallant enough we can at least admit it to ourselves. The sign that we have been pardoned for our sin is that we never do it again.

So when we look out onto the world what we see is a mirror of ourselves and with it comes an obligation to judge it according to its merits with the power of intellect. We have two instruments at our disposal, detachment and discrimination or to put it another way, mercy and rigour. We can exercise them to set us free or we can deny them and confuse the glamour of the world with our own good. We can go to sleep or we can continue on the journey using the fire of conflict as an opportunity for grace and awakening. Bhagavan does not keep us from the unpleasant but compassionately gives us the strength to accept and move on liberated. Like Lord Nataraja in the ring of fire, we too, can lightly dance above *tamasic* ignorance if we are in harmony.

Let us stop for a moment and see with Robert Frost:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep."





D. Thiagarajan

Our Self, the World and Reality

J. SITHAMPARANATHAN

The true philosophical standard of reality is permanent, unbroken, unchanging, and independent existence. Continuity without intermission is an essential criterion of reality because whatever exists at one time but not at another does not really exist at any time. When it does appear, it is merely an appearance of reality. Similarly, reality must be unchanging and constant because reality transcends both space and time. It cannot also be related to anything else and thereby be subject to change.

The most important criterion of reality, however, is independent existence. Reality must be 'self shining' i.e. it must know its own existence and not be dependent on anything else to be known. Reality

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is therefore not only “being” or existence but also “consciousness of being”. Its being and its consciousness of being are one and the same.

The absolute, by definition, is infinite, undivided, independent and free from all conditions and relativity. Infinitude does not allow for the existence of another as it sets a limit upon the infinite. There cannot therefore be more than one absolute reality because if there were, each such reality would be restricted and therefore not infinite. The absolute also does not allow internal divisions because such division is an internal form of restriction. Absolute reality must therefore be one perfect and non-dual whole, apart from which nothing can exist. The absolute reality alone exists and any apparent duality or relativity that appears in it can only be an imagination that is superimposed thereon. The absolute reality is thus not only the substratum underlying the appearance of all duality and relativity but also their sole substance because, other than it, nothing exists.

Absolute Reality and Our Self

One may doubt the reality of everything else but one cannot possibly doubt the reality of one’s own existence since one must admit one’s existence to even express the doubt. The logical point from which to embark on an investigation of the true nature of reality is therefore a true knowledge of our own existence about which there can be no doubt. Any search for reality that starts from any other point assumes its reality and its conclusions will therefore depend upon the truth of an unproven premise.

Since our existence is real, we are continuous and unchanging throughout all our three states of consciousness viz. waking, dream and deep sleep. We are however conscious of one body as ourself during sleep and another body as ourself upon waking. Our identification with either body must therefore be regarded as illusory. We cannot also be the consciousness that knows these two bodies and their respective worlds because this “knowing consciousness” is intermittent – appearing to exist only in the waking and dream states but disappearing in the state of deep sleep. It is thus, by definition unreal and cannot, therefore, be our self which is real.

One must admit one’s existence in the state of deep sleep since it is not only a state that we actually experience, but it is also one in which we are aware of our existence. We are not unconscious during sleep. What we are unconscious of in deep sleep is of anything else other than our own being “I am”; but we are not unconscious of our own being. Upon waking we are able to say that we knew nothing in sleep precisely because we not only existed then, but we also knew we existed in the absence of all other knowledge. The knowledge or consciousness “I am” alone exists in all our three states of consciousness, and since nothing else exists in all three of them, one cannot escape the conclusion that we are, in reality, only this essential self consciousness “I am”.

Analysis of one’s experience in the three states of consciousness thus leads one to the conclusion that one’s reality or “self” is this underlying consciousness that knows all these three states viz. the two conscious states of waking and dream and the seemingly unconscious state of deep dreamless sleep. One is, in truth, the fundamental self consciousness that always knows itself as “I am”; which in dreamless sleep knows nothing other than “I am”; but which in the waking and dream states appears to know other things in addition to “I am”.

The World and Reality

Analysis of all three states of consciousness also reveals to us that the world of our waking state is unreal as such and is merely an illusory appearance. In the first place, the material world that we perceive in the waking state does not appear in either the state of dream or the state of deep sleep although, as shown earlier, we exist without intermission as consciousness and should therefore be aware of its presence if it really existed in these two states. The world does not therefore meet the requirement of continuous and unbroken existence, which is a fundamental criterion of reality.

Our experience in dreams further demonstrates to us how we can be deceived into ascribing reality to the world of the waking state. During dream, we identify a dream body as “I” in exactly the same way as we now identify with our present body in the waking state. We then take the world that we see in the dream to be real just as we take

the world we now see in the waking state to be real. The dream state thus clearly demonstrates that, by its power of imagination, our mind has the power not only to create a body and a world, but also simultaneously delude itself that its creations are real. The sages have declared, on the basis of their direct experience of reality, that the world of the waking state is as unreal as the world of dream. According to them, the world, as such, has no existence of its own and is nothing but the eternal and infinite Being Consciousness that is its substratum.

Our belief that our knowledge of a seemingly external world corresponds to something that actually exists as such outside ourself is thus merely an imagination — one of the many thoughts that we form in our mind. All the objects comprising the seemingly external and solidly real world are, in fact, experienced by us only as images or thoughts within our mind through our power of imagination. This is also what happens in dreams. They are nothing but our thoughts. That is the reason why, in the absence of thoughts, — as in the state of deep sleep — there is no knowledge of any object or an external world.

There can never be any admissible evidence that the world we experience in the waking state actually exists outside ourself, any more than we can muster any evidence that the world that we experienced in dream actually existed outside ourself. Even now, in the waking state, if we turn our attention away from all thoughts towards our own self consciousness “I am”, all our knowledge of external objects disappears. Expressed somewhat differently, there is no way we can prove to ourself that the world we perceive through the body is anything other than a creation of the mind or that it exists independently of our perception of it, because any proof that we may wish to adduce can come only from the very world whose reality is in question. Every sensory perception is merely an image or thought formed within our mind by our power of imagination, but we imagine that they correspond to objects that actually exist outside our mind and thereby confer reality on the world. Since we cannot know anything about the world except the images our mind forms within itself, we have no way of knowing for certain that they actually exist outside our mind.

Summary

The true nature of oneself, or the truth of one's being, is eternal, infinite, unbroken and formless Consciousness. The truth or reality underlying and supporting the world appearance is also this same Being-Consciousness, since —being infinite and eternal — there can be nothing apart from it. That Being-Consciousness alone is Reality or true knowledge.

Having known one's nature, one abides as ‘Being’ — with no beginning nor end, in unbroken Consciousness and Bliss.

— *The Essence of Instruction*, v. 28.

Since we perceive the world, we must concede for both a common Source, single but with the power of seeming to be many. The picture of names and forms, the onlooker, the screen, and the light that illumines, — all these are verily He.

— *Forty Verses on Reality*, v. 1.

The world is made up of the five kinds of sense perceptions and nothing else. And those perceptions are felt as objects by the five senses. Since, through the senses, it is the mind alone that perceives the world, is the world other than the mind?

Though the world and mind rise and fade together, the world shines by the light of the mind. The ground whence the world and mind arise, and wherein they set, that Perfection rises not, nor sets, but ever shines. That is the Reality.

Under whatever name and form the omnipresent, nameless and formless Reality is worshipped, that is only a door to realization. Understanding one's own truth in the truth of that true Reality and being one with it, — having been resolved into it — is true seeing (true knowledge).

— *Forty Verses on Reality*, v. 6-8.¹ ▲

¹ From the translations by Prof. K. Swaminathan, appearing in *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* published by Sri Ramanasramam, 1996.



D. Thiragarajan

On the Unreality of the World

ALAN JACOBS

The Garland of Guru's Sayings (*Guru Vachaka Kovai*), is a comprehensive collection of the Maharshi's sayings, composed and strung together by the great Tamil Poet Muruganar. In Part One, 'An Analysis of the Truth', there is a verse of striking and particular interest. It is verse 69:

The world perceived by the poor jiva
Lapsed from its own Being true,
Buried in darkness, and believing
That it is but the body, alas,
The world thus seen is non-existent;
Yes, it is indeed unreal.¹

¹ This verse is in the second sub-section entitled 'The Unreality of the World' of Part One. This translation is by Professor K.Swaminathan.

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The thrust of this verse and those like it is underlined by the often quoted passage in *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 24th August, 1946:

Bhagavan: “In the sadhak stage [the stage of being a spiritual seeker] you have got to say that the world is an illusion. There is no other way. When a man forgets he is Brahman, who is Real, permanent and omnipresent, and deludes himself into thinking that he is a body in the universe which is filled with bodies that are transitory, and labours under that delusion, you have got to remind him that the world is unreal and a delusion. Why? Because his vision which has forgotten its own Self, is dwelling in the external material universe. It will not turn inwards into introspection unless you impress on him that this entire external universe is unreal. When once he realises his own Self, and also that there is nothing other than his own Self, he will come to look upon the whole universe as Brahman.”²

Like very many sadhaks I found it very difficult to be totally convinced that the world we perceive should be regarded as ‘unreal’. I realised from reading Western Idealist Philosophy that the concepts of space, time, and causality are inherent in the organ of cognition, and from Advaita, that the Self of Pure Consciousness falling on the ‘ego’ creates a mirrorisation, on the screen of consciousness. On this reflection or world stage of space, time and causality, actions and pictures are projected. I also understood that quantum physics has confirmed that what we see, feel, smell, touch and taste is not what it appears to be, but composed of subtle energies in constant flux and movement. I studied many definitions of Maya found in the Hindu literature, but, it was not until I read *The Lamp of Non-Dual Knowledge (Advaita Bodha Deepika)*, a short work, highly spoken of by Bhagavan, that I followed the complete logic of this point of view.

I summarise my findings from this book as follows, largely based and inspired by Chapter One of this marvellous treatise, entitled ‘On Superimposition’.

² See *Padamalai* by Sri Muruganar, ed. by David Godman. The chapter of interest is ‘The Reality of the World Appearance’, pp. 283-4. Avadhuta Foundation, 2004.

i. All is Absolute, pure, infinite Consciousness, non-dual, Supreme Intelligence, the Self-existent Self or Brahman.

ii. Maya or Illusion, the powers of veiling and projection are inherent powers in Brahman.

iii. These powers manifest an apparent, but unreal Universe. Unreal because it was NOT before manifestation and will NOT BE after dissolution. Therefore it is likened to a dream in the Supreme Intelligence or Mind of Brahman. Thus the apparent Universe is but an appearance based on Brahman. It does not exist apart from Brahman. It could be termed, therefore, a confusion between the Real and the Unreal, or neither Real nor Unreal, or both Real and Unreal. In the Vedanta metaphysics, the term Real is applied to the Immutable or Unchanging. The apparent world is constantly changing, in a state of flux, becoming and decaying, so it cannot be termed Real in this sense, whereas Brahman is immutable, unchanging and eternal.

iv. The ignorant ‘jiva’ (the ajnani) or individual soul is reborn and dies continuously through many lifetimes, until Self-Realisation. It carries forward from each life the seeds of many latent tendencies from previous lives, although its True Nature is also the Absolute Pure Consciousness of Atman-Brahman. But because of the implicit Maya, projection and veiling, inherent in the Self of Pure Consciousness or Brahman, it identifies with its insentient body and creates a Universe from its latent tendencies (*vasanas*) through the mind, (the organ of cognition, the brain and sensorial adjuncts). The mind is a wondrous power in the Self. The world it sees, composed of latent tendencies, and thoughts is therefore of the nature of a dream, even a hallucination, and may be termed ‘unreal’.

v. The latent tendencies inherent in each jiva at the time of each life are selected by Isvara, an adjunct of Brahman, for its spiritual development. So all is benign, it is essentially based on Love. This is stated by Bhagavan in answer to a question by Paul Brunton quoted in the book *Conscious Immortality*.³

³ Paul Brunton and Munagala Venkataramiah, *Conscious Immortality* 1984. Chapter 10, p.130.

vi. The mind-body complex, personal individuality, other sentient beings, and the Universe of multiplicity, are therefore a superimposition on the Self which is now living from reflected Consciousness, mirrored by egotism and the latent *vasanas*.

vii. Through Grace, the jiva receives the teachings of Advaita from a *jnani*, and when fit, through assimilation of this Knowledge and mental purification through right intellectual discrimination, spiritual practice and devotion, he or she is shown the way to awaken from the dream of suffering and transient joy (*samsara*). The means are through Self-enquiry into the source of the ego, the Self and the illusory nature of the Universe; and unconditional surrender of the mind to The Self (the lotus feet of our immortal Sat Guru, Sri Bhagavan, in the Heart).

viii. At the same time one lives one's life as if it was real, knowing it to be unreal, and accepting all that happens as ultimately for the best.

ix. When there is an awakening from the dream of life, the transmigration of the jiva is over. The immortal Self of infinite Consciousness is realised directly and one lives from that state of 'sahaja' until the mind-body falls off in death, and one is absorbed into Brahman — infinite Consciousness, no longer a separate individual identified with its body-mind. All is the Self, and the world is seen to be real because its substratum is now known to be Brahman.

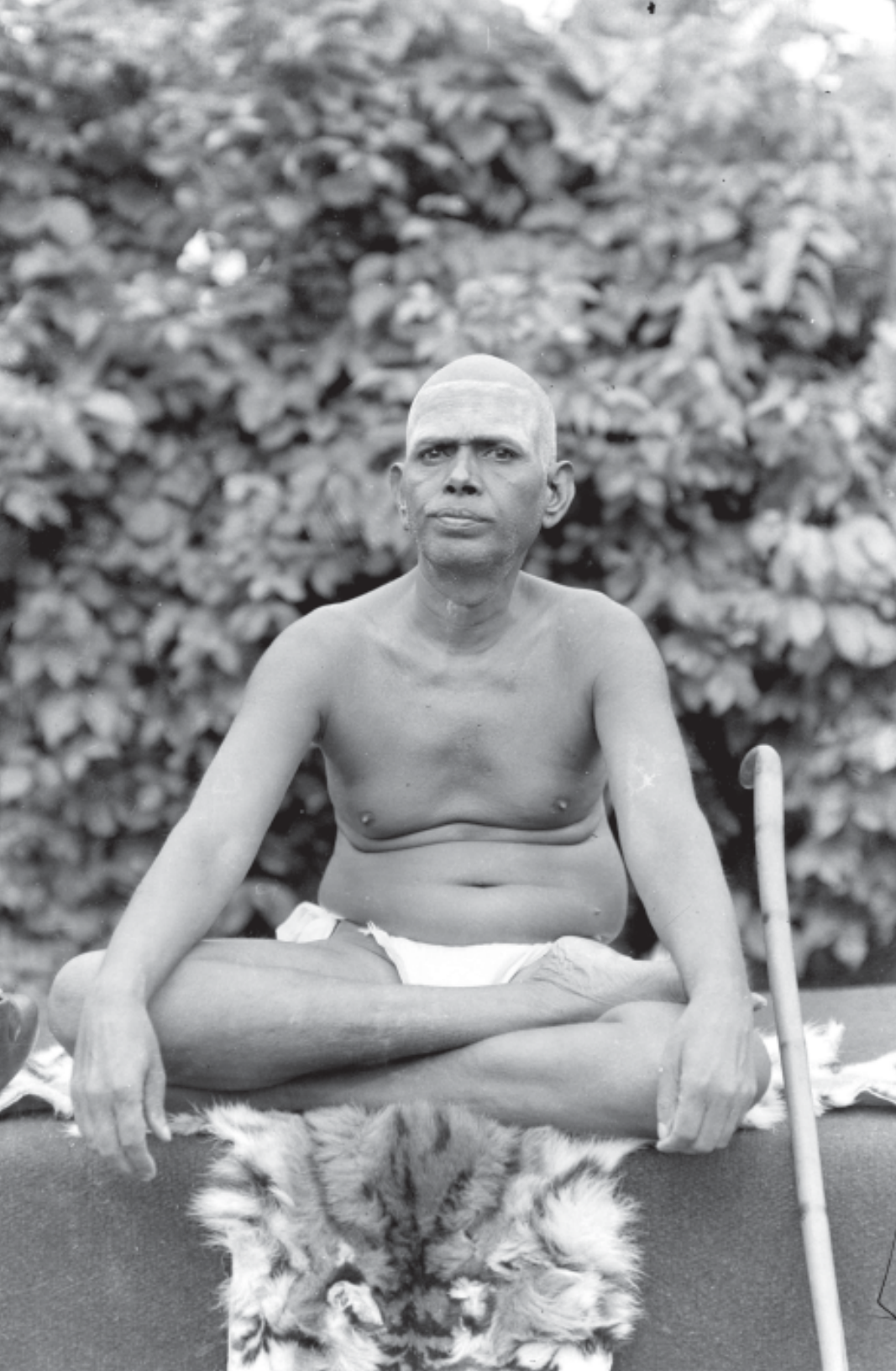
From this summary I began to see that just as our sleeping dreams at night draw on experiences formed in the waking state to create them, there must be some material inborn in us to create the dream of life. From the *Advaita Bodha Deepika* it becomes clear that the *vasanas* or latent tendencies accumulated in previous life are carried on into the next life and provide the material for the subsequent life dream to proceed, like a film in the cinematograph, projected onto the silver screen.

This is confirmed by Sri Bhagavan in an important passage of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, No. 616 where he says: "When the *vasanas* are projected from the heart they are associated with the light of the Self and the person is said to think. The *vasanas* which lie embedded in an atomic condition grow in size in their passage from the heart to

the brain. The brain is the screen on which the images of the *vasanas* are thrown and it is also the place of their functional distribution. The brain is the seat of the mind, and the mind works through it."

Of course this 'movie' is predetermined by Isvara from the *vasanas*, *sankalpas* and *vrittis* of past lives to create a film preordained for our spiritual development. This was told to Paul Brunton by Bhagavan, as I previously quoted, and recorded in the book *Conscious Immortality*. So it eventually became clear to me why this life is composed from "We are such stuff that dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep" as Shakespeare wrote in his esoteric masterpiece *The Tempest*. [iv. i.]

I hope this short essay into a difficult metaphysical question may be helpful to seekers baffled by the problem of Maya and the world illusion. ▲



With Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

SWAMI DAMODARANANDA

My Divine Call

In 1939, at the age of twenty, I left my home town of Gurpur in Karnataka and went to the nearby city of Mangalore on the west coast to pursue my higher education. There, in my hostel, I came across a pictorial biography of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi that was being circulated among the students. The book simply stunned me. My immediate reaction was to think, “A maharshi living in India now! I must go and offer myself at his feet.”

From that point onwards I became very restless of mind. I was continually planning to run away from Mangalore to Tiruvannamalai to stay with the holy and enlightened Maharshi and to be guided by him on the path of spiritual illumination. I was so gripped by this one thought that any other concerns about my further education, or the

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need to take permission from my parents, did not even cross my mind. It just flashed from within that, by the grace of God, I had the opportunity to be with a sage of *atma-saksatkar* (self-realisation). I felt that at all costs I must go to him and be at his feet to be guided on the spiritual path, that being the only purpose of life.

The plan for every person's life is based on tendencies carried forward from previous lives. Generally, it starts getting fleshed out during late adolescence. The force of some past noble tendencies must have given my life this sudden turn.

Divine Guidance

I told the manager of my hostel that I was leaving, and booked a ticket to Tiruvannamalai. A few days later I was sitting in the corner of a compartment on the Madras Mail. It so happened that in that same compartment an elderly brahmin gentleman was travelling with his family. After sharing food among themselves, the head of the family turned to me and asked where I was going. He was surprised to learn that such a young student as myself was going to visit the great sage in Ramanasramam. During our conversation he kindly advised me to get down from the train at about midnight at Villupuram station, and then take the train from there to Tiruvannamalai. Being over-enthusiastic and inexperienced in travel, I had bought a ticket to Tiruvannamalai on the Madras Mail which goes all the way from the west to the east coast, without realising that I needed to change trains for Tiruvannamalai in the middle of the journey. His advice was a God-send. Being so preoccupied with my final objective, I would have missed the connecting train. I considered it to be the Lord's grace guiding me to my divine destination.

Arunachala and Arunachaleswara

About midnight I got down at the Villupuram station and walked across the platform to where the train for Tiruvannamalai was standing. After a while the train started moving. At dawn from a great distance I was able to see between high rising temple walls, the imposing *gopuram* towers of the temple of Arunachaleswara that faced outwards to the four directions. The temple was situated on the site where Lord

Shiva is said to have manifested himself in the form of a holy *lingam* nestling with *Shakti* at the foot of Mount Arunachala.

In most Hindu temples the Supreme Universal Divine Consciousness, *sat-chid-ananda*, is understood to be one with *para-shakti*, the inscrutable Divine Power. The Supreme Divine Consciousness co-exists eternally with this Supreme Power which projects beginningless and endless universal systems, again and again, through the processes of evolution and involution. In other temples, this same truth is represented as a pair of male and female deities, such as Mahakali dancing eternally on Mahakala; the latter understood to be ever-absorbed in divine *samadhi*.

Within the great Indian temple culture are hidden eternal spiritual truths. Unfortunately, most of these truths are buried deep under a thick age-old crust of ritualistic tradition. Once in a while, however, for the sake of thirsty, seeking souls, a great spiritual giant — a masterly acharya, a devoted Mira, a Tulsi Dasa, or a Ramakrishna — blossoms within society as an ideal model of spiritual life. Swami Vivekananda characterises the appearance of such ones thus: *nirgacchati jagajjalat pinjaradiva kesari* (He bursts forth from the meshes of worldly confinement like a lion out of its cage). Sri Ramana was clearly one such spiritual giant.

Darshan and Beaming Grace

After travelling throughout the night and all the following morning without eating any food, I reached Tiruvannamalai railway station about midday. Outside the railway station I found a tonga (horse carriage) and reached Sri Ramanasramam about 2 pm. Before going into the ashram I gave away my extra clothes and money to the tonga wallah. He then took me around the buildings and showed me the hall where Sri Ramana Maharshi could be found. I took my bath at the Mother's temple tank, and then went straight to the small hall where the sage was seated.

Having offered Sri Bhagavan my *pranams*, I sat myself down with my back against a wall as I was very tired after fasting and travelling since the previous day. However, as soon as I had done this, Maharshi

gazed directly at me with unblinking, wide open eyes. I also looked into his eyes with all humility and wonder. In this way, both of us continued to stare into each other's eyes for a considerable time. While this was happening I felt ecstatic: Sri Bhagavan was showering his grace upon me. By his mere gaze it seemed as if the Maharshi was establishing me once and for all in spiritual life, despite all its trials and tribulations. Perhaps he intuitively saw my spiritual destiny. About five minutes later his eyes half closed as he went into introspective communion with the Self. I later learnt that it was quite common for Maharshi to remain in such states of divine absorption throughout the day and night. When one abides naturally in tune with the peace and bliss of the Supreme, it is known as *sahaja samadhi*: "Strange, the disciples under the banyan tree were all aged people and the Guru was young; he taught them by keeping silence, and the doubts of the disciples were all cleared up." (Sankaracarya, *Daksinamurti Stotra* 12).

Staying in the Ashram

After a while, some ashramites began to distribute pieces of fruit in leaf cups to the devotees who were seated in the hall. I took my leave from Sri Ramana, and then with my share of fruit in hand, slowly entered the passageway between the hall and the kitchen. Near the kitchen Sri Ramana's brother, Swami Niranjananandaji, the *sarvadhikari* (manager) of the ashram, was standing with a few mothers (*ammās*) who were helping with the cooking. I told them of my desire to stay in the ashram and lead a spiritual life. After some discussion they agreed to let me stay.

I was told that there had been a young man like me in the ashram earlier, who had had a little spiritual inclination. Having stayed for a while it seems that doubts arose in his mind regarding whether he should remain in the ashram. So he approached Sri Ramana and asked him whether it was best for him to stay, or else go home so he could serve his parents. Sri Ramana told him that if he felt that staying in the ashram to pursue spiritual ideals was the right thing to do, then he should do that. Otherwise, if he felt that returning home to be with his family and serve his parents was better, then he should pursue that

course in life. Thus, Sri Ramana allowed the youth to follow his own preferences as dictated by his past *karma*, or tendencies inherited from previous births. The youth returned home, the pull towards family life evidently being the strongest.

That night I slept on a veranda, the weather being hot. Others were also spread out here and there in different areas of the ashram.

Sri Bhagavan Watching with a Smile

I was asked to help in the kitchen. My daily duties mostly consisted of bringing firewood to the kitchen from the storehouse, boiling the milk that had been brought from the *goshala* (dairy) and rinsing any remaining sand or mud off enormous kitchen vessels after they had been washed by the salaried helpers. At that time the ashram was slowly getting built as donations came in. The kitchen was made of mud walls with large openings for ventilation. The monkeys of the neighbourhood would peep in and, if they saw an opportunity, enter the kitchen through the openings to eat whatever food was available. So after lunch when the *sevika* mothers (that is, elderly ladies) who did the cooking, retired to rest, one of my duties was to guard the kitchen with a stick and drive the monkeys away.

Bhagavan Ramana used to mostly sit or recline on his sofa in a big hall throughout the day except when he had to go out to answer the call of nature. It so happened that the place where I did most of my work was in a passageway near the well, through which Bhagavan would walk to the bathroom. One day, I was busy washing the big vessels, unbeknown to me, Bhagavan — as usual, wearing his loin-cloth — was standing a short distance away with a small towel under his arm, holding a little waterpot in one hand and his walking stick in the other. Suddenly I looked up and had his smiling *darsan*. I quickly stepped aside and requested that he proceed through the passageway. Still beaming at me, he indicated that it was of no concern, and asked me to continue my *seva* (service). I quickly made way and again requested him to continue. It was only then that he approached a few steps closer and slowly went on his way. It struck me how humble, egoless and self-effacing the great sage was.

Grinding Chutney with Sri Bhagavan

One morning at about 4 am I was summoned to the kitchen. To my surprise, when I entered the kitchen veranda I saw Sri Bhagavan in his loin cloth sitting near the chutney grinding stone. A few other people were also sitting nearby. I began to grind the coconut scrapings and he helped me by pushing in the overflowing ingredients. At the same time, he was busy putting salt, chillies and other things in the chutney to make it tasty. When the grinding was over he placed all the contents in a vessel. Then he went into the kitchen and prepared the seasoning in a big spoon with oil, mustard and dry chillies. When it was boiling, he brought it from the kitchen to the veranda where the chutney was being prepared. Then he began pouring the seasoning over the chutney and mixed it well.

A Sweet Little Joke

When the chutney was ready, Bhagavan distributed a little among the four or five people who were sitting there. Then he lifted his face up and from above dropped a bit of the chutney into his mouth without his fingers touching his mouth. (This healthy principle of not contaminating food prepared in the kitchen with one's saliva is followed even now in India among Hindu families.) As the devotees were tasting the chutney, Sri Bhagavan asked them how they liked it. Out of reverence they all kept quiet to signify approval. Then Sri Bhagavan smiled and quipped in Tamil, "Is the chutney asking for idlies?" Everyone enjoyed the joke and smiled. The group of ashramites then dispersed and the chutney was taken to the kitchen to be served with idlies when the morning visitors arrived.

Service at the Vegetable Cutting Room

Bhagavan next entered the vegetable cutting room where a kitchen assistant was cutting vegetables for the lunch that was to be served to the ashramites and visiting devotees. Bhagavan began assisting there also. He sat cross-legged and cut up vegetables with the utmost attention. I noticed that almost all the vegetable pieces he cut were exactly of the same size. From this I learnt the lesson that whatever

action one performs should be done with attentiveness and energy, for every job is worship of the Lord.

General Routine of the Ashram

As I remember it, during those days the general routine was somewhat like this. Early in the morning at about 4:00 am a few devotees would gather in the hall for prayer and meditation. On one such occasion, a devotee, a Mrs Kamakshi, entered the hall, offered her *pranams* to Sri Bhagavan and then got up. Sri Bhagavan called her over and showed her a small strip of paper. On it he had written, "*Om namo bhagavate Sri Ramanaya.*" He told her to chant it always. (She reportedly did so throughout her life.) As dawn approached, the Veda Pathashala *acaryas* (teachers at the ashram's Vedic school) would bring their students to chant important Vedic mantras such as the *shanti* mantras, *Purusa Sukta* and *Narayana Sukta*. Then *bhajans* (devotional songs) would be sung by the devotees in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and other languages. All the while, Sri Bhagavan would remain seated on his sofa with half-closed eyes absorbed in the Self. When the singing was over, all the devotees would sit quietly and meditate for a while. We would then disperse and attend to our morning duties. About 7:30 am of the ashramites, guests and others would all assemble in the courtyard outside the dining hall for the breakfast of idlies and chutney. After breakfast non-resident visitors would begin to arrive to offer their *pranams* to Sri Bhagavan in the hall where he would be sitting or reclining on his cot sofa.

Sometimes the hall would fill up. Mostly, the visitors would stay quiet, happy to just enjoy being in the presence of the great *brahmavit* (knower of Brahman) sitting before them ever attuned to the Divine Peace and Bliss within him. In that spiritually surcharged hall filled with holy vibrations many had their inner, personal doubts resolved without ever having to verbalise them.

Once when I was a little free from my kitchen duties, I went to sit near Bhagavan in the hall at about 11:00 am. Some ladies visiting from a university in the state of Karnataka were talking with him. While answering one of their questions on silence, I heard him say,

“*Maunam* [holy silence] is not just keeping quiet without talking. Holding one thought alone is considered to be the real *maunam*.” I would visit the holy hall at every opportunity to gather such pearls of wisdom.

On one occasion I witnessed a bare-chested brahmin standing for a long time before Bhagavan with folded hands. Perhaps Bhagavan knew him, for he seemed to ignore him. Then some other devotee entered the hall and began walking towards Bhagavan. As soon as Bhagavan saw this particular individual he began speaking to him with great joy. Thus, during these visiting hours we could see Sri Bhagavan’s various moods. No doubt he knew the devotees’ inner attitudes.

All guests were offered lunch with Bhagavan, then there was a period of rest. Later, *darshan* continued in the afternoon. From about 4:00 pm I had the *seva* duty of grinding soaked rice and dhal for the next morning’s idlies. One devoted old lady used to help me by pushing in the overflowing, semi-liquid dough with her right hand. As soon as I was free from this service, I would return to the hall to enjoy Bhagavan’s *darshan*. One afternoon I saw him talking to some devotees in the hall. While seated on his sofa, he slowly stretched his legs down until they touched the floor. He was holding his walking stick in his left hand, and massaging his knees with his right hand. As he did this, he slowly tried to stand up. Then, he remembered that he was not due to go out until 5:00 pm, and looked up at the clock. Just at that moment it began to strike five o’clock! He just smiled at this and got up to walk towards the Arunachala hill for his evening ablutions in the running stream and, as was his custom, do a little exercise. We followed him for a short distance, and then left him to walk on with his attendant.

Sadhu Arunachala (Major A. W. Chadwick) would meditate in the hall leaning against a library cupboard with a belt strapped around his back and legs. He was training himself to sit properly in a cross-legged position while meditating, like the other seekers. Devoted Echamma could also be seen sitting quietly and praying in the hall. Having lost her husband and her two children in quick succession, she had gone to Sri Bhagavan seeking consolation. By his grace, she regained

her calm and normality in due course. Many such spiritually-healed fortunates stayed in the ashram, when I was there, quietly communing with the Divine.

Around sunset, the evening prayer and meditation session started. It was accompanied by Vedic chanting, singing, prayers and meditation, as in the morning. The last item in the programme would be silent communion, when everyone would try to meditate in the presence of Bhagavan. He would be seated on his cot completely absorbed, like Sri Mahadeva, Lord Shiva.

Once, one of the Ashram administrative *sevaks* came near Bhagavan’s sofa at this time and began calling out, “Bhagavan, Bhagavan, Bhagavan!”— louder and louder and louder. At first Bhagavan was unaware of his calls, as he was totally immersed in that inner Divine Quiet of peace and bliss. However, as the *sevak*’s voice became ever louder, Bhagavan returned to everyday consciousness and responded in Tamil, “*Enna, enna*” (What, what)? We used to enjoy witnessing such incidents many times throughout the day. During his various moods and attitudes, even though he was dealing with all manner of people, there would never be any expression of fatigue on his face, and I never saw him yawning. He appeared to be unceasingly in the experience of *sat-chid-ananda*.

Sri Ramana Hands Me Over to Sri Ramakrishna

It seems to me that the events in my life occurred as the above subtitle suggests: I was enjoying my stay in Ramanasramam and having Sri Bhagavan’s *darshan* daily whenever I was free from my humble *seva* (service) in the kitchen. After lunch, when I guarded the kitchen with a stick from the monkeys who were always trying to enter it through one of the big openings in the mud wall, I usually had some free time to read holy books from the library. (A proper kitchen was later built as donations and offerings came in.) The book that made the biggest impression on me was the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (with a foreword by Mahatma Gandhi). This was my first opportunity to learn of the holy, inspiring and wonderful life of Sri Ramakrishna. The book also spoke of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami

Vivekananda and the other monastic disciples and lay followers of Ramakrishna. Thus, I first came to learn about the Ramakrishna Mission and its headquarters at Belur Math, Kolkata while I was staying at Ramanasramam.

One day while I was reading this book in the kitchen, I was shocked to look up and see my uncle standing before me. He had come from Madras in his car to take me away. When I told him of my desire to stay in the ashram, he got angry and ordered me to get ready to leave.

At that moment I had a brain wave and decided to run away from the ashram and live independently on the hill of Arunachala. Going inside, I took my spare clothes and made off at about 2:00 pm towards Mount Arunachala. I did not want to be caught by any search party that might come looking for me, so I kept off the main track by going through the forest, avoiding Skandashram and the other places where Sri Bhagavan was known to have stayed. Sure enough — as I was to learn later — my uncle was taken to all these places to look for me. Since he did not find me, he informed the people in Ramanasramam that my mother was fasting, wailing and praying for me to come back to our house in Madras. He then returned home empty handed.

That evening I climbed down the hill and slept on the veranda of an old temple without having had anything to eat or drink. Next morning after bathing, I went to the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple where they gave lunch-*prasadam* to devotees. After lunch I talked to one of the priests who allowed me to stay in the temple for about three days rendering some *seva*. It consisted of grinding sandalwood paste for the *pujas* of the various deities. By this time the people at Sri Ramanasramam had come to know that I was staying at the Arunachaleswara Temple. They called me back to the ashram. When I returned, they told me about my mother's wailing and weeping and pressurised me to go back home to pay her a visit, and said that afterwards, I could return to Sri Ramanasramam again. Having accepted this proposal, I went back home to the family house in Madras where my mother was. However, as was to be expected, my

relatives prevailed on me not to take religion to the extreme but to continue my studies. Reluctantly, I agreed to be admitted to the Engineering Institute and enrolled in a five year course.

Fortunately, our house in Madras was very close to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Centre in Mylapore. I began to visit the temple daily and started talking to the swamijis and brahmacharis. One day I was reading the works of Swami Vivekananda when a particular passage leapt out at me. Swamiji had written words to the effect, "You have devoted innumerable lives to family and material concerns. Can you not at least offer this one life to God?" Immediately the answer welled up from within me. "Yes, I can do that!" This idea inspired me so much that I then and there made a firm resolution to offer myself up to Sri Ramakrishna—instead of studying and earning for another 10, 20 or more years as my family wanted.

I informed Revered Swami Asheshanandaji, then the warden of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home in Madras, of my decision. I used to meet him regularly and he inspired me very much. He gave me a letter of introduction to Revered Swami Tyagishanandaji of the Bangalore Ramakrishna Mission Ashram. Thus in 1940, I again found myself running away — this time to join the Ramakrishna Mission's Bangalore Ashram.

My Last Visit to Sri Bhagavan Ramana

I stayed at the Bangalore ashram for about six years studying Sanskrit, the scriptures and the Mission disciplines of prayer, meditation and *seva*. In 1946 it was time for me to go to our headquarters at Belur Math, in Kolkata to be initiated. I was to receive a holy mantra from the President Maharaj, Revered Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, a disciple of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. In a separate ceremony I was also to dedicate myself to the holy order of Brahmacharya.

On the way to the Mission headquarters, I thought it would be good to visit Sri Ramanasramam to have a second and, perhaps, last *darshan* of Sri Ramana before he gave up his body. I reached Sri Ramanasramam on the 17th February, 1946 along with two other devotees from Bangalore, and stayed there for three days. On the first

day I sat on the floor for lunch with the other visiting devotees. Sri Bhagavan sat at the head of the line. I think it was ‘Kira Patti’ (the ‘Spinach Granny’) who came first to serve Sri Bhagavan with a few dishes she had prepared. As she was in her nineties, Sri Bhagavan, in a raised voice asked her in Tamil, “*Enna Kondu-vandirke*” (What have you brought)? She described her dishes. Then she slowly distributed the same simple food, little by little, to all of us devotees.

I observed Sri Ramana as he was eating. He took some pieces of chilli out of his curry and pushed them away to a corner of his banana leaf. A few grains of rice happened to get stuck to the chillies. He scrupulously returned these to the rest of the food on his leaf, so that even these few grains would not get wasted. When he had finished his lunch, his leaf plate was totally clean (except, of course, for the few chillies pieces).

After lunch Bhagavan left for the hall where he normally sat on his sofa and gave *darshan*. I immediately followed him. When he reached the sofa, I offered my *pranams* to him and asked him in English to let me know the easiest path. Although Sri Bhagavan knew English, he normally spoke only in Tamil. He just looked at me and gestured with his hand for me to sit down. I sat down on the floor in front of him. Bhagavan observed the other devotees as they arrived, sit down and filled up the hall. Disappointed that he had not answered my question, I closed my eyes and began doing mental *japa*. After a while I heard him say to some professor who was known to him, “This boy wants to know a shortcut!” Then Bhagavan continued, “A shortcut to where?”

One of my friends who had sat down next to me nudged my leg and indicated that Sri Bhagavan was talking to me. I opened my eyes and saw that he was smiling at me: he had only been waiting for the other devotees to arrive so that they too could benefit from his answer to my question! Of course, I told him that I wanted a shortcut to *atma-darshan* — the revelation of the Self. He asked me what method I was presently practising. I replied that in my own humble way I was practising *japa-sadhana*. Hearing this, Sri Bhagavan responded that *japa* was not only simple and direct, but the best method to use to

make progress in spiritual life. He quoted a phrase from the *Bhagavad Gita* 10.25: “*yajnanam japayajno’smi*” (Among sacrifices, I am the sacrifice of *japa*).

Further elaborating, he said that of all the ways to offer oneself to *paramatman* (the Supreme Being), the easiest and the best method was the repetition of the mantra of one’s own chosen deity. *Japa* promoted a constant flow of loving prayer from within for inner illumination. This woke up a subtle thirst that steadily increased, leading to a strong current of continuous divine discontent known as *vyakulata*. When this holy attitude developed into deep absorption (*dhyana*), the divinity revealed itself from within. This was *atma-darshan*.

Sri Bhagavan continued to explain about *japa sadhana* and Self-realisation. However, an anxious brahmin devotee with a thick sacred thread who was seated a short distance away loudly interrupted to ask him a question about creation and its cause. The brahmin said that some scriptures mentioned that creation was due to the *karma* of Brahma, the creator, while other scriptures stated that creation occurred due to the *karma* of *jivas* (souls). He wanted Sri Bhagavan to resolve this difference of opinion. Sri Ramana just gave him a kind look, and then continued to explain the subject of *japa* by quoting another verse from the *Gita*,

*yogayukto vishuddhatma vijitatma jitendriyaha.
sarvabhutatmabhutatma kurvannapi na lipyate.*

(*Bhagavad Gita* 5.7)

(“With the mind purified, with devotion to performance of action, and the body conquered and the senses subdued, one who realises the self as the self in all beings, though engaged in action, is not tainted.”)

Sri Bhagavan was evidently in a good mood and went on expounding spiritual thoughts based on this *Gita* verse for about twenty-five minutes. The devotees in the packed hall lapped up his sacred words of spiritual revelation. Bhagavan explained that the aspirant first repeats the mantra out loud with diligence and devotion. Then, as his or her loving attitude intensifies, the repetition gradually becomes internalised. As the body, senses and mind get purified and become free from their selfish nature, the whole being gets attuned to the

Divine. The power of the mantra enters every aspect of the individual. The aspirant becomes *mantramaya* (filled with the spiritual power of the mantra), in and through all activities. One's life gets transformed into a continuous offering to the Lord, without any attachment to the results of one's actions.

The impatient brahmin repeated his question about creation, however. This time Sri Bhagavan graciously told him that if he would only try to understand the method he had just explained, the answers to all his questions would spontaneously arise within him. As one dives deep within, the mind dissolves into the Self, and all distinctions between *bhakta* (devotee), *bhagavan* (the Lord) and *Bhagavata* (the sacred text) vanish in divine illumination.

Om Sri Bhagavan Ramanaya Namah! ▲



This year Ashram has made a special effort to design a 12 sheet calendar which is pleasing to devotees. The calendar contains twelve fine photographs of Bhagavan. There is also a desk calendar which contains photos of the Holy Hill Arunachala. The Ashram is also publishing a book diary with suitable quotations by Bhagavan.

For orders please contact the Ashram Bookstall at bookstall@sriramanamaharshi.org.

The prices of all three items is yet to be decided. They will be available probably in the first week of October.

KEYWORD

Anirvacaniya

It is not understood by those who understand.
It is understood by those who do not understand.

— *Kena Upanisad* II.3

Where there is duality, there you understand another, you think of and think the other; but by what do you understand the understander or think the thinker? For you cannot see the seer, you cannot understand the understander, and know the knower.

— *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad* III.4.2

Anirvacaniya means ‘ineffable; inexplicable; inexpressible; indeterminable.’ Sri Ramana remarked, “Although the Self is real, as it comprises everything, it does not give room for questions involving duality about its reality or unreality. Therefore it is said to be different from the real and the unreal.”¹

Sri Ramana, like Advaitins, states that the non-dual Reality appears as this pluralistic world through ignorance (*avidya/maya*). Ignorance is said to have a peculiar ontological status because it is neither real (like *Brahman/Atman*) nor an absolute non-entity like a square-circle.

¹ S. Natanananda, *Spiritual Instruction, The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1974. p.21.

The world possesses practical efficiency. As such, it is not totally non-existent. Water in a mirage is neither existent nor non-existent. Though it is psychologically given, it cannot be logically established. This gives it a special status. The world appears, even if it eventually disappears. Thus, it is inexplicable (*anirvacaniya*).

In answer to a seeker's question, 'How did ignorance arise?' Ramana replied, "Ignorance never arose. It has no real being."² "The Self alone is and nothing else."³ "When you try to trace the ego, which is the basis of the perception of the world and everything else, you find the ego does not exist at all and neither does all this creation that you see."⁴ This is, on the face of it, mysterious, inexplicable!

The totally non-existent is that which cannot exist. It is not a case of 'factual' or 'empirical' non-existence, but one of logical impossibility. And, on the other hand, when the existent appears as-it-is-not, error arises. This leaves us with three categories of existence: the existent, the appearance, and the non-existent.

What is existent can appear in two forms. Either it can be observed as an existent that is known as-it-is or it can be observed as-it-is-not. Appearance is a common characteristic of these two cases, thus, appearance itself is not the decisive feature of the existent. What is given in experience cannot, by itself, be the criterion of validity of an experience. For validity, the ontological requirement that something must appear as-it-is, is necessary. Obviously the water in the mirage does not fulfil this requirement. Hence, its existence is not valid or the same, as when its appearance is cognized as sand. This shows that a 'mere appearance' (not appearance as-it-is, but as-it-is-not) falls into a region that is neither real nor non-real. Sublatibility is the litmus test.

The water in a mirage appears and disappears. Even so the world of multiplicity appears and disappears. Neither entity fits the category of an eternally changeless existent. This experience of a changing existent

is a riddle. To exist, by definition, is to be oneself, in one's own nature. To exist contingently is to be oneself for a certain duration of time. Ramana remarked, "You want somehow or other to maintain that the world is real. What is the standard of reality? That alone is real which exists by itself, which reveals itself by itself and which is eternal and unchanging."⁵

Interestingly, in Advaitic thought, ignorance (*avidya/maya*) is declared to be mysterious, ineffable, inexplicable (*anirvacaniya*) and *Brahman/Atman* is also said to be mysterious, ineffable, and inexplicable— though for very different reasons. Ramana said, "The Self is *beyond* the expressions 'existence, non-existence, etc.'"⁶

In Advaita Vedanta philosophy, ignorance is spoken of in three ways: 1) For the common individual, who lacks the ability to discern the real from the unreal, the world is considered to be real. The question does not even arise as to whether the world around them is real or not. 2) For the individual who possesses reason and enquires into the reality of the world, ignorance becomes inexplicable. Such a person cannot say whether the world is real or not, and thus continues to enquire into its ontological status. 3) For the Sage, the *jivanmukta*, the world no longer possesses the capacity to delude. Though the world is perceived, its chains are broken. For such a one, ignorance is non-existent, false, and unreal. Ramana said, "Ignorance . . . does not function in a *jnani* at all."⁷

Ignorance has a mysterious power. It is that which makes the impossible possible.⁸ Though it has no ultimate reality itself, yet it can seemingly project creation and produce multiplicity. Seemingly omnipotent, ignorance vanishes when one enquires into the Self.

To pursue *avidya/maya* is only to fall deeper and deeper into its morass. The Self must be enquired into, for there is no solution to ignorance, only dissolution! Contrary to what critics say, this facet of ignorance is not a defect, but an ornament. This mysterious power of

²M. Venkataramiah (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 1978. p. 249.

"*jasya na vidyate, saa avidya*. (Avidya is that which does not exist)."

³S.S. Cohen, *Guru Ramana*, 1980. p. 100.

⁴Devaraja Mudaliar, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 1989. p. 74.

⁵*Maharshi's Gospel*, 1979. p. 65.

⁶M. Venkataramiah (comp.), *op.cit.*, p. 123.

⁷*Maharshi's Gospel*, pp. 85-6.

⁸Cf. Sri Sankara's *Maya Panchakam: aghatita ghatana patiyasi maya*.

ignorance both obscures and projects. Not only does it (innocently enough) obscure or conceal the Self, but then it (insidiously) pretends to be what-it-is-not by projecting the world of multiplicity.

The snake which is cognised as a rope has no being of its own apart from the rope, the substratum, on which it is superimposed. By itself it is non-existent. It is wrongly imagined to exist due to ignorance that not only conceals the nature of the rope, but also projects the appearance of a snake that is false. The same thing is true of the world. What the rope is to the snake, *Brahman* is to the world. The world no doubt is existent or real to an ignorant person who does not enquire into its ontological status. To an enquiring mind, however, the world is a puzzle defying rational enquiry. Owing its existence to ignorance, which is itself indeterminable, the world, too, does not admit of a rational explanation as either real or unreal.

In this regard, there is this important rule in Indian epistemology (*nyaya*): for an object/entity to truly *exist*, it must possess certain distinguishing features (*lakshanas*) by which it can be defined precisely. Secondly, it must be capable of being revealed by a 'valid means of knowledge' (*pramana*).⁹ Thus an object cannot be deemed to have 'real existence', if it lacks either *lakshana* or *pramana* or both. When we apply this rule to determine the reality of the world, a deep analysis reveals that the world is devoid of both these parameters. Interestingly, quantum physics too has unambiguously established the illusory nature of the world, which lacks intrinsic reality, by investigating into the fundamental nature of matter. It eludes precise definition (*lakshana*) and also escapes capture by a valid means of independent testing which is invariable (*pramana*). Thus the world is not available for definition, even though it is experienced very much like the case of the mirage-water or the rope-snake phenomena. On the other hand, the Self has any number of definitions or pointers (*lakshana*), and supported by *śabda pramana* (*Upanisads*) It can be intuited, besides being self-evident which makes possible Its direct and immediate apprehension, once the pre-requisite eligibility and competence are gained through proper

sadhana. Thus that alone, namely the Self, which exists forever immutably is real.

The world is not real, because it exists only so long as there is ignorance. It ceases to exist when ignorance gets removed at the onset of Self-knowledge. Nor can the world be treated as non-existent or non-real. What is non-real, like a square-circle, can never be cognized. The world, however, is cognized, and so it cannot be dismissed as non-real. It cannot be both real and non-real simultaneously, as that would violate the law of non-contradiction. Since its ontological status cannot be determined as such-and-such in terms of the categories known, it is said to be indeterminable (*anirvacaniya*).

Ignorance cannot have parts, since if it did it would also require another entity as its cause, which would lead to *infinite regress*. If it was partless it could not be the cause of, and one with, the world's multiplicity. It cannot have both parts and be partless, since that is contradictory. Ignorance cannot be something other than *Brahman* because there is no second to *Brahman*. It cannot constitute the nature of *Brahman* or else it would not be known as *avidya*. To say that *avidya* exists is to limit *Brahman*, and yet to say that it does not exist is to fly in the face of experience and the appearance of the world will not be accounted for. It is real enough to produce the world, but not real enough to constitute a limit to *Brahman*. Absence of reality does not render perception invalid. That which defies all categories of human thought is truly a wonder. How wonderful! Both the Self and *avidya/maya* share this trait – though for very different reasons. ▲

⁹ *lakshana pramanabhyam vastu siddhibi*.

Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's
Commentary

Verse Twenty Four

S. RAM MOHAN

Verse 24: The inert body does not say 'I'. The Sat-Chit (existence-consciousness) does not arise at all. Between these two, arises another entity, co-extensive with the body. This is known by various names: the knot between the consciousness and the inert; bondage; individual soul; subtle body; egoity; and samsara (transmigrating life).

Commentary:

Bhagavan declares that the body is not the 'I'. What is this 'I'? The 'I'-consciousness as we know it rises in the waking state and sets in the sleep state. The experience of the *jnani* is that the Self neither arises nor sets. Therefore our sense of 'I' is neither the body nor the Sat-Chit

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John Maynard

or the Real Self. What then is it? Bhagavan says that it is something that comes into being in between the two, the inert and the conscious.

There are several, successive instruments utilised in the process of understanding. The physical body, receives impulses from external world through the sense-organs, but cannot understand them without the mind. The mind cannot function without the intellect. The intellect is ineffective without the ego behind it.

When we sleep, the body is still present. But it is not aware either of itself or the world, because the conscious mechanism that utilizes it as an instrument of perception is absent. Thus, the insentient body is just an instrument in the hands of mind and intellect. Its substance is material and it has beginning and end. It has the four main characteristics of (i) insentience; (ii) origin and end; (iii) materiality; and (iv) activity. In contrast, the nature of ultimate Reality or Self is delineated thus: (1) it has no origin or end and undergoes no mutation or change; (2) non-material and of the nature of Pure Consciousness-Existence-Bliss; and (3) it does not act or participate, only witnesses.

It is therefore seen that the physical entity is inert, material and subject to change; the Self on the other hand, is birthless and deathless, non-material, actionless, and is Pure Consciousness. Yet it is said that these two mutually incompatible entities co-exist in our personality. How is that possible, unless there is a connecting link? What is that connecting link? It is called the ego, which comes in between and links them. It emanates from the Self, but forgets its origin. Projecting out in various forms as the *buddhi* (intellect), *manas* (mind) and the body, it associates itself with them. Though it derives its existence from the Self, it forgets this and associates itself with the body, mind and intellect, enjoys, and suffers, undergoes changes and mutation through that. When through the *upadesa* of the Master, it withdraws from them and retraces its true origin the false-identification disappears. The ego disintegrates and dissolves in Pure Consciousness.

Bhagavan says that the consciousness of the Self is ever-effulgent and ever-present. By uniting it with the inert body-mind complex, due to our 'forgetfulness' of our Real Self (*pramaadam*), the limited 'I', the ego, is born. This imaginary person, the limited 'I', mistakes the

two incompatible entities, Self and ego, as one and the same entity, due to super-imposition (*adhyaasa*) of the false on the Real. The consciousness (*chit*) of the Self is ascribed to the body and the defects and limitations of the body are ascribed to the Self!

We see that this product of the *adhyaasa*, this ego 'I', has no form or body of its own, nor any reality. For this reason, Bhagavan calls it here first as the knot — wrong identification between the *chit* and the inert body, *chid-jada-granthi*. The Self and the body appear as one, as if they are tied together by a knot. This is the primal ignorance. In truth, these two are eternally distinct. Their natures are opposites of each other. The body is inert; the Self is consciousness. The body is unreal; the Self is real. Hence the two cannot become one. (The ego is like the dream-man born to a dreamer who in the dream weds a dream-woman. This is how the false I comes into being.)

Two fundamental functions are referred to here: namely *aavarana* (obscuration) and *vikshepa* (projecting as something else).

The ego which emanates from the Self obscures or covers up its own origin. It also projects itself out as something different from the Self, in the form of intellect, mind, body and the world. During the wakeful and the dream state, both the *vikshepa* and *aavarana* are functioning. In the deep sleep state, only the obscuring *aavarana* remains. Sankara compares this *aavarana* to the thick layer of moss on the surface of a pond. The moss has its origin on the water beneath it. But by enveloping the surface of the pond totally, it obscures it from our vision. When wind blows, or we move the scum on the surface of the water, the moss moves away for a while, revealing the column of water below. But again, when the wind stops or we take away our hand, the moss covers the surface again. To see the water and the bottom of the pond clearly, the moss on the surface should be permanently removed.

Similarly, during the deep sleep, the ego takes the form of unconsciousness and obscures the Self. During the wakeful and dream states, the ego-veiling is partly removed. The ego is aware of external things. But the covering veil in the form of thoughts, does not allow us to 'see' the Self. To realize the Self, there should neither be the

coverage of nescience nor the moving ripples of thought. The mind, inwardly turned merges, in the Self.

The individual self is called *chidabhaasa*, reflection of consciousness or pseudo 'I'. This false entity is also referred to as 'bondage', in the form of clinging to the world. Why does a man cling to the world, possession and family? Because he thinks he can derive happiness from the world. Not realizing that the source of joy is within himself, he searches for it outside through the physical, mental and intellectual pleasures. His search arises from the basic error of duality. Thus, each individual restricts himself as individual-self on one side and the rest of the universe, including what he takes to be God, on the other side. Considering himself to be apart from the rest, he feels attraction toward some and repulsion toward the others and develops a fear that he may not get happiness despite all his efforts. The root of this duality lies in his ego, veiling of the Self. Obscuring the Self, the ego expresses itself as the intellect, mind and body and identifies with them forgetting its own origin (the Self); it does not recognize the creation of its own mind. Bhagavan calls this by another name *samsara* (worldly life). The mind, which is the origin of *samsara* is only an expanded form of this ego. Since the mind is the basis of *samsara*, the ego, the root of the mind is also identified as *samsara*. ▲

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Death Experience of Bhagavan

From *The Mountain Path*, April 1981

We present in the following pages three articles on the decisive so-called 'death experience' which occurred to Bhagavan at Madurai in 1896. The first is an important historical document compiled by Narasimha Swami, the first biographer of Bhagavan. It is a reprint from an earlier edition of the magazine which some readers may not be aware of. The second was written by one of India's most respected astrologers and a devotee of Bhagavan. And the third is an exact translation from the Telugu biography *Sri Ramana Leela*. It was written and published late in Bhagavan's lifetime. — Editor

The most detailed account of Bhagavan's Realisation experience is to be found in B. V. Narasimha Swamy's biography, "Self Realisation". It was the first major biography to be written, and all subsequent accounts have relied heavily on his version, either quoting it verbatim or summarising its contents. The account in the book was not a direct transcription of Bhagavan's words, and the author makes this clear in a footnote which

has appeared in most of the editions of the book. He said that he was merely summarising, in his own words, a series of conversations which he had with Bhagavan over a period of six weeks in 1930. The following account gives two of the conversations on which his account was based. They are the only records of the conversation which are still in existence, but fortunately they cover all the known aspects of the experience, so it is unlikely that much valuable material has been lost. The first conversation took place on 8-1-30 and the second a few weeks later on 5-2-30.

There are two important points in this account which are not brought out in the published version. The first is Bhagavan's repeated use of the word *avesam* to describe his initial perception of his experience. In Tamil, the word means "possession" in the sense of being taken over by a spirit. For the first few weeks Bhagavan felt that he had been taken over by a spirit which had taken up residence in his body. The second point is that the feeling persisted until shortly before he left home, and his discovery that the *avesam* was the Self and not some external being residing in his body may have been a contributory factor in his decision to leave home.

The account is in Bhagavan's own words, and though there are strong traces of the translator's style and preferred terminology, it is still a more accurate version than the ones which have been printed in all of the published biographies.

"My fear of death was some six weeks before I left Madurai for good. That fear was only on one day and for a short time. At the time there was a flash of excitement, it may be roughly described as heat, but it was not clear that there was a higher temperature in the body, nor was there perspiration. It appeared to be like an *avesam* or some spirit possessing me. That changed my mental attitude and habits. I had formerly a preference for some foods and an aversion to others. This tendency dropped off and all foods were swallowed with equal indifference, good or rotten, tasty or tasteless. Studies and duties became matters of utter indifference to me and I went through my studies turning over pages mechanically just to make others who were looking on think that I was reading. In fact my attention was never directed towards the books, and, consequently, I never understood their

contents. Similarly, I went through other social duties possessed all the time by this *avesam*, i.e., my mind was absent from them, being fascinated and charmed by my own Self. I would put up with every burden imposed on me at home, tolerating every slight with humility and forbearance. Periodically, interest in and introspection on the Self would swallow up all former feelings and interests.

"That fear was only on the first day; that is, the day of the awakening. It was a sudden fear of death which developed, not merely indifference to external things. It also started two new habits. First, the habit of introspection, that is, having attention perpetually turned on my Self, and second, the habit of emotional tears when visiting the Madurai temple. The actual enquiry and discovery of 'Who I am' was over on the very first day of the change. That time, instinctively, I held my breath and began to think or dive inward with my enquiry into my own nature. 'This body is going to die' I said to myself, referring to the gross physical body. I had no idea that there was any *sukshma sarira* (the causal body) in human beings. I did not even think of the mind. I thought of the gross physical body when I used the term body, and I came to the conclusion that when it was dead and rigid, (then it seemed to me that my body had actually become rigid as I stretched myself like a corpse with *rigor mortis* upstairs, thinking this out) I was not dead. I was, on the other hand, conscious of being alive, in existence. So the question arose in me, "What was this 'I'? Is it this body? Who called himself the 'I'?" So I held my mouth shut, determined not to allow it to pronounce 'I' or any other syllable. Still I felt within myself, the 'I' was there, the sound was there, and the thing calling or feeling itself 'I' was there. What was that? I felt that there was a force or current, a centre of energy playing on the body, continuing regardless of the rigidity or activity of the body, though existing in connection with it. It was that current, force, or centre that constituted my Self, that kept me acting and moving, but this was the first time that I came to know it. I had no idea of my Self before that. From that time on, I was spending my time absorbed in contemplation of that current.

“Once I reached that conclusion (as I said, on the first day of the six weeks, the day of my awakening into my new life), the fear of death dropped off. It had no place in my thoughts. ‘I’ being a subtle current, it had no death to fear. So further development or activity was issuing from the new life and not from any fear. I had no idea at that time of the identity of that current with the personal God, or ‘*Ishvara*’ as I used to call Him. As for Brahman, the Impersonal Absolute, I had no idea then. I had not even heard the name Brahman. I had not read the *Bhagavad Gita* or any other religious works except the *Periapuranam*, and in *Bible* class, the four Gospels and the Psalms from the Bible. I had seen a copy of Vivekananda’s Chicago Lecture, but I had not read it. I could not even pronounce his name correctly; I pronounced it ‘Vyvekananda’ giving the ‘i’ the ‘y’ sound. I had no notions of religious philosophy except the current notions of God, that He is an infinitely powerful person, present everywhere, though worshipped in special places in the images representing Him. This I knew in addition to a few other similar ideas which I picked up from the *Bible* and the *Periapuranam*. Later when I was in the Arunachala temple, I learnt of the identity of my self with Brahman, and later with Absolute Brahman, which I had heard in the *Ribhu Gita* as underlying all. I was only feeling that everything was being done by the current and not by me, a feeling I had had ever since I wrote my parting note and left home. I had ceased to regard the current as my narrow ‘I’. That current or *avesam* now felt as if it was my Self, not a superimposition.

“While on the one hand, the awakening gave me a continuous idea or feeling that my Self was a current or force in which I was perpetually absorbed whatever I did, on the other hand, the possession led me frequently to the Meenakshi Sundaresa temple. Formerly I would visit it occasionally with friends, but at that time that produced no noticeable emotional effect, much less a change in my habits. But after the awakening, I would go there almost every evening, and in that obsession I would go and stand there for a long time alone before Siva, Nataraja, Meenakshi and the 63 Tamil saints. I would sob and shed tears, and would tremble with emotion. I would not generally pray for anything in particular, although often I wished and prayed that...”

(*The rest of this particular manuscript is missing, but a few weeks later, on 5-2-30, Narasimha Swamy questioned him again on this topic, and Bhagavan gave the following answer*):

“It was not fear of death that took me to the Madurai temple during those six weeks in 1896. The fear seized me for a short while when I was upstairs in my uncle’s house and it gave rise to that *avesam* or current. That obsession made me introspective and made me look perpetually into my own nature, and took me also to temples, made me sob and weep without pain or joy or other explanation, and also it made me wish that I should become like the 63 saints and that I should obtain the blessings or grace of *Ishvara* — general blessings, specifying and expecting nothing in particular. I had no thought or fear of death then, and I did not pray for release from death. I had no idea before those six weeks or during those six weeks that life on earth was full of pain, and I had no longing or prayer to be released from *samsara*, or human life or lives. All that idea and talk of *samsara* and *bandha* I learnt only after coming to this place and reading books. I never entertained either the idea that life was full of woe or that life was undesirable.

“That *avesam* continues right up to now. After reading the language of the sacred books, I see it may be termed *suddha manas*, *akhandakara vritti*, *prajna* etc.; that is, the state of mind of *Ishvara* or *Jnani*.”

Question: How is it that there was a perception of difference and prayer that “I should become like the 63 saints and get *Ishvara*’s grace?”

Bhagavan: The *akhandakara* current was sporting with these and still remained despite that desire.

Page fillers...

One morning in September, one Maurice Frydman, a consulting and electrical engineer announced himself before Sri Bhagavan. He entered the Hall, hat in hand but with shoes on. The Maharshi ordered a stool for him on which he seated himself cross-legged for a short time and then he withdrew. After a wash and light refreshments he

came back without shoes and squatted on the floor. He stayed three days and was quite social and genial and friendly to everyone who responded similarly towards him. He tried to learn our ways and adapt himself to them. His clumsiness often evoked the good-humoured laughter of the Maharshi who always put him right as a father would a child. He tried to learn from Maharshi something about Realisation, raised doubts and had them cleared. Once he asked why there should be illusion if the individual soul is identical with the supreme. Bhagavan gave him the usual answer (the answer is not given in the text) and then began to chew betel leaves. In the meantime, Mr. Frydman was ruminating and with dramatic gestures wanted to know why the ego should not be cut down at one stroke and destroyed so as to gain Supreme Bliss. The Maharshi stopped chewing his betel leaves long enough to smile, and then broke out into laughter and asked the questioner to hold out his ego so that the Maharshi could strike it down. Everyone in the Hall laughed including Mr. Frydman, and at the conclusion of the laughter Mr. Frydman addressed the Maharshi and said, "Yes, now I understand."

The author of this reminiscence is not known, but the events took place in 1935. Maurice Frydman eventually became a resident of Sri Ramanasramam for a period of nearly three years and during the later stages of his stay, he compiled Maharshi's Gospel. — Editor



Young Ramana's Death Experience

Astrologically Analysed

GAYATRI DEVI VASUDEV

Introduction

While the ancient Vedic system known as Jyotisha has come under assault from modern academic science, it should be stressed how rich and far-reaching its contributions to the earliest scientific observations pertaining to planetary motion and calendar-making have been. Still today, Jyotisha plays an important role in modern India and is regularly utilised in marriage compatibility decisions, Muhurtas regarding religious and civil functions and other similar concerns. While its usefulness in diagnosing individual karmic tendencies is time-tested, within the discipline there is some debate as to what extent karmic factors are operative (and therefore, discernible) in the birth chart of a jnani.

As the greatest sage in recent Indian history and as a fully Self-realised soul, it is not clear to what extent planetary influences would

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impact the later life of Bhagavan Sri Ramana. It is striking, however, that the events and conditions that augured the liberation of a young Tamil boy in the late 19th century are identifiable in the boy's birth chart and offer hints about the early formative conditions that gave rise to the birth of a sage.

Given the space limitations, the following is not an exhaustive analysis of Sri Bhagavan's Rasi chart but rather confines itself simply to attempting to determine the probable timing of — and the astrological factors that contributed to — the death experience of the young Venkataraman in July 1896. Over the years devotees have speculated about a precise date for the event, sometimes using 17th July as a rule of thumb. Bhagavan's own comment on the subject — “about six weeks before I left Madurai for good” — arouses our curiosity and begs our attention in hopefully pinpointing a specific day.

The Great Experience

As a young boy of about 16 years, Sri Ramana had an unusual experience of death after which a great change came over him. About six weeks later, he left his home for Tiruvannamalai and took up the renunciate life in quest of the Ultimate Truth. The date of the experience has not been recorded but there is a record of the date he left his hometown. Piecing this information together with astrological factors¹, the date of the experience can be traced. The chart of Sri Ramana Maharshi is based on birth particulars obtained by Dr. B. V. Raman from the Maharshi's own brother, Swami Niranjanananda, and therefore, its accuracy is beyond reasonable doubt. In order to understand what this experience was, we quote from *Self Realisation* by B. V. Narasimha Swami. The following is Bhagavan's description:

¹ Astrology or Jyotisha is the study of the correlations between celestial factors and terrestrial events. The Grahas (loosely translated as planets) are nine in number. The pronoun *he* is used for a Graha and not *it*, because Jyotisha recognises the Universal Consciousness permeating the Grahas. The physical masses alone do not constitute a Graha just as the body alone does not constitute a man.

It was about six weeks before I left Madurai for good that the great change in my life took place. It was so sudden. One day, I sat up alone on the first floor of my uncle's house. I was in my usual health. I seldom had any illness. [...] But a sudden and unmistakable fear of death seized me. I felt I was going to die. Why I should have felt [so] cannot be explained by anything felt in the body. Nor could I explain it to myself then. I did not however trouble myself to discover if the fear was well-grounded. I felt I was going to die and at once set about thinking out what I should do. I did not care to consult doctors or elders or even friends. I felt I had to solve the problem myself then and there.

The shock of death made me at once introspective []. I said to myself mentally, without uttering the words — “Now, death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.” I at once dramatized the scene of death. I extended my limbs and held them rigid as though rigor-mortis had set in. I imitated a corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing my lips tightly together so that no sound might escape. Let not the word ‘I’ or any other word be uttered. “Well, then”, [I said] to myself, “this body is dead. I will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of the body, am I dead? Is this body ‘I’? This body is silent and inert. But I feel the full force of my personality and even the sound I am a spirit, a thing transcending the body. The material body dies, but the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am therefore the deathless spirit.” All this was not a mere intellectual process, but flashed before me vividly as living truth, something which I perceived immediately, without any argument almost. I was something real, the only real thing in that state, and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that. The ‘I’ or my Self was holding the focus of attention by a powerful fascination from that time [onwards]. Fear of death had vanished once and forever. Absorption in the Self has continued from that moment right up to this time. Other thoughts may come and go like the various notes of a musician, but the ‘I’ continues like the basic or fundamental Sruti note, which accompanies and blends with other notes. Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading or anything else, I was still centred on ‘I’. Previous to that crisis I had no clear perception of myself and was not consciously attached to it. I had felt no direct perceptible

Sa	Ma		Ke Mo	Jp		Ke	Mo	
Jp	RASI			Me	NAVAMSA			Ve
Su	Me	Ve	As	Sa	Ra	Ma	As	Su
Ra								

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi: Tiruchuzhi 29/30 Dec, 1879, 1 am (LMT), 9N56, 78E07, with a balance of four years, one month, and 20 days of Jupiter Dasa (Raman Ayanamsa)

interest in it, much less any permanent disposition to dwell upon it. The consequences of this new habit were soon noticed in my life.²

Chart: Loss of Father and Affliction to Sun

Young Ramana's father died in 1892 leaving the family in indigent circumstances. The family shifted residences — Venkataraman and his eldest brother to live with an uncle in Madurai and his mother and younger brother at Manamadurai. This was during Venus Bhukti of Saturn Dasa.³ The 9th house is quite heavily afflicted. It is occupied by the Moon and Ketu and aspected by Pitrukaraka⁴ Sun afflicted by Rahu. The Sun is further afflicted by Saturn's aspect. The Dasa Lord Saturn is the 2nd Lord from the Karaka Sun. Venus is with 7th Lord

Mercury, again with reference to the Karaka. The death of the father not only dealt a blow to their already modest financial circumstances but also drove the family from the family home to live with relatives. Venus and Saturn in their mutual periods invariably bring major setbacks and in this case, as the two planets are also in mutually adverse positions in the Navamsa⁵, forced the family to shift residence.

Natural Aptitudes in Youth: Mars and A Sturdy Physique

The young Ramana was an expert swimmer and gifted at sports including wrestling. Though he was intelligent and had an excellent memory, he was not particularly interested in his school lessons. Mars, the planet of vitality, occupies the 7th house and aspects the Ascendant.⁶ Ramana was a strong boy but consistent with the influence of Mars on both the Lagna and the Lagna Lord, he was an abnormally heavy sleeper. In fact, once while asleep, the door of the room had to be forced open because no amount of calling would wake him up. His friends often took advantage of this unusual trait and played tricks on him such as pulling him out of bed when he was asleep and leaving him somewhere else.⁷ This quality of deep sleep was a gift from Mars. But, because of other factors in the chart, it was not a life-long feature. Later on, in fact, very few devotees could ever testify to having seen the Maharshi asleep.

As for studies, the family was disappointed in young Venkataraman. They had been counting on him to do well in school in the hope that he might gain a position of influence to aid in their maintenance. Four years of Jupiter Dasa were remaining at the time of birth. Jupiter in this case is a malefic being the 3rd and 6th Lord. He exchanges signs with 5th Lord Saturn forming a Dainya Yoga⁸ and thus affecting

² B. V. Narasimha Swami, *Self Realisation: Life & Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam, pp. 16-18.

³ Starting from birth, one's life is influenced by the different planets for different periods of time. Dasa is the major period while Bhukti means the minor period of a planet.

⁴ Pitrukaraka is the natural significator of father. Karaka means natural significator, each of the planets being assigned a particular signification such as father, mother, brother etc.

⁵ Navamsa is the ninth division, a divisional subchart used in astrological analysis for, among other things, corroborating analyses from the main chart.

⁶ Ascendant or Lagna is the rising sign in the horoscope or the sign that rises on the eastern horizon at the time of birth.

⁷ See *Self Realisation*, pp. 16-17.

⁸ Yogas are juxtapositions of planets attracting specific results, good or bad. Dainya Yoga is one such adverse Yoga.

educational performance and attainments. Saturn is the 4th Lord too so that the Dainya Yoga permeates the significations of the 4th Bhava⁹ as he had neither a home nor property of his own. Saturn Dasa diminished academic activity too as we shall see next.

First Stirrings

The epochal event in July 1896, where a sudden fear of death overtook him occurred in Saturn Dasa, Moon Bhukti. With reference to the Moon, Saturn is the 9th Lord in exchange of signs with the 10th Lord Jupiter. The Moon as Bhukti Lord is with Ketu which led to a fear of death preceding the experience. After the experience, young Ramana was healthy but completely lost all interest in his studies. About six weeks later he left home requesting in a note that no one look for him. This is when he set out to be with his Supreme Father Arunachala. When he reached Arunachala, he threw whatever money he had — a little over Rs. 3 — into the temple tank. He never again handled money. For some weeks after that he was absorbed in samadhi in an underground vault of the temple. In May 1898, his relatives finally tracked him down. His mother and uncle pleaded with him to return home but he simply remained silent. This was in Rahu Bhukti. Rahu is aspected by Saturn. The Moon and Sun influence Rahu. After that he moved up the hill where he remained until moving to the foot of the hill after his mother's death.

The Lagna (the Central point, the Ascendant), Jupiter (the Gnanakaraka), the Moon (Manahkaraka) and Ketu (the Kaivalyakaraka)¹⁰ are all in airy intellectual signs which indicate the path Venkataraman would take — Jnana — and leading to this metamorphosis of 1896. Let us take a closer look.

⁹ Each of the 12 houses rules one particular area of life. The 4th house rules home, property, etc. The 5th house rules education. The 6th house rules liabilities and setbacks.

¹⁰ Lagna or the rising sign is the foundational pillar of a chart. Gnanakaraka means significator of wisdom or higher knowledge. Manahkaraka is significator of mind. Kaivalyakaraka is the significator of Self-Realization.

Sanyasa Yoga from Mars

Mars, apart from his malefic¹¹ properties, is good for renunciation. A natural malefic in the 7th is a yoga for sanyasa.¹² In November 1895, just some 7 or 8 months prior to the death experience, an elderly relation casually mentioned he had just come from a pilgrimage to Holy Arunachala. As soon as the word 'Arunachala' fell on the young boy's ears, a whole new world opened up in his heart and he knew he had to go there. That was the seed for his eventual decision to leave for the Holy Hill.

This happened in Saturn Dasa. Saturn is ruled by the Adi Devata Siva. Arunachala, meaning 'pink and immovable', is deemed to be Siva Himself; the Lord of the temple of Arunachala at the base of the hill is Arunachaleshwara, Arunachala in the form of a lingam. Of course, Sri Ramana never talked of an Ishta or a mantra or a sadhana. But he was immensely fond of the *Periapuranam*, an ancient Tamil work on great devotees of Lord Siva. His love for the hill can be attributed to the 5th Lord Saturn also being the Dasa Lord.¹³

Journey to Self Begins

The 9th house factor is all-pervasive. The Lagna Lord Venus is with 9th Lord Mercury. The 9th Lord Mercury is in his own nakshatra, Jyeshtha. The 5th Lord Saturn is in Revati, ruled by 9th Lord Mercury. This is why the experience that occurred in Saturn Dasa was not a mere passing event, but long-lasting, impactful and tremendously successful. It is said the young Ramana left Madurai on 29 August, 1896, about 6 weeks after the great experience. Let us see if we can track the date of Self-illumination: Starting with 29 August, 1896 and going backwards by 6 weeks, takes us to mid-July. The planetary

¹¹ Planets are classified as benefics and malefics. Mars, Saturn, Rahu and Ketu are natural malefics. Jupiter, Venus, well-associated Mercury and waxing Moon are natural benefics.

¹² Sanyasa is renunciation or asceticism. Sanyasa Yoga means a specific placement of planets that indicates that one will become a renunciate.

¹³ Each of the Navagrahas of Indian astrology comes under a particular form of God. Saturn is ruled by Siva. Adi Devata means such a deity.

	Ma		Me
Ra	CHART 1 15 JULY 1896 2 PM		Ve Su Jp Ke
		As Sa	Mo

	Ma		Mo Su Ve
Ra	CHART 2 10 JULY 1896 2 PM		Me Jp Ke
		As Sa	

DEATH EXPERIENCE

positions for Wednesday, 15 July at 2 p.m. (IST) for Madurai show the Tithi to be Sukla Panchami.¹⁴ The previous New Moon fell on 10th July, the next on 9th August. Panchami is favoured for spiritual matters. The Moon in Virgo, on the other hand, is not compatible for spiritual occurrences of any kind.

New Moon as Catalyst

Is there anything striking in this chart? The major planets remain in the same signs during the whole week. So, we are not concerned with them. What about the Moon and the Sun? Do they enjoy a special relationship to warrant such a major change? Usually for major spiritual experiences, New and Full Moons become important, especially New Moon.¹⁵

¹⁴ Each lunar month is made up of 30 lunar days. Each lunar day is called a Tithi and marks the Moon gaining 12° over the Sun. Panchami is the 5th lunar day when the Moon gains 5 x 12° or 60° over the Sun's longitude. *Sukla* is the "bright half" or waxing phase of the Moon.

¹⁵ Amavasya is the last lunar day of the lunar month and starts when the Moon is just 12° behind the Sun.

Let us track the positions on the previous New Moon. We will still be within of a six week time-frame from 29 August. So, let us look at the New Moon day 2 p.m. (IST) on 10th July, 1896 for Madurai (Chart 2).

This is a very interesting chart. The New Moon has occurred on young Venkataraman's Moon and Atmakaraka.¹⁶ It has occurred in the 9th house in Punarvasu, Sri Ramana's Janma Nakshatra.¹⁷ Transiting Mars is on the natal Mars. Saturn stationary is on natal Lagna and influenced by Mars. Except for the Nodes (Rahu-Ketu), all the planets are in the 9th house from the Janma Lagna — Sun, Mercury, Venus and the Moon. Jupiter in the 10th is exalted.

Saturn and the Moon, the Dasa and Bhukti Lords, are in airy signs involving the natal Lagna — so a great ferment began in the mind of the young lad. If you superimpose this chart on the birth-chart, you find the Dasa Lord is caught between transiting Rahu and transiting Mars. It was a tremendously challenging and revealing experience. Transiting Moon is on top of the natal Moon (who is also the Bhukti Lord) and moving towards conjunction with the natural Atmakaraka Sun. It tore him apart at the inner level — split the body and soul (*chit-jada-granthi bheda*). The New Moon often brings about restlessness and uncertainty. The young Ramana was overtaken by both these states as evidenced by his questioning.¹⁸

¹⁶ Atmakaraka is the planet that has advanced the most in the sign of his occupation. Karakamsa is the sign occupied by Atmakaraka in the Navamsa chart. The Rasi chart is the map of the sky at the time of birth. Navamsa is a sub-divisional chart derived from dividing each sign into equal parts of 3° 20' each. Both charts are to be interpreted judiciously to be able to decipher the results.

¹⁷ Janma Nakshatra is the constellation occupied by the Moon in the birth chart. The Zodiac is divided into 27 Nakshatras. The Moon was in the 7th Nakshatra called Punarvasu at the time of Sri Bhagavan's birth.

¹⁸ Any major event in life generally occurs when the transits (planetary positions at the time of an event) move into a pattern that has a synchronicity with the planetary positions at birth. Radical Sun here means the Sun's position in the birth chart. The planets on the day of the Great Illumination were placed strategically with reference to the planets at the time of Bhagavan's birth.

A Seer is Born

Jupiter in Cancer in the 10th from the Lagna (Janma) in a deeply spiritual sign heralds great transformation. Jupiter is aspected both by Mars and Saturn — Mars from his Moolatrikona and Saturn from his exaltation — highlighting the epochal event. The experience shifts to the Moon Bhukti, to the borderline Antara of the Sun.

In the Moon Bhukti, the Moon as Atmakaraka becomes a very difficult period. The Moon being in a cuspal degree assumes great significance. The Moon rules the mind and ego. Being in the 7th from the radical Sun, the ego is dealt a death-blow by the experience. The 9th house being involved, the death of the ego is the triggering point for the spiritual transformation of the native.

With Moon Bhukti, the Amavasya day assumes great importance. The Bhukti Lord Moon is merging into the Sun, the Soul Force or Atman. The Moon ruling the mind is disappearing into the Sun, the Soul Force not only of the individual but also of the Cosmos. The Dasa Lord is Saturn and there is complete renunciation and detachment — a dissociation of the body-mind from the soul. The Maharshi from this moment ceased to be young Venkataraman, ceased to identify himself with the body or the mind, and became a Seer, pure witness of the little “I”. The date 10 July, 1896, was, therefore, in all likelihood the day of the Great Experience. ▲

The Death Experience at Madurai

From the Telugu *Sri Ramana Lila*

KRISHNA BHIKSHU

TRANSLATED BY N.A. MOHAN RAO

Krishna Bhikshu wrote a Telugu biography during Bhagavan's lifetime. The author spoke directly to Bhagavan and showed him the complete manuscript which Bhagavan carefully read through and made meticulous corrections. We can therefore accept the veracity of Krishna Bhikshu's biography.

The following is an excerpt concerning the famous death experience at Madurai when Bhagavan was a lad.

Krishna Bhikshu was introduced at an early age to Ganapati Muni who in turn brought him to Bhagavan in 1929. Though he had a law degree he never practised and instead dedicated his life to a deep study of traditional Hindu rites and practices.

i) The translation is rendered as true to the letter as possible, without regard to conformity with idiomatic usage; ii) Certain words interposed here and there for making the sentences complete, are given in italic font, and within brackets; iii) The Telugu words are transliterated as per the scheme used in the dictionary cited below. The scheme is self-evident to any Telugu-knowing person; iv) The Telugu-English Dictionary published by the well-known publishers, Balasaraswathy Book Depot, Madras, (and claimed to be the 'largest twentieth century dictionary') has been used to obtain some of the equivalents. On occasions, though, the dictionary equivalents have been disregarded in favour of the translator's own choices. The translator does not regard the Indian vernacular dictionaries to be comprehensive enough to cover all the English equivalents. He finds them also woefully incomplete — for example, tooDi-penDlikoDuku is not found in the present dictionary.

In 1896, Nagaswami married Janaki Ammal. The in-laws' place was Madurai itself. At the post-wedding festivities,¹ Venkataraman was the fellow-bridegroom² to his brother. (*It was his*) seventeenth year. (*He*) was studying for the Matriculation examination. Though (*he was*) not that studious a person, there was no fear of failing in the examination. (*He was*) well-built, (*having*) good health; half of July had passed.

¹ The Telugu term *manuguDupulu* stands for customary celebrations that go on for three days after the wedding in tradition-bound families.

² There is no exact translation for the Telugu term *tooDi-penDlikoDuku*, which means 'accompanying' for *tooDiand* 'bridegroom' for *penDlikoDuku*. Here 'accompanying' is meant as adjective, and not as verb form. The complete term stands for a male youngster, very often underaged, who is made to sit by the side of the bridegroom through the celebrations, apparently to give company and ease the latter's ennui in sitting passively for long hours. The term is sometimes inaccurately translated as 'best man'.

On the upper storey, Venkataraman was lying down. Nobody (*else*) was in there. Suddenly, it occurred to Venkataraman, "I shall be dead." There was no reason. "Am dying!"

"There was no reason³ for feeling like that. It did not occur to me what that state was, and whether fear was proper or not.⁴ The thought of asking the elders or the doctors did not come. What is dying? How to escape⁵ it? This alone was the problem.⁶ There were no other thoughts. That very moment, (*I*) had to resolve it.

"Dying means, the legs become stiff; lips become taut; eyes get closed.⁷ Breath stops. So it came into experience due to intensity of the strength of feeling. To me too, the legs became stiff, lips became taut, eyes got closed and breath stopped. But with consciousness not lost, everything was breaking forth⁸ clearly. (The activity of the outer sense-organs having gone, the in-turned perception became available.)

"Even if this body dies, the I-consciousness⁹ will not go. The individuality¹⁰- consciousness was clear. When the body is burnt and turned to ashes in the cremation ground, I will not become extinct. Because I am not the body.

"Now the body is inert. Insentient; I, on the other hand, am sentient. Therefore, death is to the inert body, 'I' am indestructible conscious entity.

³ The term *kaaraNamu* stands for 'cause' and also 'reason'. Both seem equally applicable here and the previous paragraph.

⁴ This is the literal rendering. Idiomatically, it may mean 'whether it was something to be feared or not'.

⁵ The term *tappinchukonnuTa* means both 'escape' and 'avoid'. Both apparently fit in here.

⁶ *samasya* can also be translated as 'issue', which equally fits the context.

⁷ The punctuation used in the original is reproduced here and elsewhere, even though it looks imperfect.

⁸ The verb used here is in active voice. Else, 'everything was being cognized clearly' might be okay too.

⁹ *smRti* may mean 'consciousness' or 'awareness'. Either may be used in the three contiguous sentences.

¹⁰ *vyaktitva* can be rendered as 'individuality' or 'personality'. But the former is apparently better suited to the context owing to its sharper definition.

“When the body gives up its activities, and the activities of the senses are not there, the knowledge that obtains is not senses-born. That ‘flashing forth of I’ is *aparoksha*.¹¹ (*It is*) self-effulgent. Not a matter of imagination.

“The thing that is there after death is the eternal, real entity.” In this way, in one moment, new knowledge accrued¹² to Venkataraman.

Although these ideas were expressed¹³ sequentially,¹⁴ this experience was obtained by Venkataraman spontaneously only. ▲

¹¹ Meaning ‘not indirect’, i.e., ‘not obtained through the intervention of the senses and the mind’.

¹² The Telugu text uses a verb in the active voice, and there is no good equivalent in English. ‘Accrued’ is therefore adapted for the purpose, though it is slightly inaccurate. The alternative is to use the passive form ‘is obtained’. But then it agrees neither with the voice of the verb, nor with the preposition, ‘to’.

¹³ The literal rendering would be ‘spoken’, but ‘expressed’ is taken to be equally permissible.

¹⁴ The dictionary equivalent is ‘by degrees’, but ‘sequentially’ is thought to be equally valid.

The Ant that Kissed the Moon

G. KAMESHWAR

If one takes it that I was born when I saw Arunachala mountain for the first time, then I am about to turn twenty one. Just turned adult, one might say but the fact is quite the contrary. For, Arunachala towers as such a father figure of all time —why, of time itself —that each and every person ever remains a child as far as Arunachala, the most ancient of ancients, the physical manifestation of Siva, the mystic mountain, is concerned. Whether one is eight months or eighty years.

And Arunachala remains a rather stern faced father, Who has seen it all. He glows in solitary splendour, with His hard rock exterior, blazing hot countenance and utter silence. He even has an annual festival to boot, where He spews flames from the crown of His head. Full of mystery, He stands in supreme aloofness, right in the midst of teeming humanity, looking completely unconcerned with the bustle of the

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whole universe. A quiet and ruthless hunter, He makes short work of the 'me and mine' of those who set their hearts on Him. And it is for this reason that sages through the ages have sought Him out praying to be preyed upon. And He has unfailingly done that — denuded them, silenced them, swallowed them whole...

As Bhagavan Sri Ramana says in *Aksharamanamalai*:

Let me, your prey, surrender, and be consumed by you,
O Arunachala, and attain peace. (v. 27)

You took your aim, shot the arrow of grace at me, finished me and ate me alive, O Arunachala. (v. 92)

Even as I thought of you, you had thought it all out; and like a spider, you had laid a trap, weaving your web of grace; and there you captured me, imprisoned me, and consumed me, O Arunachala. (v. 103)

Thus it is that over the ages, Arunachala has developed a reputation that inspires reverence, awe, even fear. "Brahma was banned because he crossed Him...Arunachala is fire, an endless column of fire. To embrace Him is to court annihilation... In fact, it should do to just remember Him; thinking of Him is enough." — so whisper the voices of the ages.

And yet there is a soft side to Him. One half of Him is His consort Parvati, the daughter of the Mountains. Arunachala is the combination form, Siva and Parvati, Ardhanareeswara. Siva and Parvati, God and Grace, Jnana and Bhakti, Austerity and Love. And as the parents of all creation, they are most compassionate and so let us commence our climb by first offering them our obeisance:

jagata: pitarau vande. Paarvatee Paremeshwarau!

And now, may we proceed towards the mountain path?

Ever since I have seen Arunachala, I guess I have entertained a dream to go up to the summit of that sacred mountain. It was not a full blown desire more buried in seed form, somewhere in the recesses of my heart.

And all these years, the seed remained a seed, an invisible piece of longing, which off and on did surface in my mind, tentatively, but which never overcame the challenges of germination. Firstly, there were the elders of the field. Ever so many of them advised against the ascent,

for one reason or the other. Then there was the question of season. You would be ill advised to attempt the climb in summer. The hot weather and the rock surfaces would fry you in no time. Not that the other seasons are cool. But winter in Tiruvannamalai is relatively less hot. So, that's one time you can try. Provided you know the way. And then of late, the forest department has imposed restrictions on climbing the hill. One needs a special permit from the government to go up the hill. This is in force during all times of the year, except during the time of Kartikai Deepam, when all are allowed.

And then there are some people who say that the hill is not meant to be climbed. It is not proper to do so, and that were you to do so, you would be transgressing the sanctity of the holy place.

Like this young woman, who had climbed Arunachala a few months earlier. It was her first visit to Arunachala. Being a hiker, athlete, and a nature enthusiast, she was immediately drawn by the summit. Just a few months earlier, she had been to Mount Kailash and had circumambulated that holiest of mountains. And now, here she was at Arunachala. She took off at 5 in the morning, and with a local guide, she literally powered her way up and was on top of the hill in a little over an hour. Amazing! And on top, she sank into meditation, and, later, very reluctantly made her way down and back to low-level life.

"That was home," she told me. It was a deeply mystic experience for her. "I could never have climbed the way I did. I just went up the steep route, risking life and limb at every step but I wasn't in control. It was an 'other' force that took me to the top. Never in my life have I climbed like that... I love watching the scenery, hiking slowly... not this time. I don't know...I wasn't in control...but I know one thing...I will never in my life be able to go up there again...never...This one time I was allowed....don't you see?...there was some unfinished *karma*...and Arunachala wanted me to be done with that. Arunachala is not a mere hill, it is Lord Siva. I know that I am not allowed to climb again. Don't you see? Arunachala is not meant to be climbed," she told me crushing the seed all over again.

And to think that just a year ago, I had been privileged to go halfway up the hill, to the 'Seven Springs' hoping that next time I would go all

the way up. Was it to be or not to be? Would I be transgressing holy laws?

Grappling with these questions, I argued with myself. Surely it was a question of attitude. I was not fool enough to think that it was an attempt to scale the peak in an Olympian manner. I knew that it would happen only if Arunachala allowed. But wouldn't a father humour a child that climbed on his shoulder, ruffle his head? Doesn't Arunachala allow thousands of devotees to go up every year during the annual festival of lighting the beacon — Kartikai Deepam?

But then there was another issue. More down to earth. This seed of mine also suffered from an important handicap. The field that it was buried in was rather intractable, jaded with age. I was never of hardy physique, and the passage of time has not helped either. My physical fitness was surely an issue.

And so the seed went back to sleep again until...

Until the Jayanti of Bhagavan Ramana in the first Parthiba year of the new millennium.

Jayanti was on 18th December. My family had planned ahead, and were going to Tiruvannamalai. Work commitments, lethargy, and a general lack of initiative usually see me a mere spectator of the world-striding *trivikrama* deeds of my family. But some bulb did switch on in my pickled brain and yes, I saw some light. Could I attempt the summit? It was winter. And Deepam time as well. The Kartikai Deepam on top of Arunachala had been lit a few days earlier on the 13th of December. And it burns for some eleven days or so. My own state of physical readiness seemed 'not bad', and perhaps just enough to pass muster. It was now or never. And so I broached the subject. "Why not?" came the reply from a well wisher in Tiruvannamalai, who offered to arrange for a guide for me. I could not back out now.

We reached Tiruvannamalai on the evening of 16th December. It was a Thursday and the first day of the holy month of Margazhi, the month Sri Ramana was born.

To put it mildly, I was rather nervous. It did not appear possible to me. My legs would not be able to make it. My heart would not hold. These were the perturbations that played with my fickle will. We were

in Ramanasramam, and twilight time saw me in Matrubhuteshwara temple, the temple of Lord Siva who came as mother, the form of supreme compassion. I prayed in silence.

Next morning, I was up at 4 am. Walking out of the room in Morvi compound, I looked up, and spotted the drop of God, the Deepam, on top of the Hill. All the world was in silence. It was heavenly. By 4:45 or so, the local guide landed up. God be blessed, it was Chandran, the same person who had led me to the Seven Springs a year earlier! I could not have got a better guide. The gods were certainly on my side.

I packed some dry figs, a few oranges, and a bottle of water in my cloth shoulder-bag and we set sail. The time was 5 am. We drove to a point near the Arunachaleshwara temple. There was a narrow lane, flanked by humble dwellings that led to the mountain.

Some fifteen or twenty minutes into the climb, we reached the *mulai-paal-teertham* tank. The climb was tough. I was somewhat wiser by my previous year's experience of the climb, but that only served to make me more apprehensive. One had to step from rock to rock, and each step was a different transaction. My heart was pounding like drums of war, and I was panting like a steam engine. Chandran was most considerate and allowed me to halt almost every five minutes.

The view of Arunachaleshwara temple from up there was fantastic. Ramparts within ramparts, magnificent towers, all set to geometric perfection. The house of God, standing majestic and tall for hundreds of years.

Climbing on, the going got worse. It seemed never ending. Each step was a struggle. I was seriously wondering whether I would be able to make it even halfway. One part of my mind was counseling me to give up, and get back. Return, come back another day, said my mind. Somehow my will prevailed, and I walked on. Chandran told me that we had to cross five hills, each distinct hill mass was made of several hillocks. And we would be crossing five hillocks in this very route. That's what I was given to understand. I have read somewhere that Arunachala is a Sri Chakra. I could visualize the Arunachala Sri Chakra Meru as waves of hillocks cascading upwards to the peak.

I climbed on. Chandran stopped at a point and casually pointed to the top, “Look!” And there! On top! A whiff of smoke from the Deepam! Arohara! Annamalai! Arunachala!

We were nearly halfway now, and soon reached the *arai-malai-guhai*, the cave that is halfway up the hill. I stepped in and sat down on one side. What peace! Chandran went off to gather some greens. I ate some figs, drank some water, breathed in silence. Once again, I wondered, awestruck, how Sri Ramana, Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni and others had managed to live there. They would come to this cave and spend many days. They slept at night on the bare cave floor and ate the simplest of food. As ascetic as a rock of Arunachala, that’s what you had to be if you wanted to stay there. But it had its pluses as well. The high rock perch outside had a sweeping view of the dale. The breeze in the evenings would surely be heavenly. Nights would be wonderful — the silence, the chill, the play of darkness and distance. And full moon nights would be pure magic. Drinking spring water gathered from *Ezhusunai*, cooking some greens or boiling some gruel, getting to know the local monkeys as individuals, sharing one’s food with them, seeing the flights of birds.

After a short respite, I started north, to the summit.

Chandran fashioned a makeshift wooden staff for me. This did wonders for me, making the climbing much easier. Not that it was easy. I was still moving at my own slow pace. Several pilgrims overtook me, and powered their way up. I started on the final leg, literally on my last legs. The view from here was fantastic. We could see the two large rainwater lakes: *Palli-konda-mattu*, and *Tamarai-kulam*, or lotus tank. Rains had been copious that year. The tanks were full.

Around 9:30 or so, we reached quite near the summit. I could see a blue, plastic canopy. Walking past the canopy, we were there! On the summit of Arunachala! And in front of us was the ‘Annamalai Deepam!’ The time was 9:40 am. If the heavens are true, then this was the seventh!

The whole of the summit was black due to the grime of the *ghee* (clarified butter), tons of which are used up in the Deepam. The Deepam was sizzling in a cauldron around six feet high, which stood there like a huge bucket. It was made of five metals. I was told that it

can hold around 2000 litres of ghee. Chandran said that in terms of weight, it would hold some 3000 kgs of ghee. At the mouth, the cauldron is around five feet or so in diameter. The cauldron is brought up from the town below, just before the Deepam festival, during the month of Kartikai. Earlier on, the cauldron was left on the summit the entire year around. It was only recently, perhaps in the last hundred years, that they decided that it was not safe to leave it up there. Chandran told me that the material of the cauldron also had been changed.

There the cauldron stood. Now, perhaps half full of ghee. With small tongues of flames slipping out of the mouth, like Arunachala licking his lips. There was a whiff of whitish smoke, rising up in the sky. The Deepam that was lit on the full moon day of Kartikai would remain lit for around ten or eleven days and visible in the nights from thirty miles away.

There were a few young men at the summit. They stoked the cauldron, poured the ghee and generally manned the post.

We walked towards the cauldron, to the rocks behind it, which was the very top of the peak. The whole of the surface was very slippery. A thick, dark, carpet of ghee. I walked very gingerly past the cauldron, through a narrow gap between two rocks, to the other side. I climbed a rock on my right, the top rock at the summit. While sitting on my haunches there I could see in front was Arunachala Paadam — a pair of feet, etched on the rock. Arunachala’s feet, said Chandran. I touched the feet with reverence, bowing to it. Collecting a few dark ghee-stained stones from the top, I slithered down from the perch.

On one side, I could see the glorious Arunachaleshwara temple. Exactly 180 degrees across, on the other side of the mountain, I could see the Adi Annamalai temple. This was probably the only place from where one can see both the temples. What a blessing to be here! The giri-valam road, used for circumambulating the hill, could be seen snaking around the mountain. And the Deepam, burning in front of me. Considered one of the holiest of sights. And there I was. On the summit of Arunachala. Was this real? Was I dreaming? Had I really been able to reach where I am? I was in a daze.

At about 10:30 am we decided to commence the descent. I ate one of the oranges that I had brought, and shared a few with the monkeys around. They seemed quite delighted, as Chandran made it all a game, throwing pieces all around. We walked down, which was tougher than the climb up. Chandran discarded the wooden staff, telling me that it was of no use on the way down.

Oh it was tough climbing down for me. More daring pilgrims were literally sprinting past me. Like mountain goats. Everybody had a word of advice for everybody else. Complete strangers spoke with consummate familiarity. Some of the 'goats' seemed to snigger at a slow-coach like me. Oh, I love my country!

Pilgrims carrying tins of ghee were coming up the hill. The 15 kilo tins they carried on their shoulders were meant for replenishing the Deepam on the summit. What a penance this was. I felt very humbled seeing these people. There were others carrying bales of cloth, which were used as wicks for the Deepam. Some thirty metres of such cloth, rubbed with a few kilos of camphor were used as a wick.

An hour or so later, we reached the half-way cave again. Turning right from there, we decided to take the route that would go to Skandasramam and thereon to the rear entrance of Ramanasramam. It was a long and arduous descent. I laboured on.

"There is this devotee from Vellore, who comes every year," said Chandran. "Every year, he comes to Tiruvannamalai, and climbs to the summit. He is blind. He walks with a guide. He keeps his hand on the shoulder of his guide, who walks a bit ahead of him. And he manages to reach the summit. He comes every year.

"And then there is this devotee from Nagarkoil. He is lame. Disabled in both legs. He too comes every year. Powering himself by his arms, he lifts his body and goes up the hill. Only when there is an insurmountable patch, he takes some help from his escort. Otherwise, he moves himself. And he reaches the summit. He comes every year."

I listened in amazement. A blind person and a lame person reaching the summit of Arunachala. What can one say about the power of devotion, or the power of Grace! Glory to Arunachala!

Feeling humbled, I trudged on. Just before we reached Skandasramam, there was a short drizzle. It was lovely. Sometime after noon, we reached Skandasramam and drank the spring waters of Skandasramam which was really refreshing. After resting a short time we started down to Ramanasramam. By 1 pm, we reached the Ashram. I could hardly believe that I had made it. Or had I?

I was reminded of the old riddle that Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni solved during the contest at Navadvipa in Bengal, when he was awarded the title of Kavyakanta. The riddle, called *samasya*, posed by the examiner, was in the form of a phrase that did not make sense. The Muni was required to compose a verse extempore which explained this phrase, and solve the riddle. The phrase was *pipeelika cumbati candramandalam*, which means: "The ant kisses the orb of the moon."

Now how on earth can an ant kiss the moon?

Ganapati Muni, replied spontaneously in verse:

*satee viyogena vishanna chetasa: prabho: sayanaasya himaalaye girau
sivasya choodaakalitam sudhaasayaa pipeelika cumbati
candramandalam*

"Sorrowing over Sati's dismemberment/Lord Siva lies prone/
Swooning on the mountains of the Himalayas!/Seeking nectar, (now
within reach)/ The ant kisses the orb of the moon!"

I felt like that ant. The ant was enabled by the grace of Arunachala to kiss the moon at the crown of Lord Siva!

As I hobbled back to the Morvi guest house, a Sanskrit verse formed itself in my grateful mind:

*Adya me saphalamjanma Yad-drishtavaan jnana-bhaasawaram
Arunchalasya sahasraarE Hrut-prabha-amrutam sivam*

"Today my life's purpose has been achieved, for I have seen the
beacon light of knowledge/On the crown sahasrara of Arunachala,
Heart-Light, Immortal, Auspicious, Siva."

Glory to Arunachala, whose feet are seen on the top of the summit!
Glory to Arunachala whose crown and feet in reality can never be
seen! Glory to Parvati and Parameshwara, the parents of the universe!
Glory to Sadguru Ramana! Glory! ▲



Self-Realisation and the Parables of Plato and Bhagavan

S. MOHAN

Know the Atman as the Lord of the chariot, the body as the chariot; know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind again as the reins.
Katha Upanishad, 1.3.3

The spiritual literature of the world is filled with analogies, metaphors, parables and symbols. All these help to illustrate a particular concept or to throw light on a specific process. They assist understanding by drawing attention to relationships and parallels.

One of the classic parables in ancient Greek philosophy is 'The Parable of the Cave' in Plato's *Republic* at the beginning of Book VII. Plato (427 – 347 B.C.E) came from a distinguished family of Athens.

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

His writings, treasured in the Western world, are the very first recordings of Greek philosophy available in complete form. Earlier writings do exist but have survived only as fragments. Plato's writings are mainly in the form of discourses between a teacher and his associates. Almost every dialogue features Plato's own teacher Socrates (469 – 399 B.C.E.). Plato depicts Socrates as a man of simple tastes, a cheerful disposition and with a great desire to clarify how to live life meaningfully. Many young men of Athens, like Plato, flocked to learn from Socrates. The politicians in the Athenian democracy became apprehensive about the contents of these discussions as well as the considerable influence that Socrates exerted on the young men of the city. He was therefore falsely accused of corrupting their minds and introducing new religious concepts and put to death.

Socrates did not leave any writings and it was left to Plato to record the various dialogues that took place. The first part of Plato's writings focuses on the philosophical legacy of Socrates and include a description of his trial and his advice to his students and friends before he died.

Plato is said to have left Athens after Socrates' death and travelled extensively in Asia Minor and Egypt. There is speculation that during this period of ten years he might have come in contact with Indian religious philosophy. When he returned to Athens he established a place of learning called the Academy. The writings of this later period continue to figure Socrates but are actually expositions of Plato's own philosophy. *The Republic*, comprising ten books is the most comprehensive of his later writings. It is a description of an ideal state. 'The Parable of the Cave' appears at the beginning of Book VII which outlines the scheme of education for what Plato calls the 'Guardians' who are to be 'Philosopher – Statesmen', at the top tier of governance.

This parable describes the very first qualification of these philosopher-statesmen. It describes a group of prisoners in a cave, manacled and bound, so that they cannot even turn their heads. They are forced to look at a wall in front of them. Behind them is a raging fire which lights up this wall. In front of the fire but behind the prisoners, there is ramp on which people walk to and fro. Their shadows

are thrown on the wall, moving, gesticulating and also talking, as their voices echo from the wall. The prisoners gazing at this shadow play on the cave wall regard what they see as reality.

The parable describes how one of the prisoners escapes, and, unshackled and free, discovers a way out of the cave. He emerges into the outside world but is dazzled by the sight. Orienting his eyes slowly, he first gazes at the sun's reflection in water, and then learns how to look at the moon and the stars in the cool light of night. Finally he is able to look at the sun directly. He realizes that this world, not the cave wall, is the true reality. He goes back into the cave to try to share his insight with the other prisoners. But they are unable to accept the views of the returned prisoner.

This parable describes the two states of humanity, the constrained condition of illusion within the cave, and the freedom and enlightenment outside in the sunlight. As the treatise proceeds to discuss the education of the philosopher-statesmen, Plato implies that the 'Guardians' of his Republic must be persons who have experienced enlightenment. In this parable the sun is the source of enlightenment. The cave represents the mundane world, shrouded in the darkness of ignorance, where moving shadows are mistaken for reality. Gradually learning how to view the moon the escaped prisoner is finally able to experience the dazzling brilliance of the sun.

From the Indian and Vedantic viewpoint this parable seems to symbolize Self-realisation. In this context, it is interesting to consider how Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi portrays this state as recorded by Sri Natanananda in the text called 'Spiritual Instruction' or *Upadesha Manjari*. Bhagavan compares the human system to a cinema projector, using a paradigmatic twentieth century innovation as his example. He likens the lamp, the source of illumination, to the Self or *Atman*. The lens which is close to the lamp and helps focus the light is the 'pure *sattvic* mind' or intellect. The film is the 'stream of subtle thoughts', coloured and superimposed with 'latent tendencies', the imprints and memories of past experiences, a multitude of experiences from many lives. The screen is the world outside on which the images fall, processed by the 'lens-intellect' and the 'film-mind' and lit up by the luminosity

of the 'lamp-Self'. The various pictures projected are the objects perceived in the world with their names and forms. The mechanism and the process of projection are what Bhagavan calls 'the divine law'.

Bhagavan explicitly states, as recorded by Sri Natanananda, that 'just as the lamp illumines the lens, while remaining unaffected', the Self illumines the human system, the world of names and forms that are dependent on the latent tendencies or *vasanas*, while the Self Itself remains unaffected and unchanging. This simile powerfully describes the nature of the 'Unchanging Sun' or *Aruna-achala*. Plato does not explain his parable, but Bhagavan explains very clearly why he chooses this example to illustrate the nature of truth. These illustrations of the nature of the Self or *Atman*, remind us of the analogy in the *Katha Upanishad*, quoted at the beginning of this essay. In this classic metaphor the Self is depicted as the Lord of a chariot. He owns, guides and energizes his charioteer, the Intellect, who, through the reins of the Mind, controls the sense-horses. The chariot itself is the human body. This metaphor comes from an exposition on the nature of Brahman and the concept of Self-Realization, as expounded by Yamaraja, the Lord of Death, to a young man called Nachiketa.

The major part of the *Katha Upanishad* takes the form of a dialogue between Nachiketa and Yamaraja. Nachiketa's father performs an important sacrifice, and desiring the boon of heaven, proceeds to give away gifts to the officiating priests. Nachiketa, a sensitive young man, is perturbed at the poor quality of the offerings made by his father, and fearing that the father will therefore not be successful in achieving his objective, pesters his father as to how he will dispose of him. In exasperation, his father retorts, "I will give thee to Death."

To fulfill his father's vow, Nachiketa goes to the house of Yamaraja and waits there for three nights. On his return, Yamaraja is dismayed to find that he has made a pious Brahmin wait for three nights without food and to atone for his error, offers Nachiketa three boons. Nachiketa asks for the restoration of his father's love and peace of mind as his first boon and for his own initiation into the secrets of the sacred fire sacrifice as his second boon. Both his boons are fulfilled. Nachiketa then asks to be instructed on Brahman and blessed with the state of

Self-realization. After testing his competence and commitment, Yamaraja proceeds to describe the nature of Brahman in a beautiful manner as well as the process for realizing Brahman. The analogy of the chariot appears in this description. At the end of this exposition, the Upanishad states that Nachiketa, 'having acquired this knowledge imparted by Yamaraja, and also the whole teaching about Yoga, attains Brahman, having become free from all impurities and death'.¹

Reading this Upanishad, many questions arise: 'Who was Nachiketa? Was he a real person? Did some incident in his life provoke such serious questions in his young mind? Is the Upanishad (which appears in the *Katha-Saktha Brahmana* of the *Krishna Yajur Veda*, as also the *Taittiriya Brahmana*), the real life experience of a sage, who, in his youth attained Self-Realization, at a moment when he was close to death? *Was this a death-experience?* Such questions lead one, startlingly, to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi himself. According to Sri B.V. Narasimha Swami, in the second chapter of his book *Self-Realization*, Bhagavan experienced the 'death-experience' and emerged from it as a self-realized soul. His attitude to life changed completely and he sought solitude and proximity to Arunachala. He was blessed with the continuous experience of Brahman and for the rest of his life shared his experiences and offered his guidance to the countless devotees who sought him out.

Bhagavan's account of his death experience and his teachings on self-enquiry are fit to be considered as a twentieth century Upanishad. Blessed are those who knew him and blessed are those who seek him even today. For, 'the Knower of Brahman verily becomes Brahman' and like his father, Arunachala, Bhagavan is himself a permanent source of illumination to the entire world. ▲

¹ *Katha Upanisad*, II.iii.18.



Niranjanananda Swami

A Life of Service

K. MANGALAM

TRANSLATED BY S. POORNIMA

The following article is an edited version of an Ashram Tamil biography of Niranjanananda Swami entitled *Maamunivar Taalpaniyum Maasilaa Aanandar*.

After the *mahanirvana* of Sri Ramana Maharshi the ashram had a deserted look as many devotees left Tiruvannamalai. Only a few such as Muruganar stayed on keeping the flame of Bhagavan's teaching alive. The ashram manager or *sarvadhikari*, Swami Niranjanananda was barely able to keep the ashram functioning. The strain of all the hectic years when Bhagavan was alive and so many people came to see him plus the worry of how to keep the ashram open finally broke the *sarvadhikari's* health.

In 1952 Chinnaswami was in considerable physical agony from an intestinal disease and heart pain. One day he called close relatives and devotees to hear his last instructions. He said, "I am going away

K. Mangalam is the daughter of T. N. Venkataraman the former president of Sri Ramanasramam.

with stainless hands and a fulfilled heart. I have never touched a paisa of the Ashram for my personal possession. Everything here, every stick and stone, belongs to Bhagavan. You have to treat them with devotion. You must give your heart and mind to Bhagavan. He will shower your heart with grace. Be truthful and honest. In doing your Ashram duties you must uphold the virtue of your lineage.”

This final injunction showed Swami Niranjanananda’s great dispassion and attitude of complete surrender to Bhagavan. He lived true to the words of the saints “Except to Him to no other gods do I pay obeisance.” This great karma yogi left his body on a full moon day, Thursday the 29th January 1953 at 11.30pm. His earthly remains were interred in front of the Mother’s temple for which he had laboured so hard and long. A lingam was consecrated and pujas are performed daily.

Swami Niranjanananda who became the *Sarvadhikari* (manager) of Sri Ramanasramam during the lifetime of Bhagavan, was born in 1886 and named, Nagasundaram. He was one of four siblings and was six when their father died in 1892. They were all shocked at being left destitute both emotionally as well as financially. Known as a charitable man, Sundaram Iyer left no savings and so the family became dependent on relatives after his death. In 1896 Venkataraman had the death experience which radically altered his life and sent him to Arunachala. In 1898 his mother and his elder brother Nagaswami went to Tiruvannamalai to persuade him to return, but although they failed in their original purpose, Bhagavan’s presence helped them, in particular his mother, to develop *vairagya* (dispassion) in themselves.

In or around 1902, Nagasundaram came to see Bhagavan, then in silence at Sadguruswami Cave (Banyan Tree). He stayed a while and noticed that a quantity of sugar candy offered to Bhagavan by his visitors was in the cave. Concluding that it was his brother’s property and would be excellent *prasadam* for distribution back home among his relations, he bundled up some candy. When this was brought to Bhagavan’s attention he wrote down his advice to Nagasundaram which became his first *upadesa* (instruction) to him. He advised his younger

brother that the offerings of devotees did not belong to any one person and there was no question of ownership in the matter. Everyone who visited him was equally entitled to a share in the offerings made. This *upadesa* impressed him deeply and Nagasundaram lived by it for the rest of his life.

In 1904 at the age of 17 Nagasundaram began to earn for the family when he started work in the Taluk office at Manamadurai. Four years later, he was married to Mangalam, the eldest daughter of his aunt’s (Nelliappiar’s wife) sister.

They had a boy in 1914 whom they named Venkataraman in honour of Nagasundaram’s older brother who now was the Sage of Arunachala.¹ It was in April that year that, along with his mother, they visited Tiruvannamalai. Alagammal who was old and fatigued declared, “I’m not going back. I will stay here.”

Nagasundaram returned to Tiruvenkadu with his family and resumed his work until his wife died and he was left with the sole responsibility for his son whom he could not care for properly on his own.

In 1916 someone met Nagasundaram and told him that his mother wanted him to come to Tiruvannamalai. Nagasundaram saw it as a call from Arunachala Siva, resigned his job and left Tiruvenkadu entrusting the family of Nelliappiar with the baby Venkataraman.²

Nagasundaram was 30 years old, when in August 1917 he arrived in Tiruvannamalai with the intention of surrendering to Bhagavan and he never left again except for Ashram work.

He took the decisive step in 1918 of renouncing the world and taking *sannyasa*. He received *diksha* (initiation) and after placing the robes in front of Bhagavan he donned them. He took the name

¹ This son eventually became the president of the Ashram in 1953 after spending many years learning and helping his father manage Sri Ramanasramam during Bhagavan’s lifetime.

² Nelliappiar himself died in 1914. T.N. Venkataraman was fondly known as ‘Venkitoo’. In 1917 the two and half year old Venkataraman was adopted by Bhagavan’s younger sister, Alamelu and her husband Picchu Iyer. Nagasundaram called him ‘ambi’, the young lad.

MOUNTAIN PATH

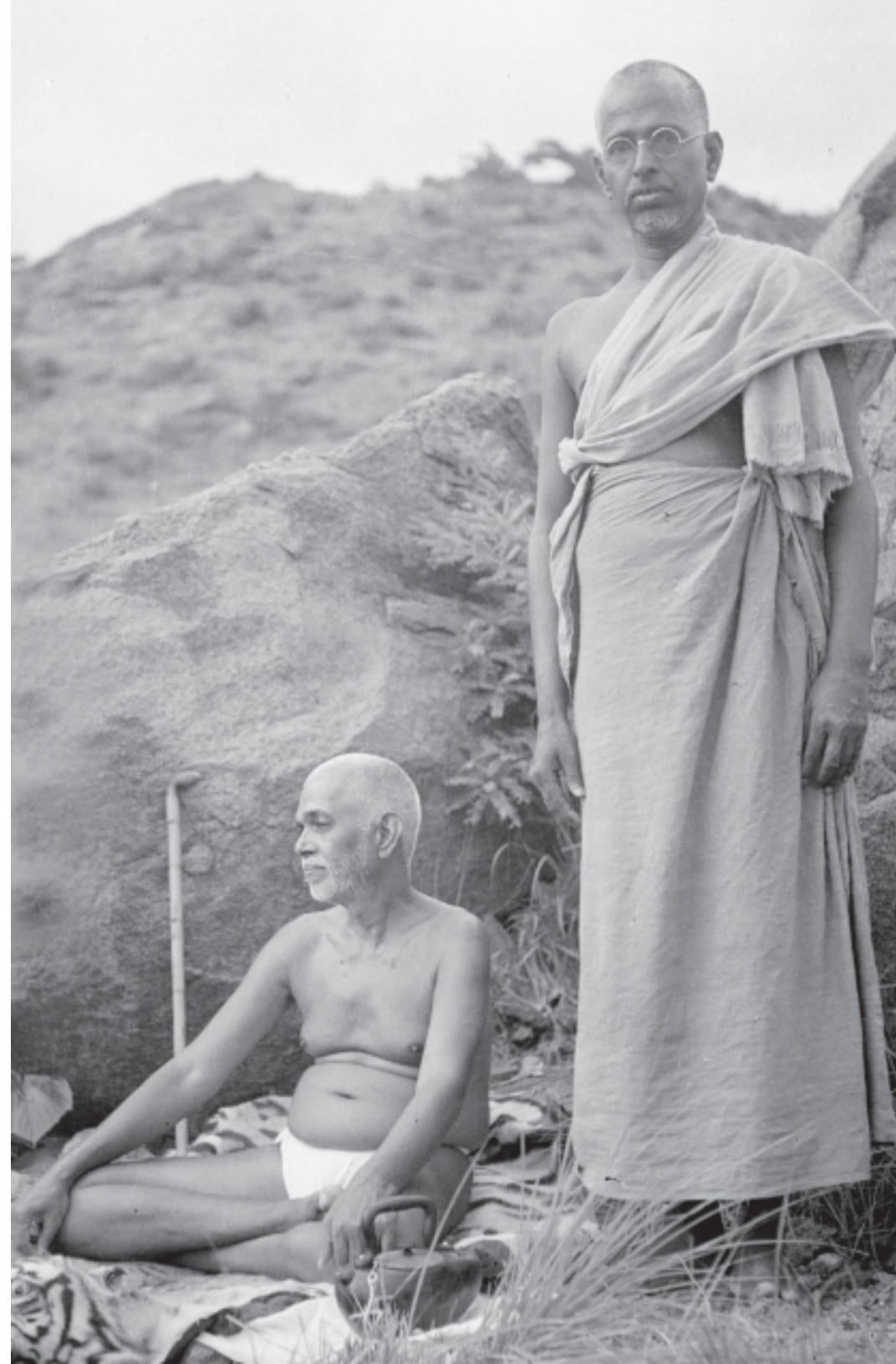
Niranjanananda. 'Niranjan' meaning 'one who is spotless; free from blame; free of attributes' and 'ananda' meaning 'bliss'. As Bhagavan had insisted that begging was the best way to destroy the ego, he, with many other devotees regularly went to the town to beg for food. Niranjanananda Swami was modest, respectful and devoted. He was not egoistic about being the younger brother of Bhagavan. Later, service to Bhagavan and his followers became his life's mission. Devotees started to call him 'Chinna Swami' or Little Swami.

Bhagavan lived at Virupaksha Cave with his mother but since there was no permanent water supply, Skandasramam was founded around three perennial springs. In 1917 Bhagavan moved there and his mother started cooking.

Mother Alagammal became seriously ill in 1922 and Bhagavan and Chinna Swami looked after her day and night. One day mother took her younger son's hand and placing it into Bhagavan's hand, said, "Picchai doesn't know good or bad. You have to look after him." She attained Mahanirvana soon afterwards by Bhagavan's grace. This was on 19th May 1922. Her body was taken down from Skandasramam and interred near Pali Thirtham. A lingam was consecrated over the site and a thatched hut built to cover it. Chinna Swami went there every morning and evening to do puja to the lingam and eventually he stayed there at night too.

In December 1922 Bhagavan and his disciples came to stay at the Mother's samadhi and that is how Sri Ramanasramam began. It was in October 1931 that Chinna Swami took charge of the Ashram. He became first the secretary and then the manager. A lawyer, Venkataramiar from Tirunelveli, drafted a power of attorney empowering Chinna Swami to manage the Ashram on behalf of Bhagavan and stamped it in front of Bhagavan. This act was symbolic of Sri Ramanasramam's official transformation into an institution.

The devotees of Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni in 1932, wanted him, Nayana, to be the manager of the Ashram. As all important decisions were made in front of Bhagavan, a meeting was arranged to discuss the issue. In the course of the discussion Bhagavan turned to Nayana and said in a gentle manner, "It seems that Picchai has a longing to run the



Ashram. Why not let him do it?" From that moment onwards Nayana and his associates gave up their idea once and for all and were content to be simple devotees fully co-operating with the management in every way.

Chinnaswami administered the Ashram with discipline and integrity. He made the best possible use of the donations and the foodstuffs. He had no other thought except to look after Bhagavan and the devotees and make the Ashram function in the best possible way. Chinnaswami treated everyone equally. Bhagavan would admonish him when necessary, but gave his complete support in the administration of the Ashram.

The Ashram began to grow and so Chinnaswami's son Venkataraman was called with his wife and two sons from Chettinadu and was trained as his assistant.

On the 6th March 1938 a Will was drawn up and read out in front of Bhagavan. Since that day Chinnaswami gave up all personal attachments and became the Ashram's first devoted worker who never did anything without Bhagavan's direct or indirect consent. Knowing that Bhagavan would not eat anything unless it was served to everyone else, he ensured that the small quantity of food that Bhagavan ate was of the best quality. For instance, he would procure the best quality rice from Nellore, ghee from Proddattur and dal from Viradupatti.

Chinnaswami was particular that visitors to the Ashram should be able to receive Bhagavan's grace without distinction and he desired that everybody should be ready to serve the Ashram in one way or another. He showed no favouritism to anyone, including to his own grandchildren. He was like the untouched lotus leaf on water but discharged his duties most conscientiously. He was a karma yogi to the tip of his fingers and laid the firm foundation for the growth of the Ashram.

In 1939, with Bhagavan's consent, Chinnaswami took steps to build a temple over the samadhi of Mother Alagammal who attained liberation at the hands of Bhagavan. Over the years he also worked hard to build rooms for visiting devotees, a Veda Patasala, for the education of boys who were learning the Vedas, a Gosala for the ashram

cows and a dining hall. All these were built with great effort and attention to detail. Funds were scarce but Chinnaswami managed somehow. Once he planned to go to North India to raise funds to build the Mother's Temple as advised by devotees and went to Bhagavan to obtain his blessings and consent. When he told Bhagavan of his plans, Bhagavan remained silent for a while and then said, "Everybody is coming here, believing that there is something precious here, why do you want to go there?" Chinnaswami unpacked his travelling bag at once.

There were a few people who disapproved of certain aspects of Ashram work; of them Bhagavan would say, "They are all independent men who come and go as they choose. But we who are in the Ashram should follow the rules of the Ashram." By this statement, Bhagavan submitted himself and Ashramites to the Sarvadhikari's disciplinary rules while conceding freedom of opinion to others.

Chinnaswami took a personal interest in ensuring that the devotees were well cared for and well fed and he personally attended to all the details of the celebrations of Mahapuja and Mother Alagammal's Aradhana and the Navarathri festival. He also enjoyed distributing prasada and making sure that the Vedapatasala children had special food with plenty of milk and fruit. He acquired the house in which Bhagavan was born at Tiruchuzhi and named it 'Sundara Mandiram' after their father and he was instrumental in buying the house in Madurai, in which Bhagavan attained enlightenment and named it 'Ramana Mandiram'. Both these places have become pilgrimage spots for Ramana devotees. Chinnaswami would never spend Ashram money unnecessarily. He would not touch Ashram funds for his personal needs but relied on devotees to supply them. He mended his own clothes and would wear torn old clothes until someone offered new ones.

There was one Jayanti celebration which gives an idea of how the Ashram coped with a crisis. There were no vegetables or rice on the day before Bhagavan's Jayanti and Chinnaswami was worried as to how they were going to feed all the visiting devotees. In the pouring rain he was seen wandering around mumbling to himself as he tried in vain to think of some way to save the day. Late that night a bullock

cart arrived at the Ashram gates laden with rice and vegetables. The cart driver delivered the items and left. Chinnaswami was woken up and again he was in a quandary after the initial euphoria. “Who is going to cut the vegetables?” Bhagavan who was watching all this woke up everyone in the Old Hall by striking on the floor with his stick, saying, “Pichai is in a fix, come on, let us go and cut vegetables.”

September 1946 marked the completion of fifty years since Bhagavan’s arrival at Arunachala. A golden jubilee celebration was organised by Chinnaswami. Also during his tenure as the Ashram Sarvadhikari he inaugurated the twice daily Vedic chanting by the students in Bhagavan’s presence and every day he would receive the mail, give it to Bhagavan for perusal, make the reply with great care and send it to Bhagavan for approval.

Many mutts, Ashrams and individuals sent their books to the Ashram and they were classified and numbered and arranged in glass cabinets. This was how the Ashram library originated. Chinnaswami put a responsible devotee in charge and if anyone had doubts on Vedantic questions Bhagavan would call for the relevant book and read out the appropriate passages.

In 1920’s the works of Bhagavan such as *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, *Appala Pattu*, prose translation of Adi Shankara’s *Vivekachudamani* etc. were published by various devotees such as Echammal, Narayana Reddy and Annadorai and were sold in the North East corner mandapam of the Arunachaleswara Temple under the seal of *Ramaneeyavaani Pustakalayam*. When Chinnaswami took charge of the Ashram administration the Sri Ramanasramam Book depot started functioning in a building next to the Ashram office. Chinnaswami always kept with him three Tamil books: they were: *Ramana Vijayam*, *Nuttirattu (The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi)* and *Nan Yar (Who am I?)*. Chinnaswami said that Bhagavan was like fire and he advised people to remember that Bhagavan was no ordinary person — that he was Siva and people should be mindful when they approached him. In regard to those who wandered in search of alternative gurus, Chinnaswami would say, “In order to see the sun

does one need a lamp?” Indeed is not Bhagavan the spiritual sun ‘brighter than thousand suns’?”

In 1948 the construction of the Matrubeswara Temple was completed after ten years of meticulous hard work by everyone concerned especially Chinnaswami. In this temple Lord Siva is worshipped as the God who becomes the Mother. It required great strength of mind and courage to overcome all the difficulties, criticism and obstacles and bring the sacred task to a successful completion and it was the crowning glory of Chinnaswami’s work for the Ashram. The kumbhabhishekam ceremony began on 13th and concluded on the 17th March 1949. There were four full days of Vedic chanting with numerous homas on 13th, with hundreds of Vedic scholars and pundits participating, and the rituals were completed on the 17th of March. Some 10,000 meals were served. People were astounded at the magnitude of the celebrations. There was no limit to the poor feeding. Bhagavan himself supervised this seva. Besides a great many cooks and helpers the service of the police was also enlisted and fire-fighters were asked to stand by in case of accidents. On the first day Bhagavan came along with the *purna kalasam* to the New Hall and then went straight to the Mother’s Temple. He touched all the sacred items consecrated to the temple, and then came to the New Hall where he sat on the new granite sofa that had been prepared for him.

Chinnaswami took great care to ensure that Bhagavan’s life was free as far as possible from any inconveniences. It so happened that after Bhagavan left the dining hall a devotee would be waiting so that he or she could take their meal off Bhagavan’s leaf plate. This came to Bhagavan’s attention. Though he had great difficulty, due to arthritis in his knees, in getting up after the meals, Bhagavan started getting up with the leaf in his hand to throw it on the communal pile. Chinnaswami eventually persuaded him to leave his leaf on the condition that everyone also would do likewise, that his leaf would be thrown out along with all other leaves and that none would henceforth eat on his leaf. Since then, to this day, all used leaf plates are left behind to be collected and thrown out together.

Chinnaswami fully understood Bhagavan's uniqueness and was utterly loyal in his devotion to him. He ran the Ashram solely with the donations given by devotees. He had flaming integrity regarding Ashram accounts. Every paisa was accounted for and not one was spent unnecessarily. He laid the foundation for the eventual phenomenal growth of the Ashram and he was aware that it was due to Bhagavan's grace. He was a stickler for discipline and enforced it in the Ashram. and Bhagavan himself was a perfect model in complying with the Ashram rules.

The year 1948-50 saw Chinnaswami in great stress and anguish mainly because Bhagavan had developed a most excruciating form of cancer around his left elbow and though all therapies were tried through the best experts, Bhagavan's health deteriorated day after day. However, by Bhagavan's grace and inspired by Bhagavan's own example, Chinnaswami stood like a rock and faced all the problems with tremendous fortitude.

On the 14th April 1950 Bhagavan attained Mahanirvana. He was Chinnaswami's brother, father, mother, prop, Guru, God and everything. Though he remained as an abiding, effulgent Presence and was the Light that he ever was, Chinnaswami sorely missed that benign physical presence and his health began to decline rather fast.

Realising that times had changed, on the 30th September 1950, under the supervision of Chinnaswami, a management committee with seventeen members was constituted. He then slowly arranged the ashram so that come the day when he too departed, the ashram could continue to function.

Blameless, spotless Chinnaswami who lived at the feet of the great sage is now in permanent silence having eternally reached the feet of his Guru. His life is a source of inspiration to all Ramana devotees. ▲

When Will My Journey Begin?

BHARAT M. MEHTA

The decision to go to Tiruvannamalai has been preceded by so many thoughts, desires, and aspirations that it seems the journey began long ago, even before I took the first step towards it.

My first knowledge of this great sage was through Daddy who twice had darshan of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. Surprisingly, his visit was rather reluctantly undertaken the first time. A broker, who frequented his shop, often tried to persuade Daddy to accompany him during his regular visits to Ramana Ashram. It so happened that his sincere devotion and simplicity, in the end convinced Daddy to go.

The short time Daddy was in the presence of this divine person seemed to have an electrifying effect on him. The moment Bhagavan's eyes glanced in the direction of Daddy, he felt as if he was at ease,

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suddenly devoid of the restless agitation that had always possessed him, now, instead, he felt a thought-free concentration, the sensation that he had no doubts that needed clarification, a sense of complete well being, devoid of any curiosity, regret, remorse or pain. He was cruising with joy, just *being* in the presence of Sri Ramana. Bhagavan's silence seemed to communicate itself to him. The aura of his presence was liberating. Just being there was transforming.

The connection was made. Daddy made a second trip. He was convinced that Ramana was truly Bhagavan. His spiritual search ended here. He had found ever-lasting joy. A desire for a spiritual journey was ignited. A direction was now pointed out to him. Reading His philosophy and imbibing His teachings provided new meaning to Daddy's life.

If such was the profoundness of this wordless conversation of a few minutes, I was determined to also taste this nectar. Since I could not have the luxury of a darshan, I made an effort to read about Him, beginning with His life story. At this time, a friend recommended that I read Paul Brunton's, *A Search in Secret India*.

I was convinced that I had found my guru in Ramana Maharshi. This itself, I realised was a divine blessing. Many others, less fortunate, spend their entire lives in search of a guru and by then, there is no time left to actually pursue a path of spiritual practice.

With this in mind, I thought of undertaking a visit to Arunachala, in the fond hope that a little of the greatness of this evolved soul would rub off on me! I wanted to walk on the ground on which He had walked. I wanted to feel the air which had touched His body, when He lived there. I wanted to feel the vibrations in the air that still lingered, caused by His spoken words. I hoped and dreamt that being able to experience all these physical sensations would help me in my effort and endeavour, to make my life worthwhile, from the point of view of a spiritual pursuit.

But then I thought again, that if mere desire could uplift one, without one's being justifiably deserving, then "beggars would ride". Had I led my life so far in a manner that would enable this experience that I was going to enjoy to help me to progress? Was I sensitive enough to be

receptive to these subtle sensations? In short — was I worthy of visiting Ramanasramam?

I decided to postpone my visit, till I had made a critical review of how I had led my life so far. I decided to go there only after I felt that the visit would be justified. Was I be worthy of this pilgrimage? What changes did I need to make in my own life before I could make this journey? If I was still vulnerable to my usual involuntary reactions, then surely there was little to be learnt at Tiruvannamalai.

For me, there had to be a serious preparation, before I could start this journey. I had to be able to answer the following questions:

“Can I truly say that I have begun to look at life as something deeper than the materialistic acquisitions?”

Can I truly say that I can recognize that human relations and associations that I have grown into are actually chains that tie me down?

Can I be so detached from the outcome of a certain effort, that I can accept the unexpected result with equanimity?

Can I restrain my thoughts in a situation when I am tempted to react?

Can I turn away from the sight of a beautiful sensuous human form, by telling myself that all flesh is dust in the ultimate state?

Can I sacrifice my comfort for the pain that I need to undergo, if I want to further my knowledge of the scriptures?

Can I look at every human being as an extension of myself?

Can I be moved to real compassion, that I am willing to share what I have?

Can I look at a difference of opinion as an enriching experience?

Can I humbly attribute my so called success to the efforts of my team?

Can my resolve help me to succeed in controlling my thought?

Can I forget an unpleasant interaction with another person, by recognising the experience as a burden that can slow my journey?

Can I forgive those who have harmed me today?

Can I look at every painful experience as the result of the law of Karma?

Can I attribute every failure to a wrong decision on my part and not to others however obvious their mistakes may appear?

Can I rise above the natural instinct to indulge in the five senses?

Can I rise above the urge to seek vengeance?

Can I overlook the shortcomings of others, as an exercise in making me more forgiving?

Can I overcome the instant urge and the uncontrollable impulse to judge?

Can I see divinity in every form of life?

Can I remember to stay focused on a discussion objectively, without getting personal and wanting a solution?

Can I be so humble as to contribute to the success of a venture, without bragging that it was the outcome of my effort?

Can I consider silence as an option before speaking?

Can I calmly undergo physical discomfort, recognizing that this body is distinctly apart from me, my soul?

Can I curtail my worldly activity once I have earned sufficient for the rest of my life?

Can I look at death as the beginning of a new journey?"

When I look at my woeful shortcomings in answering these questions, I wonder if it would not be a sin to put my foot on that *punya bhumi* (sacred earth)?

So let me start today on preparing myself to be worthy, at least in a small way, to make this pilgrimage to Arunachala. ▲

HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

One Summer's Day

MICHAEL CHETTLEBOROUGH

It was the late 1940's that a group of older teenagers walked over Pinner Hill to a field which was on the way to Watford. It was a lovely, warm light evening and we made up a happy, noisy group of boys and girls sitting on the dry grass chattering and laughing about inconsequential things; but I stood apart some thirty yards away, though why I should have become detached from the group is forgotten, possibly I had just wandered off to explore. Suddenly I was aware of a great peace and silence, a stillness that was so vibrant with joy that it was almost overwhelming. As I stood there lost in wonder for an immeasurable time, a voice seemed to ask, "Can they not hear and feel this wonder? Surely they must be aware of it?" For as I observed in a sort of detached, bodiless way with no sense of identity, the group carried on completely oblivious of what was happening with me, like actors on another stage or on the screen in a film. After awhile 'the spectator' returned to the group but nobody made any comment for his absence had not been noticed and he drew no attention to it. The

experience was not understood at the time and, as there were no appropriate books to hand or people who could be asked to explain its meaning, it was just filed away in memory and, being so deeply valued, it was not to be mentioned to anybody else for many years.

It was September 1958 at the age of 28 when I first walked through the doors of The School of Economic Science (SES) in London and enrolled in a Philosophy course.¹ After some years in the Royal Navy followed by more time abroad as a geophysicist I had lost contact with people at home so an old friend had suggested that SES was a good place to make new acquaintances. The course used a booklet of questions, mainly about everyday life, and encouraged students to give verbal answers from personal experience. There was plenty of space to record them plus the diagrams and notes which arose from the resulting discussions. It must have interested me because I covered the sheets with writing. Then, at the end of term, I was suddenly posted back to Africa for further field work in the search for oil and soon forgot all about the SES. However whilst there I resigned from my job for reasons now best described as pique and returned to England six months later still not knowing what I really wanted to do but ‘certain’ that it would be somewhere overseas.

It was not to be! By January 1960, with nothing found and feeling very depressed, I suddenly URGENTLY wanted to return to SES and rushed off to rejoin the Philosophy course. This time instead of masses of written answers on the sheets they remained blank except for the occasional reference to a quotation for I was actually trying to listen to what was being said and to put it into practice in my life. A temporary teaching job came up, in those days teachers had extra duties and one was to patrol areas of the school at ‘break’ times and so it was that one

¹ The School of Economic Science [SES], founded in 1937, is a registered charity based in London and provides courses in what it calls ‘practical philosophy’ and economics. Following a meeting in the 1960s between Leon MacLaren, the then head of SES and Swami Shantananda (the Sankaracharya of Jyothimath, India), Advaita Vedanta became the principle on which the school’s philosophy was grounded. The Sankaracharya’s successor, Swami Vasudevananda Saraswati continues to provide spiritual inspiration to the SES today.

day I confronted a fourteen year old pupil who was on an ‘out of bounds’ lawn. “Get off that lawn!” I shouted. “NO”, came his reply. Now it should be understood that I was used to being obeyed and I saw my temper start to rise and there was a fair chance that I might have tried to throw him off when, in a flash, SES was remembered and I smiled instead. He smiled back, came off and I had made a friend for life. Such was the impact of incidents like this that by half way through the next term I had decided that this was the most important thing yet to have occurred in my life and that 10 years or more of vaguely dissatisfied searching had come to an end. The decision made, almost immediately I found an advertisement for a good permanent teaching post at a school near my home, attended an interview, got the job and so made it possible to remain at the SES. That autumn I married Pamela, who also joined SES and we moved as caretakers into a house provided by a friend. It was a seamless start to our quest.

What was the teaching at SES? Well I now know that its core was the idea of looking inwards rather than outwards – an idea totally new to me. They approached it through a series of personal disciplines which were gradually increased. They did not feel like disciplines for I accepted them with joy as did my SES group (a class). When carried out earnestly they gradually increased one’s awareness and bit by bit there grew recognition of the thing called ego and, most importantly, its hold over one. This increase of awareness in turn frequently meant that the ego’s hold on that particular aspect of behaviour was broken and there was a resulting feeling of freedom and happiness. After a year or so, an Indian Mantra Meditation method was introduced as an aid at just the right moment and one became even more aware of the deep peace of the inner silence that was starting to appear. Incidentally this initiation involved a gift of one week’s joint salary which was no easy task for us but after discussion, which included consideration of payment by instalments, we took the decision to go for it. Shortly before the ceremony a cheque arrived by post covering a large part of the fee! We had won it in a draw of a Premium Bond given to us at our marriage. Perhaps it is significant that it didn’t cover the total amount required!

Meanwhile our life outside the SES was changing, partly because of inner changes within but also because of the increasing demands on time by SES. One such was the requirement to attend a residential course at a very large country house, Stanhill, that SES was renovating. When I explained this to the headmaster at my grammar school saying that I had a commitment and wanted to attend a week's retreat but would not expect to be paid for that time, much to my surprise he agreed and furthermore arranged that my salary was not affected.

For one year I attended the 'Movements' group at the Study Society (a parallel group to SES) which used movements to the beautiful playing of a piano to increase awareness. It included a version of the Sufi Whirling Dervishes' dancing in which I found that by meditating at the same time I could spin at all speeds — a practice that from childhood upwards I had found impossible without being sick. One more escape from the claws of ego? There were many other such incidents to encourage me on the way. But I had to give it much hard work and commitment as it became a nearly all-embracing activity. In one residential week spent with the usual group there was such a power of spiritual love generated that miracles seemed possible. Some examples are: after a spell of very hard work on a path using a mattock, a large blood blister appeared on my hand but, after the usual 'pause' for stillness on finishing a task, no trace of it remained. In a similar pause on a very high internal scaffold in the main hall, with eyes as usual closed, my right hand suddenly went out and caught the hand of the lady alongside who had started to fall. In a joint group meditation the fire was heard to suddenly flare up but on opening my eyes afterwards it was obvious that the great fireplace was and had been empty all the time.

Wandering in the gardens at the weekend the voice of the SES leader was heard very clearly in my mind to say, "No thoughts", but on looking up it was seen that the man was at least thirty yards distant and looking away. On another occasion at my house I was at the top of a 30 foot ladder projecting well into space beyond the supporting gutter when I froze with fear. What to do? I remembered that we had been introduced to the idea, "I am the Atman", and straight away the

fear was gone and I was able to complete my task in stillness. For some years I was a group tutor when one had to trust that answers would come for there was no prior briefing possible or desirable. Outside SES, being aware of the stillness within, one could cause a reflection of that attitude in other people and this was found useful in dealing with classes and assemblies. The cardinal rule was to trust and not to look for results.

There were so many other things in those ten years and it was a period of much beauty and joy but towards the end there was a strengthening of the ego, perhaps because of the growth of an attitude of elitism, but certainly because of a growing sense of my power and my powers (see Ravana's teaching) so that the last year was increasingly counter productive, unhappy and turbulent. However overall the whole period was one for which I remain very grateful. SES had called itself a 'prep school'; it had pointed me in a new direction in 1960 and then prepared me over the following ten years to meet my master by showing me my ego and its power. This ego could be defeated but there was always a great danger of "claiming" or arrogance if humility was forgotten, for then the ego is strengthened.

The meeting with my master occurred on a cold winter's morning of 1969 at about 4 am. when I was reading Mouni Sadhu's *In Days of Great Peace*. This book had reached me in a most fortuitous way because books about Ramana were not usually stocked by SES as a policy to keep students focused on the disciplines of the school, but a lady librarian found it there and passed it to my wife, saying she thought I would appreciate it. I remember that I was overcome with emotion as I realized with certainty that I had found my Master. A deep longing was satisfied and I knew that there was no need to look further and I wept with gratitude. It is worth remarking that SES had said that such tears were from a frozen heart melting. The meeting established the true spiritual link with a guru that is needed by a seeker and is now seen as what was missing in the SES philosophy course. My last term at SES was peaceful and we both duly parted from the organisation without any problem, which was not always the case with leavers. It now seems as if it all happened as if planned that way, but not by me.

The next period of our life was not easy because the structured life led before centred on the SES, had come to an abrupt end with the loss of many friends and activities. But Pamela remembered a reference to a Dr. Chandra Sharma and opening the London telephone directory instantly found his address. I then duly wrote the following letter to him on 13th July 1969.

“It has been said that in your waiting room there are photographs of Ramana Maharshi. Are you associated with His Ashram? If so, can one meet you to talk about this? These are serious questions and a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed for your replies.”

He replied on the same sheet: “Yes; yes; come in one day around 5.30/5.45pm except on Wednesday.” So we did. On learning of our recent membership of SES he made one comment, “Discipline!”

He went on to explain that Raman’s way was the opposite of a rigid physical discipline although it did require a subtle mental discipline and he went on to reassure us about the step we had taken and to offer advice.

Later I read *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-knowledge* so I wrote to Arthur Osborne at the Ashram and received replies from Lucia Osborne of which the following are relevant excerpts:

September 30th 1969: “My husband has delegated your other requests to me as I usually reply to such letters for him. Sadhana is a series of ups and downs. The reverses or seeming reverses can be used as a stepping stone. Fight despondency with faith and prayer. The Guru is always with you and watches over you more than you realize. It is said that if you make one step towards Unity with Him, He makes 99 towards you. The Guru is One under various names: Christ, Buddha, Bhagavan.....always abiding in your heart whether you know it or not. He is the real “I AM”, all-pervading, transcendental, the same as “Before Abraham was ‘I AM’”. His physical frame is only a temporary appearance to lead us back to the eternal living Guru. If, after your reverses, you are at last drawn to Bhagavan’s teaching, it is a sign of His Grace. It is the most direct and effective path if followed sincerely with faith. At first it is necessary to keep regular hours however short. Apart from the vichara — the quest “Who am I” — one can use also whatever is helpful and suits your nature such as invocation, prayer,

simply watching one’s breathing (without counting) till it becomes even and quietens the mind. The teaching is explained in the books. *The Teaching of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words* might be helpful. Most books explain His teaching. If you have any doubts do not hesitate to ask. You can always turn to Bhagavan. He will always respond to a sincere prayer from the heart. If your wife is drawn to the path, she should follow it. With time it will become easy. It is so simple and direct that it seems difficult.”

November 29th 1969: “Even if our present life is the result of our previous karma still there is also freedom to lighten it and free ourselves through sadhana. Worrying never helps. It is good if we can accept whatever comes in a spirit of surrender, positive surrender, doing whatever seems necessary to the best of our ability without any stress as far as possible. In the same measure we gain inner serenity, outer circumstances will reflect it. With kind regards. Yours in Sri Bhagavan, Lucia Osborne.”

Looking back I am amazed by the way one was led to Ramana and how, when there were difficulties, they always solved themselves when I trusted. Still trusting, but, no longer tied to London, we moved to the countryside in Cornwall where we raised a family and looked after relatives. It was as if a necessary duty had to be done before one could move on oneself. During the 1990s there was a resurgence in my sadhana. There were moments of what Arthur Osborne called ‘certitude’ and for a while even a desire to write. We attended the founding meeting of the Ramana Maharshi Foundation in London and many of its monthly meetings subsequently. The opportunity to visit the Ashram first arose in 1997 and several times again thereafter. We also attended the meetings of a local Quaker group for a while, for it seemed that we had much in common with their way of worship but mostly we just got on with our lives in an unspectacular way.

And so it has continued but always with this feeling of being quietly guided. And now, in the evening of life, I quietly wait for whatever comes next, secure in the knowledge that Ramana is always here, as Lucia said all those years ago. All is One, there is no second.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya





Wake Up, Lord Ramana, to Awaken Me!

Sri Ramana Tiruppalli Ezhuchchi

SWAMI SADHU OM

TRANSLATED BY SADHU TANMAYA CHAITANYA

If a person wakes up refreshed from restful sleep in a happy frame of mind, he can cheerfully perform his duties the whole day. Therefore, it was the Tamil custom in ancient days to ceremonially wake up the king with auspicious prayers accompanied by melodious music, and he would thus likely discharge his duties in a manner that would bring joy to all his subjects.

Extending this approach to please the Lord of the universe, so that His Grace protects and brings happiness to all of humanity, great saints have composed hymns to 'wake up the Lord' and invoke His blessings. The genre of such hymns comes under the category of *Tiruppalli Ezhuchchi* in Tamil and *Suprabhatam* in Sanskrit. Manikkavachakar's *Tiruppalli Ezhuchchi* and *Sri Venkatesa Suprabhatam* are most popular hymns sung by millions. Following such illustrious examples, great devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana too have sung similar hymns.

Unlike the earlier hymns, the present work has the unique distinction of blending the vision of Advaita *jnana marga* with a heart-

melting pleading for Bhagavan's Grace, which alone can truly wake up ardent seekers into Self-knowledge from the beginningless sleep of ignorance. Although Sadguru Ramana is *ever awake* in the non-dual vision of the Self, it is traditional in the path of *bhakti* to assume a seeming duality of *guru-sishya bheda*, purely for the purpose of invoking divine Grace to achieve Liberation. Conceding this, it is quite in order, to 'wake up' our Sadguru to draw His attention, for receiving His benedictions! For as Manikkavachakar famously sang, 'by weeping for Your Grace, we shall attain union with You!' (*vinaiyen, azhudhaal unnaip peralaame!*)
— Translator's Note

1. As an indication of the sunrise, the dense darkness is slowly disappearing in the eastern skies. The stars in their celestial course also slowly hide their bright light and fade out of sight. The rooster cocks and the early crows have started calling out loudly. The moonlight is fading away fast at this moment, as the deep red rays of the sun are fast enveloping the horizon, driving away the blackness of the night. Gracious Ramana, the time has come for you to wake up from your blissful, non-dual sleep (and bless me to regain my true nature).

2. The bright gem of the sky, namely the sun, has arisen with a cool brilliance and the fog is fast clearing away. The birds from their nests have woken up and begun flying away, filling the sky with their songs. The mother cow which was sleeping in the cool mud-plastered stable has woken up and started lowing with a desire to feed its tender calf. Even as the calf is restless to drink its mother's milk, I too am pining, as your spiritual child, to drink the milk of your Grace. You only beckoned me earlier to Arunachala, so that I can live in your lap for good. It is time for you now to rise from slumber, Mother Ramana, the innermost Self, to slake my thirst for the nectar of your Grace!

3. What if the sun has risen? What if its effulgence spreads all over the world? What if the world rises into frenetic activity? What if the silent sea rises with surging waves? What if the sky rises with brightness? What if the multitudes of birds rise and fly forth? What if the sea of humanity stirs out of sleep and rises up in action? What does it matter,

of what avail is it to any, whoever it be who rises up from sleep? The darkness of ignorance, in the form of 'I am the body' consciousness has risen in full blossom and is holding its sway everywhere. This darkness can be dispelled *only if You* wake up! Lord Ramana, You alone are my Refuge. May you be pleased to rise and awaken me!

4. The 'I-thought' has risen and possessed my body like a ghost with 'I am the body' consciousness, and has led me to believe that this world is a concrete reality. Not knowing the source of my ego, I am tossed about by the play of the three *gunas*, namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. To quell the play of 'I-thought' and 'my-thought', I beseech you to rise and dance in my heart with the awesome might of your Grace. Wake up, Lord Ramana, to awaken me to my natural Perfection!

5. Entering repeatedly the mother's womb in countless lives, I have been ever drowned in the ocean of *samsara*. Shackled by the ropes of time and space, utterly unaware of my real nature, I have been sleeping for ages in the delusion, thriving as 'I am the body' consciousness. In order to eradicate my hardened stupidity caused by primal ignorance, Lord Ramana, you assumed the holy form in a human garb and took over my life completely. Now it is time, Sri Ramana, for you to wake up, in order to kindle the true knowledge of Self in my heart!

6. What the knowers of Self and great saints detest, such worldly knowledge (*apara vidya*) I gained with great effort. Alas, I have continued to remain as the most wretched even among the despicable wretched lot, pursuing only the futile vanities of life all along. In the darkness of my heart which words fail to describe, bestow the light of true knowledge, at least now. Who else has the compassionate power to wake up the ignorant child, other than its loving parents? In order to destroy all my defects and awaken me, your dear child, into Self-knowledge, Oh Guru Ramana, may you be pleased to wake up from your sleep in the Self!

7. Lest I should continue to suffer in *samsara* by continuously rising up as the 'I-thought', I beseech you to arise in the hall of my heart and dance blissfully as the 'I-I', quelling my ego once for all and destroying my little, alienated individuality. Having taken over my life wilfully

at Arunachala, now keep me ever at Your Feet, annihilate my separative ego and bless me with the nectar of immortality. Oh Siva Ramana, please wake up from your non-dual, blissful sleep and awaken me into Self-knowledge (as the culmination of your Grace).

8. I have taken up as my conditioning adjuncts, the sleep and wakeful states of living, in the prison of body-consciousness and thereby slipped into the endless sleep of primal ignorance, and as a consequence wallowed in the sufferings of this dream-like worldly life. By the power of your Grace, let me awaken into the land of Self-awareness and thus cut asunder my chains of bondage manifesting all the time as 'I am the body' consciousness. Oh Effulgent Ramana, may you rise up like the sun from the ocean of compassion and bless me with the transcendental knowledge of the Self.

9. All through the day, I rise up in manifold forms of identification as 'I am this', 'I am that', and have thus worn the bodies of countless life-forms including human body over innumerable lives. Not gaining any benefit other than the wretched plight of miserable existence, I suffered endlessly with body-consciousness as the perennial bane of life. Even as I wept like a blind man caught in the dense maze of a forest groping for a way, you appeared then before my eyes, verily as the God of Deliverance, even while shining as the sole, all-encompassing Self. Oh Arunachala Ramana, wake up from your un-worldly sleep and awaken me to your own state!

10. In the hearts of those who worship you in surrender, with a prayer to wake up from the slumber of ignorance, you shine as the Lord who did not suffer the slightest damage as though you were blissfully asleep for countless ages, untouched by their ignorance! You are the radiant sun of the supreme Self, shedding your rays of knowledge all over the world, shining with splendour in the vast, immeasurable skies of silence. As a meek devotee, I beseech you with tears of love, to rise in my bosom as the transcendental Self. Wake up Lord Ramana! With infinite Grace, Awaken me once and for all!

Om Tat Sat. Sri Ramanarpanamastu!



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Quest

Childhood

LUCIA OSBORNE

For many years Lucia Osborne's autobiographical manuscript was lost. It has resurfaced due to the efforts of Marion von Hoensbroech to whom we owe thanks. The first chapter gives us an insight into the life of a Polish girl who found her way to Bhagavan.

We intend to publish selected chapters from her life-story in future issues.

To say that childhood is the best and happiest period of one's life is a cliché. Children lack a sense of proportion and though they live in the present they can be desperately unhappy. Life is seen in stark black and white.

From the talk of my sisters and their friends I gathered that one's appearance: face, figure, form, being attractive or beautiful was of paramount importance for happiness and here I was, a squat little figure with a prominent chin, a nose like a button and a forehead

already starting to wrinkle with worry. I must have had a very strongly-developed sense of perfection and been far too sensitive or self-conscious of the way I looked and was deeply disturbed by imperfection. One should be perfect. I felt almost guilty compared with the rest.

My mother was the only surviving child out of seven or eight and was brought up, so to speak, in cotton wool. Loveable and lovely she was, although incapable of running a household and so things went on in a happy-go-lucky way which was far from happy with a generous, gullible, improvident father to add to the disarray.

One of the rooms in our house had a large, old-fashioned mirror and the moment I opened the door I was confronted with my outer reflection and the inner dismal reflection following as a matter of course. In my teens things improved a little. For one thing I shot up suddenly, became proficient in disguising my shortcomings and, what is more important, I realized that other values mattered more than just mere good looks. People's faces are like mirrors.

The questions "What is the purpose of life?" "Why are we born?" began to occupy my mind. One day I felt so strongly that I was missing something of tremendous importance that I began running in the street under its impact. I did not know what I was missing nor who I really and truly was. Surely there must be some stability behind this unsure vacillating creature being censured inwardly by whom? By what?

Different from the other children, I was teased that I must have been changed by the wet-nurse with her own baby or another one. It seemed to have been the fashion at the time for mothers not to nurse their babies but employ healthy peasant women straight after confinement as wet-nurses, who nursed them together with their own children.

I learned to read practically on my own; I am not sure how. Someone must have shown me the letters and how to form words. I still remember how astonished my mother was when one day she got hold of me to try to teach me the alphabet and discovered that I could read. Books opened new worlds for me. I identified myself with the characters and lived the stories which were more real to me than life. 'One could shoot around her and she would not notice when reading'

was the comment of my mother. In this I followed in her footsteps. She found her escape from problems in reading, always reading. I remember Zola and Maupassant, books which I used to steal from under her pillow at night, hidden most probably on my account. Under the curtained kitchen table with a candle for light one could read unnoticed. However little I understood, seems to have been enough to absorb me.

Two stories enchanted me:

Pharaoh was sitting on the highest terrace of his palace with a crystal ball in his hand which had a peculiarity that in whatever direction he turned his gaze the scene approached him as if on a screen and he could easily see and hear what was going on. It was time for evening prayer. Pharaoh saw through his crystal ball a man stranded in the desert praying to God for some rain. Another scene showed a peasant in prayer for good weather to protect his harvest. Somewhere else he saw two armies fighting, each side praying for victory. A thief prayed for an easy haul and the householder for protection from thieves. All these conflicting prayers went up in the shape of birds of varying hues, met mid-way, fought and fell back to earth. Amon-Ra was sitting on his heavenly throne, impassive, no prayer reached him. Then Pharaoh turned his crystal in a direction in which a hamlet appeared, a woman was calling her little boy to prayer: "It's getting late, you good-for-nothing; come quick." When the boy was brought in at last he folded his hands and prayed. "Thank you Amon-Ra for the palm trees which give us lovely dates to eat and for all the other trees which give us fruit and shade and for the birds which sing and the flowers which look so bright. It's enough", he said to his mother, jumping up to resume his play. "What sort of prayer is that, you good-for-nothing," his mother said but his prayer went up into the sky in the shape of a dove, not encountering any obstacles and nearing Amon-Ra's throne the dove sang in the voice of the little boy, "Thank you Amon-Ra for the palm trees which give us lovely dates to eat." Amon-Ra heard the prayer, opened his eyes and a ray of light fell on the earth bringing relief to all the afflicted.

Another story which I loved to read and re-read was about a mother who was very ill and her son who, wanting to save her, set out to find the water of life. In his wanderings he came to a hill at the foot of which dwelt a very old man in a cave. From him he got the directions on how to reach the source of the water of life. He was advised to go straight to it without looking right or left and not to be distracted by whatever may happen on the way. If he deviated from his straight course he would turn into stone as many others have done. Having thanked the old man he set out. Many stones he saw on the way. Beautiful singing reached his ears, and his mother's voice calling him but he plugged his ears and went on. Suddenly there was a huge fire in front of him, he plunged right through it and the fire was cool. He went through a flood which threatened to engulf him but it disappeared like a mirage. At last he reached his goal and having drunk a little of the water of life he felt completely restored. He filled his jar with water in a hurry to return to his mother and on the way sprinkled some of it on the stones which came to life. They all followed him and elected him their king. Thus he returned to his mother whose life was restored.

At school I lived in a world of my own. Introspective, oversensitive, self-conscious; life created problems. Learning came easy enough. This helped a bit. One of the girls was particularly beautiful; large blue eyes, golden wavy hair and perfect features. Just my idea of beauty. That she was rather stupid did not seem to matter. I was wondering how it would feel to be so beautiful and whether we could change over at least for a while. Would it be the brain (mind) or the heart which would be decisive for the change if it could be transplanted? I could not decide which. Am I the heart or the brain? Who am I? Who is watching? I watch myself being envious, resentful, having happy or worrying thoughts, disapproving (mostly of my own ways) acting up to people so as not to disappoint them, to please them, not so sincere, uncertain always uncertain. Surely there must be something steady not vacillating in one. Who is watching and judging? Who is trying to fight laziness and not succeeding? Who am I? Who am I?

This questioning kept on coming up again and again and nobody to answer till one day my mother said: "If you want to know so much, one day you will know." It helped.

After finishing school I enrolled at the university in Warsaw to study astronomy. Mathematics was my *forte*, not at all composition or languages and yet out of necessity I acquired several as most Polish people tend to do. Like in most things later in life I was also frustrated in studying astronomy as things at home came to such a pass that it became necessary to start work immediately.

When Arthur came down from Oxford his travels brought him to Poland, Katowice where I was working at the time as a translator and secretary to a general manager of an international combine of heavy industry, supplying among other things armed components, occasionally to opposite fighting armies.

A university professor from Krakow arranged English courses in Katowice with Arthur as teacher. I joined this course. Arthur attached himself to me from the start. Unpractical, charming, obviously vulnerable he needed looking after. I did not yet know English, and so we communicated in French. His food, which made him ill, needed changing amongst other things.

After a time he proposed to me but I had no intention of getting married to him as technically I was still engaged to somebody else, a young Czech with whom I was not in touch at the time. It was I who suggested that we should not to see or write to each other for a time till my feelings crystallised themselves and then I became disillusioned and unhappy when he did not even write. Torn between attraction and repulsion emotionally I was in a bad way. One particular night I prayed with all my heart just to be at peace, not torn by such conflicting emotions nor any emotions subject to change. Arthur must have been the reply to my prayer.

In the end this led to our marriage which proved a blessing, Arthur expressed it for himself as a foreshadowing of divine Grace. It was so for both of us. ▲

CHILDRENS' CORNER

Drsti-Srsti: Harry Potter and the Indelible

SHARADA BHANU

[Sunday afternoon, at the home of the Shankars. Appa is cleaning out a shelf, Amma, typing a report. Arun and Uma are in the middle of a fight.]

Uma: Hey! You can't have The Deathly Hallows! I'm reading it! You can take it when I finish.

Arun: You take ages. And I just want to read the war bits. And anyway I'll be off for cricket at 4. So you can wait.

Uma: Amma! He's pinched my book. I was in the middle!

Amma: You've both read this novel ages ago. Uma, you must have read this one dozens of times. I don't see why you have to fight over this at all.

Uma: So I can read it again, can't I? It's vacation. And I had it first. Tell Arun to back off before I blast him with the Killing Curse!

Arun: (dodging the book out of her reach) Immoral thug, isn't she Amma? Worse than Voldemort, really. Nothing indicates he would

Sharada Bhanu lives in Chennai and is currently writing a children's fantasy book based on the mythology of the Narasimha *avatara*.

waste an Avada Kedavra just to get hold of a book. And her own brother too. Wick-ed. Always knew she was a nasty bit of work.

Uma: (exasperated) Shut up! You know I didn't mean it! And just return that book or...

Arun: Good thing Hogwarts didn't send you an owl. Imagine what a worthless witch you would have been. "Avane Kedu, Va! He, he, I didn't mean to say that really, sooo sawrry you're dead."

Uma: Okay, okay, I promise when I kill you, I *won't* apologise. In fact I'm sure people will understand. Especially Dumbledore. After all he killed his sister. And she doesn't seem to have been at all bad, not a patch on you...

Appa: Hmm, I don't get it. I thought this Dumbledore was supposed to be a good guy?

Amma: Shankar, you still haven't got round to reading this?

Appa: Uh, no. I think I saw the movie of Book II with all of you.

Uma: Appa you're really missing something. And of course Dumbly is good, in fact it's not certain he killed his sister, he's just afraid he may have, but I'm sure when he met his sister afterwards, she told him it was that awful Grindelwald and everything was all right.

Appa: Just a minute. Either you kids have become totally incomprehensible or I'm just not equal to the intellectual pressures of contemporary fiction for children. If he killed his sister how could she have offered any information after the event?

Uma : Oh Appa, you really have to read the series. You see, no one really *dies*. Either they come back as ghosts or they go on to another place. And it's separated from this by a silver curtain.

Arun: It's not really a place. More like a mode of existence. They're shadowy, sort of, but still very much the same people they were. Personalities and all.

Uma: It is a place! Harry Potter says it's like a railway station! King's Cross.

Arun: Stupid! That's just a metaphor. Or symbol. Or something. Anyway King's Cross is not the real place. It's sort of between existences; when you're wondering whether you're going to live or die.

Appa: This really doesn't sound at all like the books we got to read at your age. Whew.

Uma: Anyway the point is that even Voldemort can't be killed. Though he really deserves it, he's so awful. He winds up there as a raw baby.

Arun: You think he would have felt better cooked?

Uma: Yeesh, shut up! But Amma I didn't understand why he's a baby, did you? I mean if JK was just saying that he has to be reborn, well doesn't everyone?

Arun: If you achieve mukthi, you don't. And catch You Know Who getting *that*.

Uma: But I thought when you were really horrible you didn't *get* a human birth. And Adi Sankara said that a human birth was difficult and precious.

Amma: Well Kanna, maybe Voldemort deserves mercy, too. He had a difficult childhood. And after all it's very hard to be sure that people are so clearly divided into good and evil, isn't it? Look at Snape. He seemed evil but was good and the false Moody seemed good and turned out to be evil.

Uma; No, ma, He Who Must Not Be Named didn't try for remorse, even when Potter asked him. He's wicked all right. They'll be snakes I suppose, he and Slytherin.

Arun: So when they slither along everyone can enjoy a belly dance. Or Nagini will oblige, I suppose. Yuck, you're really stupid.

Appa: Arun! Watch it. But I agree that there seems to be no reason at all to think that snakes are evil. Western prejudice. Obviously Rowling knew that in our country people worship them as an aspect of Devi.

Amma: But remember Slytherin house contributes to the victory in the end! And Harry names his son Severus. So JK is not unaware that what exists is infinite and beyond good and evil.

Appa: Shruti, you're just reading Hindu philosophy into this.

Arun: Appa's right! Amma, if there's no difference between good and evil what's the point of the whole series. Or the huge war in the end?

Amma: Kanna I'm just saying that it's more complex than that. Look at how Potter and Voldemort are not just similar, their bodies

and souls blend, their consciousnesses constantly threaten to merge into each other. The winner of the fight will be the one who realizes that he cannot injure the other without injuring himself. That's why "Expelliarmus" works while Voldemort's Killing Curse boomerangs, repeating what happened when Harry was a baby. In life there really is no other. Anything you do to the other is done to the self. Wise people realize this faster than those who are foolish.

Uma: So that's why during the war, the children all use "Stupefy" and not the Cruciatius or Avada Kedavra, and why Harry won't kill even to defend himself! And I thought it was just because they were forbidden curses.

Appa : No, he learnt advaita from Amma out here, that's why. And Rowling, not satisfied with scattering a 'Nagini' or a 'Padma' here and there, actually picked up basic skills in Vedanta.

Amma: Well *sat* is universal, not just Hindu. The truth manifests itself through many voices and cultures separated by time and space. Bhagavan speaks through His own words and texts written by "others." Shankar, you remember that He was once asked to write something, anything even an akshara, a single letter of the alphabet...

Appa: He often discouraged devotees prizing keepsakes, so I suppose He was not acting out of character there...

Arun: So what did Bhagavan Ramana do Amma?

Amma: Composed a verse which said: "All the letters in this book add up to a single imperishable letter. This, as written you have read. The single letter shines for ever of its own accord within the heart. Who can hope to write it?" You see akshara means both a letter and the Imperishable.

Uma: So the truth expresses itself again and again. In our hearts. It is always the same and it can't be erased. Like Harry Potter.

Arun: Or any of us! He wasn't so special after all, huh? The Boy Who Lived?

Appa: (smoothly) Since that's settled, I suggest both of you will now suspend this historic battle and lend a hand with getting this shelf in order, okay? In the meantime I shall improve my knowledge of imperishable wisdom. (Retires to a chair with the disputed copy of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.) ▲

LETTER TO THE EDITOR



Dear President, Sri Mani and Dr Moorthi,

As soon as I returned to England, I wanted to write and thank you for all you had done.

Although for almost two years now I have read and thought about little but Sri Bhagavan, I had very mixed feelings about visiting the ashram. In fact, if I hadn't got into contact with Jane and been so inspired by her and the boys, I don't think I would ever have come. I was dying to see all those places I'd been reading about, and was sure that actually visiting Arunachala would give me an insight into Bhagavan that no book could ever offer. At the same time, I am not much of a traveller, having hardly ever left Europe, and having promised myself a few years ago that I would never even leave England again. A trip to India was the last thing I wanted or expected, especially since, until I discovered Bhagavan, I had very little interest in Eastern religions. However, it wasn't the expense, discomfort or risk of travel that put me off; my real fear was disappointment. What if the ashram and all those other places somehow failed to live up to my extremely high expectations of them? What if Bhagavan Himself, in some obscure and unexpected way, were to let me down? He had become so central to my life that I simply couldn't imagine how I would cope with such a disappointment. So what I really feared was returning to England depressed and disillusioned, feeling that the whole thing had been some kind of fraud.

From the moment I stepped out of Chennai airport, I somehow knew that all my fears had been unfounded, that I was going to love India, and that I had been mad to think that Bhagavan could ever let me down. Sure enough, far from falling short of my high expectations, Arunachala effortlessly surpassed them. Until my arrival, I hadn't even dared to dream that it would be so perfect, so exactly what I wanted it all to be. But Skandashram and Virupaksha Cave are the sort of places that would have sent Keats or Shelley into poetic raptures, and they had a very powerful effect even on a lesser soul like mine. An even bigger surprise was my reaction to the Mountain itself. The one part of Bhagavan's teaching I had always found difficult to swallow was the idea that a mountain could be God. I tried to accept it, just because He had said it, but it never sat easily in my mind with the rest of His philosophy, which seemed so admirably rational. How could this clearly sane man say that Arunachala was not really on earth, but was actually a part of heaven? Now — although my rational self is still looking on in disbelief as I type these words — I think I know what He meant.

The ashram itself was all I could have wished it to be, and far more. Chinnaswami — if I may be so familiar — would certainly be proud of the way you are all safeguarding his legacy. What most charmed and impressed me was the fact that, even after all these years, the presiding presence there still seemed to be Bhagavan's. Far from trying to take His place, I felt that all of you were respectfully keeping out of His way. There was a mysterious sense of something missing yet still present at the centre of it all, which seemed to fill everything with peace. The actual organisation of the ashram seemed to work so smoothly and quietly that at times I felt it was all done by magic, though I realise how hard you must all labour behind the scenes to give this impression.

One of my other fears about visiting was that it might possibly make Bhagavan seem more distant from me. Here at home He was, so to speak, my own private property. At the ashram, He would be turned into a great public figure, not only owned by everyone, but claimed by a foreign country and an unfamiliar religion. To an extent,

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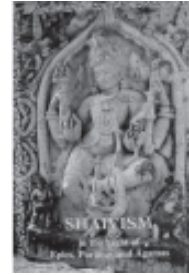
this was true. Much as I loved the ashram, I never forgot that I was a visitor in someone else's land, and I never had the sense of homecoming that so many devotees have reported. I was left in no doubt that the man who had bewitched me had been an Indian and a Hindu. But a couple of days ago, in a back issue of the *Mountain Path*, I read a piece by an old devotee which remarked that everyone who set eyes on Bhagavan immediately felt that He belonged exclusively to himself — rightly so, because Bhagavan belonged to everyone, and everyone belonged to Him. Visiting the ashram may have proved to me that Bhagavan is yours — but it has also left me more certain than ever that I am His.

Bhagavan Himself said, with reference to Paul Brunton, that you can only stay in Arunachala if some Power wants you there. It may well be that I am never summoned back — but I do assure you that I shall always feel privileged to have spent those ten days, and grateful for your great kindness and hospitality to me while I was there.

With all best wishes,

Louis Buss ▲

BOOK REVIEWS



SHAIVISM In the Light of Epics, Puranas and Agamas by N.R. Bhatt. Indica Books, D40/18, Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP. pp. 634, Rs875(HB). ISBN: 81-86569-70-7
www.indicabooks.com

Shaivism is one of the fundamentals on which Hinduism is built. The word *siva* means auspicious. It also connotes the ultimate reality and the Lord.

Its influence on Hindu thought and development can be traced back in recorded history to Mohenjodaro and is the longest, continuous tradition in Hinduism. The idea of liberation of a pure soul from the bonds of limited matter is at the core of Shaivism. Its mythology is vast and the philosophical concepts, rituals and attitudes it has inculcated into the Indian psyche is incalculable.

The author has devoted his life to the study of Shaivism. He worked at the Adyar Library and Research Institute and later the French Institute at Pondicherry where he built up over 50 years a collection of some 15,000 manuscripts collected from temples and gurukkal families in Tamil Nadu, and this book is the result of his lifelong studies. There is no doubt it is a definitive introductory study to Shaivism.

The book begins with the contribution of the Saiva Agamas to Shaivism. The agamas deal with everything pertaining to temples: the worship of the deity, architecture, rituals, priests, philosophy, civil and moral codes. It is a general survey.

The most interesting part of the book is the survey of the early history of Shaivism during the time of the Saraswathi River basin Rgvedic period at Mohenjodaro-Harappa and the decline of the Vedic gods. The origins of Siva were in the relatively minor god, Rudra. It was in the Yajurveda that He was elevated and regarded as auspicious, Siva. He was also the bringer of prosperity, Sankara. With the shift to sacrifice as the key element in rituals the gods began to lose their importance with the exception of Rudra. His only rival was Prajapati

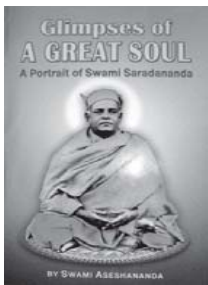
who He defeated. He then becomes Mahadeva, Isana, Isa, Isvara. By the Upanishadic period, Rudra had the highest attributes ascribed to Him. It is in the Svetasvatara Upanishad that He is clearly allotted the powers of creation, preservation and destruction.

Brahma originally appeared in the Vedic literature as Prajapati and Vishnu is mentioned in the Rgveda as a minor god who assisted Indra, and encompassed the whole universe in three steps. The association with Indra led to a transfer of his powers particularly as the subduer of Vrta, the asura. Hence Vishnu became the avowed enemy of demons and took the title *daityari*. The role of preserver came to be exclusively assigned to Him.

The author then goes into detail about Siva in puranic mythology, the linga and the images of Siva specifically to 28 distinct aspects. His investigation of the meaning of *linga* is significant and plausible. He then elaborates in some detail the rituals surrounding Siva in temples and the ancillary cults of Sakti, Ganesa, Kartikeya and Nandin which surround His worship.

The appendices give detailed lists of all the major Siva temples in the south as well as Siva tirthas. This book is concise, encyclopaedically informative and most important for us, though dense with facts, written for the layman. One can sense that Pandit Bhatt is not only a fine scholar but a devotee rooted in his own experience. It is an invaluable resource for Siva bhaktas.

— T.V. Ramamurthy



GLIMPSES OF A GREAT SOUL A Portrait of Swami Saradananda by Swami Aseshananda. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. 2008. pp335, Rs100. ISBN: 978-81-7823-491-5 srkmath@vsnl.com

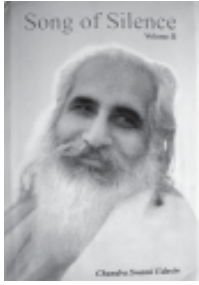
One of the benefits of reviewing books is the steady stream of publications coming from the Ramakrishna Math which normally one would not be aware. Reading the lives of saints is an inspiring experience particularly when the book is balanced. There are more than enough books about miracles but few which tell us of the humility and depth

of scholarship of a true sadhaka. Swami Saradananda and his cousin Sasi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) were members of the legendary inner circle of young men led by Vivekananda who surrounded Ramakrishna. His massive biography *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, is, with M's *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, the recognized authority on the life and teachings of the master.

Swami Saradananda was a big man not only physically; he was also a major influence in the development and consolidation of the Ramakrishna Order. The obituary in the *Prabuddha Bharata* in October, 1927 said the existence of the Ramakrishna Mission was “largely due to him.” He took upon himself the responsibility for the welfare of The Mother. Though endowed with considerable leadership qualities he nevertheless, when the time came, was content to let Swami Shivananda, (Mahapurush Maharaj) become the President of the Order and offered him his unequivocal whole-hearted support and counsel in administration. A man of great humility, humour and sense of responsibility, his life is a shining example of service and devotion. The Master had advised him: “Don't think of your personal salvation. You are meant for great things by the Divine Mother. Be like a banyan tree. Many weary souls will come to take shelter under your wide branches. Never refuse any of them. Accept them all and give them peace and abiding rest.”

We owe thanks to Swami Aseshananda from the Vedanta Society of Portland, Oregon USA who was a disciple of Swami Saradananda for yet another glimpse into the lives of those celebrated swamis upon which the Ramakrishna Order is built. The style is simple and straightforward as befits the man. The greatness of the subject needs no embellishment. The biography also contains a selection of lectures and letters that are full of common sense, cogent and purposeful. I would recommend this book to those who want to refresh themselves at a sure spring of genuine, fresh, pure spirituality. — Amrit Ray

SONG OF SILENCE Volume I & II Dialogues with Chandra Swami Udasin. Seekers Trust, Sadhana Kendra Ashram, Domet, Dehradun, 248125. pp.447 & pp.444, Prices not stated.



Chandra Swami Udasin belongs to the lineage of Udasin monks begun by one of the four great Kumara bothers, Sanatan Kumar Rishi. The son of Guru Nanak Dev, Sri Chanderji, was one of its most notable exponents who established Mutts in the four quarters of India. The order was centred in Bhuman Shah, West Punjab until Partition. Chandra Swami was born in at Bhuman Shah in 1930. After *sanyasa* at the age of 17, he spent many years wandering before settling at the Srinagar Mutt. He later moved to near Haridwar where he engaged in severe tapas. It is claimed he had the ultimate and integral realization of the Divine at the age of 29. He was appointed by his mentor, the previous *mahant* or spiritual head, as the successor in 1994.

The two volumes under review are a compilation of questions and answers on yoga practice. The swami is focused on the practical aspect of meditation. He had spent many years in solitary practice and his answers reveal a profound and consistent understanding of the obstacles and experiences involved with *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi*. Swamiji emphasizes the role of practice over mere philosophizing. There is a telling urgency in his words. Indeed one can say, the entire emphasis of the teaching is on doing rather than thinking about it. The advice given to the various questioners is down to earth and lucid. There is nothing particular which you would not find in another book of yoga but the answers do ‘taste’ original. “The Udasin lineage is called *Shrauta-Smarta Dharma* which means that it is based on the *Vedas* and *Puranas*.” Importance is laid on the *yoga darshana*. Though I do have a reservation about a Ramana Maharshi story which seems to have come more from well-intended imagination than fact, the replies and stories are apt and resonate with innate wisdom. There is nothing second hand about Chandra Swami Udasin.

Here are some short admonitions: ‘Surrender does not mean losing your freedom as the word sometimes connotes. When you surrender to the Divine, you are completely free—as free as the Divine Himself. In this divine state you can use the ego, but you are not used by the ego.’ ‘You become what you constantly think of and you thinking effortlessly of what you love.’ ‘Purity of heart is more important than intellectual

knowledge.’ ‘Tourism! Tourism for what? You have been chronic tourist for innumerable lives, but still unsatisfied.’

It appears Chandra Swami Udasin has got off the bus.

— Christopher Quilkey

BEYOND ORIENTALISM. The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies. Ed. By E. Franco & K. Preisendanz. Motilal Banarsidass Pub. Delhi, 2007. 673pp, Rs895 (HB). ISBN 978-81-208-3110-0 www.mlbd.com

Wilhelm Halbfass was a German Indologist whose *India and Europe* (1988) affected the perception and study of the mutual influence India and European philosophy exerted on each other and how these ideas resulted in mutual misunderstanding. Though the book was published after Edward Said’s seminal *Orientalism* (1978) and made little reference to it, Halbfass revised his book to incorporate Said’s ideas. He did not follow the earlier trend set by Deussen among others.

He writes about the historical misconceptions made by the West and how they impacted on India. Just as important, he discusses the misrepresentations of Indian thought by Indians themselves such as Rammohan Roy who, heavily influenced by Western thought, twisted Indian accepted wisdom to fit what they considered at that time, the superiority of Western concepts. This trend has continued today and Halbfass comes down heavily on Neo-Hindu milieu which employs the European medium to speak for itself. He initiated a ‘dialogue’ and ‘understanding’ which continues to reverberate through academic circles. He criticises those who are involved in Indology who air of superiority and express contempt for their subject and regard it as an obsolete subject. He is equally critical of the trend in India labelled passive-aggressive pseudo tolerant Hinduism. For Halbfass both sides have much to learn from each other. He has, in short, profoundly altered the academic perception of Indian philosophy.

The book under review is an anthology of articles written by 23 scholars about Halbfass’ work and its impact on studies. It has four headings: cross cultural encounter and dialogue; issues of comparative philosophy; classical Indian philosophy; and Indian religion, past and

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present. Halbfass comments at the end of each section on each paper. Many of the papers are specialised particularly in respect to Mimamsa, Vaisesika and Nyaya philosophy. However others are more accessible such as on the nature of reason whether as in India it is subordinate to scriptural authority or the Western mode where reason is supreme. This is a specialist book. — Andrew Clement

JAYANTEYA GITA (Nimi – Navayogi – Samvada), translated by N. Raghunatha Iyer. The Sanskrit Academy, Chennai, 2008. Rs.80.

The Sanskrit word *gita* means a song. The concept and history of this *genre* of expression is fundamental to the sanatana dharma. Life is a song and the scriptures written using the *gita* style express in terse beautiful language the heart of the *dharma*. There are quite a number of Gitas and these literary and spiritual jewels are Sanskrit language's gift to the world. The *Jayanteya Gita*, embodies the dialogue between Nimi (King Janaka) of Videha and the nine Yogisvara sons of King Rishabha and Jayanti (from whom the sons got the collective name Jayanteyas), which forms part of *Skandha XI* of *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the devotional masterpiece of all climes and times.

The *Jayanteya Gita* consists of four chapters and 185 verses in Sanskrit. As the translation is based almost wholly on that consummate connoisseur of English, N. Raghunatha Iyer, the book is a treat to read adding aesthetic pleasure to spiritual joy. The supply of notes, wherever necessary, based on the commentary of the great Bhagavata commentator Sridhara Swamin enhances the value of the book.

Srimad Bhagavatam is for all, the Advaitins, Visishtadvaitins, Dvaitins and others. Bhagavan Ramana emphasized that all the Acharyas taught the same Truth. It is hence but natural that *Jayanteya Gita* should appeal to one and all. The double strands of *bhakti* and *jnana* are woven into the texture of *Jayanteya Gita*.

The *Jayanteya Gita* declares the identity of Isvara, Guru and the Atman. While the pure Advaitin may say that seeing the Self is seeing the Lord, thus inviting one to do Self-enquiry, this excerpt from Bhagavatam exhorts one to love and surrender to Hari, the Lord and thus find one's Self. Literary and spiritual joy awaits lovers of Sanskrit and spiritual aspirants who read this delightful book. — K. Venkatarajaram ▲

ASHRAM BULLETIN

S. Gopalakrishnan

Sri Kunju Swamy Aradhana Day

The Aradhana Day of Sri Kunju Swamy, who was with Bhagavan from 1920 at Skandasramam, was solemnly observed at the ashram on 7th August 2009. Sri Kunju Swamy is well-known to ashram devotees for his strict adherence to Bhagavan's words, and as a reliable chronicler of events that occurred in Bhagavan's lifetime. His book *Living with the Master*, is a collection of reminiscences published by the ashram.

At 7.30 a.m. the recorded *parayana* of Bhagavan's poetic compositions in Malayalam chanted by Sri Kunju Swamy was played at Swamiji's samadhi.

And at 10 a.m. Sri Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai* was recited by a large number of devotees including those who came specially from Palghat, Kerala, after which, puja was offered to the lingam at Swamiji's samadhi. At its conclusion *prasad* was distributed.

The Gita Saram in Tamil and Malayalam

Sri Bhagavan Ramana made a selection from the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* of Lord Krishna of the most important verses. These verses were recently added to the regular evening chanting at the ashram along with the original sanskrit in the sunday evening *Sanskrit parayana*.

The near-by town of Tirukoilur is one of the recognised Krishnaranya *kshetras* and Sri Bhagavan on His journey from Madurai to Arunachala in 1896 was brought to this holy city on the Birthday of Lord Krishna. The young Venkataraman pledged his ear-stud with Muthukrishna Bhagavata so that he could continue on his quest to reach Arunachalam.

This year on the 13th August which was Sri Krishna Jayanti Day this year, a few devotees from the ashram went to Muthukrishna Bhagavata's house at Tirukoilur and chanted *Aksharamanamalai* and distributed *prasad* from the ashram. They also visited the huge Vishnu temple as well as the Veerateswar and Atulyanatheswar temples.

The Samadhi Day of Poet Muruganar Swami

The Samadhi Day of Poet Muruganar Swami, the great devotee of Sri Bhagavan, was solemnly observed on 20th August 2009. On the

18th August devotees from Choolaimedu, Chennai, led by Sri Ramanan, arrived at the ashram and, accompanied by some inmates of the ashram, started reciting Muruganar Swami's *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* which runs to 1851 verses. The recitation was completed on the night of the 19th August.

At 9.30 a.m. on the 20th August *oduvars* led by Sri Balachandra Oduvar, sang some selected verses from *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* at the poet's samadhi while the ashram priests performed puja to the lingam in the samadhi. At the conclusion of the puja accompanied by singing, *prasad* was distributed among the large gathering of devotees.

Obituary

Captain A. Narayanan

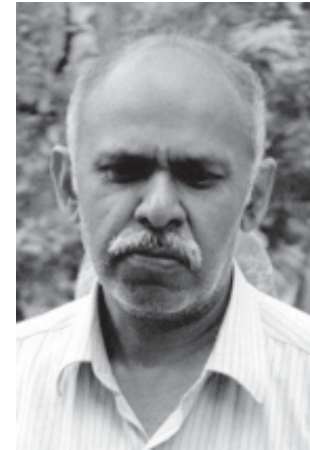
Captain Narayanan (Captain to everyone in Sri Ramanasramam and other devotees) was absorbed in Arunachala around 11.15 p.m. on Friday, 28th August 2009. He had been unwell for some time and

bore his disabilities with unshaken faith and fortitude. He was 63 years of age. Throughout his years at the ashram he was completely dedicated to Bhagavan and mentally absorbed in Arunachala.

Captain was the grandson of the eminent doctor, K. Narayana Iyer from Pudukottai, who was a great devotee of Bhagavan. He had contributed to the construction of the Old Hall and the northern wall of the Ashram.

Soon after graduating from the Madras Christian College with an M.Sc. degree, Narayanan joined the Indian Navy in 1966 as a Short Service Commissioned Officer and served for seven years. In 1975 he joined the Merchant Navy serving it as Chief Officer and Captain for 17 years.

When Captain Narayanan came to Sri Ramanasramam for good in February 1992 he had indeed come to his true home. His sense of



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identity with the interests of the ashram was complete and he proved himself to be a karma yogi *par excellence*.

Captain was a man of few words and intense activity. Single-handed, he compiled the eight-volumes on Sri Bhagavan entitled *The Boundless Ocean of Grace* in Tamil first and later its English version. He also wrote and compiled *Ramana's Arunachala – Ocean of Grace Divine*. This book is about Arunachala, its history and glory.

He rarely spoke of himself and never sat in judgment of others. He practiced an austerity and observed a self-discipline which would do honour to a seasoned *sannyasi*. He was a man of pure character and strong integrity. His self-effacement was total. He lived Bhagavan's teaching and was an example to others.

Captain performed *giripradakshina* of Arunachala almost every day of his life since 1992 till he was too ill and weak to walk. Captain made it a point to participate in the *narayana seva* (poor feeding) at the ashram every morning. He did this till almost his last day.

Narayanan had been given excellent treatment for his pancreatic cancer at Bangalore. However, metastasis set in, the cancer, attacking his liver and lungs. Knowing that the call was coming soon, Captain radiated a striking aura of peace, calm, courage and even joy in the last days of his life. It was clear to everyone in the ashram that Bhagavan was blessing him with a sense of detachment from the body.

Frugal to the extreme in his personal matters, Captain was generous to a fault in helping the needy.

A large number of Bhagavan's devotees, his admirers and beneficiaries attended the cremation on Saturday, the 29th August, 2009.

