

# CONTENTS

RAMANA ASHTOTTARAM	2
EDITORIAL When is Enough Enough?	3
EVERYTHING IS PREDETERMINED G. Weber	9
POEM: PRADAKSHINA WITH THE KING Ana Callam	15
AVUDAI AKKA OF CHENGOTTAI Kanchana Natarajan	17
VIDEO INTERVIEW: O BHAGAVAN! Shivani Sharma	31
POEM: VENKATARAMAN'S ADVICE AT JAYANTI Ana Callam	37
KEYWORD: SATSANG	39
ULLADU NARPADU: VERSE TWENTY FIVE S. Ram Mohan	45
SWAMI RAMANAGIRI David Godman	47
O BHAGAVAN, PLEASE WAKE UP! V.V. Raghava	61
TALE OF THE ACCOMPLISHED ARTISAN Nawazuddin	67
BHAGAVAN'S HANDWRITING: SRI RAMANA GITA B.V. Narasimhaswami	71
THE QUEST: ARRIVAL AT ARUNACHALA Lucia Osborne	85
POEM: FLAWLESS Ana Callam	89
SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI ON SELF-ENQUIRY D. Samarendar Reddy	91
SHORT STORY: AN INVISIBLE FORCE Prema Sastri	99
MAHA BHAKTA VIJAYAM: THE PILGRIMAGE OF VITHOBA Nabaji Siddha	105
BOOK REVIEWS	118
ASHRAM CALENDAR 2010	124
ASHRAM BULLETIN	125

## Ramana Ashtottaram

66. ओं सदानन्दाय नमः

Om Sadānandāya namah.

Prostration to the one whose bliss is perpetually renewed.

The sun, the Ganga, brightness, vigour, movement, joy, Being manifest as bliss in becoming, reborn from moment to moment, he is *sadyojata* (one of pure birth) and so *sadananda*.

67. ओं मृदुभाषिणे नमः

Om Mrudubhāshinē namah.

Prostration to the one whose speech is sweet and gentle.

Moonlight is calm and cool but lifeless. Sunlight on Ganga water is bright, cool, sweet and vibrant and speaks to us in whispers of a bliss forever new. Bhagavan's speech was a gentle ripple on the surface of deep silence. ▲

## When Is Enough Enough?

Once there was a sorcerer who had a callow apprentice. Before leaving his house the sorcerer left instructions with the apprentice that he should clean it meticulously. The apprentice was smart but lazy and after laboriously sweeping for some time he became bored. He had an idea. There was a magic broom in the house belonging to the master who had left strict instructions with the student never to touch it without his permission. The broom responded to a magic incantation and would do whatever was requested. Now, the apprentice had heard the master chant the incantation to start the broom on a new task but he had never heard him stop it. But that didn't bother the eager apprentice who took the broom in his hand and chanted. The broom jumped to attention and the apprentice told it to clean the floor by bringing buckets of water into the house. This the broom did with alacrity. But then, the broom began to fill the house with water from the well and try as he might the desperate apprentice could not stop the process. The master returned and chanted the magic words commanding it to cease. The apprentice was mortified.

We are that apprentice. With insufficient knowledge we start something that soon overwhelms us.

It is a cliché that we are faced today with a world of abundance. It is the nature of modern life that we are taken up with ever increasing tasks, responsibilities and acquisitions. There never seems to be enough time in the day to do all that we want or are required to do. The ubiquitous mobile phone is a case in point where it is no longer possible to disappear and be alone. It is increasingly evident that we have become slaves to our own desires and those of others. It has reached a point where even if we do have free time and the space to just breathe, our mind, so attuned to doing, immediately thinks of another task to perform. Indeed we tend to feel guilty if we are not working at full stretch constantly. Will there ever be a moment when we have sufficient material objects to make us feel completely secure, so that we may focus our time, energy and attention on our inner being? When is enough enough? Is there a moment in time when we can rise above it all and say, “no more”?

Like the sorcerer’s apprentice we are in a position to play with knowledge because it is no longer hard to come by. And yet...and yet...what we all recognise it to be self-evidently true we do not find a satisfactory way to deal with it. If we find ourselves with too much of something, be it freedom or knowledge, we go looking for even more to resolve it — more study, more exotic clothes, more searching for gurus. Of course we have to search for perfection, but what happens when we find it? Are we by then so conditioned to searching that we don’t recognise perfection when it happens to us? An egg is a perfect shape, what would happen if one tried to add to it?

There are moments of perfection which, if we recognise and appreciate, are keys. When we encounter the true guru who can guide us we know immediately in our heart that yes, this is it. We need not add to this, instead we remember and focus our attention on that perfection. It is a seed which has its own dynamic. We cannot improve it but rather allow it to unfold at its own pace in our heart. Like a small delicate flame we tend to it and protect it from the vagaries of our restless mind. We nourish it with our quiet attention. Unlike the

material world it is not a question of getting more of it — it is miraculously complete within itself.

How do we sustain our attention on that which is spiritually precious? We should be aware of the difference between the logic of the material and the spiritual world.

In the gross material world every moment requires a response and whether we respond consciously or not is our choice to make. We make decisions for personal gain, either gross and self-evident, regarding money, or subtle, concerning power. Our decisions can also be altruistic, such as engaging with a noble cause. If we can rise above the pressure for a moment, by not identifying with the energy at work in us and the world, we may be able to see that the forces of destiny carry us along like passengers on an unstoppable train. Bhagavan taught that though we think we have free will, actually the timetable of our journey has already been decided and is in inexorable motion. If all is decided then why make any decision? It is a question of clarity. Our mind is an instrument of understanding. If we are caught up in the rush of events then we cannot develop the clearness of mind not to be affected by the inevitable frustration and sorrow of desire denied. We do have choice, whether to identify with our feelings or not. But for that ability to develop we should first realise that there is no end to the gratification of desires.

How can we reach the point where we realise this and learn to live in the moment, free from the conflict of desire and fear? We can do so by constantly posing this question in the form of ‘Who am I?’. We develop the capacity to consciously stop and be aware of the flow of thoughts, and not be an unconscious victim of circumstances. We may be on the train but we are alert. The other option suggested by Bhagavan is that we can surrender, go to sleep and peacefully arrive at our destination. This appears to be the happiest option but surrender in fact means that we accept unreservedly whatever happens to us — no complaints, no objections, complete acceptance of whatever happens. Is there anyone who can fulfil such a stringent condition?

To return to the important question of sufficiency, enough is enough when it is complete.

Putting little bits together would take forever but when it is whole then one cannot add to it. By surrendering we leave the security of our

narrow views which are bolstered by narrow self-esteem and open up to the possibility of something greater than ourselves. To see wholly requires an affirmation, an assent to a higher truth that governs our lives. We need to combine self-enquiry and surrender because they are both necessary if we seek a higher principle that guides and explains our lives, though 'explain' is too small a concept for the vast mystery of life we behold. When we affirm by self-enquiry that limitless sense of 'I am'; when we surrender to the moment and unreservedly accept what is happening now, we break the chains of a limited sense of who we are. There is no longer the question of gain or loss, for it is irrelevant.

Knowing that we have enough applies to spiritual teachings. At a certain stage it is no longer a question of acquisition of new knowledge but application. *Knowledge is not wisdom*. What we gain from lectures and books is important but equally vital is the application of these teachings. It is useless to endlessly acquire information. The end consequence of such a path can be confusion, apathy, arrogance and dogmatism.

The turning point or rebirth can be an intellectual insight or more often, a grand affirmation of a gratuitous sublime experience that cannot be rationalised or forgotten. Once the conscious decision has been reached we enter a new realm of logic whereby the way forward is not through acquisition but by the letting go of all that which obscures the sense of wholeness. If we are to believe our guru Sri Ramana, then we already are That. What prevents us from being That is our sense of separation caused by the relentless demands generated by the mind to fulfil our desires. Right desires are the fulfilment of the necessities of life: food, clothing, shelter, instruments for work or whatever is indispensable and that includes food for the heart and mind. Unnecessary desire is that which we can do without. It is unnecessary if its lack does not damage our integrity.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, who established in the 1950s a Soto Zen centre in San Francisco, gave a lecture to his students:

"Buddha is always helping you. But usually we refuse Buddha's offer. For instance, sometimes you ask for something special. This means that you are refusing to accept the treasures you already have.

You are like a pig. When I was young, as my father was very poor, he raised many pigs. I noticed that when I gave the pigs a bucket of food, they would eat it after I went away. As long as I was there, they wouldn't eat it, expecting me to give them more food. I had to be very careful. If I moved too quickly they would kick the bucket over. I think that is what you are doing. Just to cause yourself more problems, you seek for something. But there is no need for you to seek for anything. You have plenty, and you have just enough problems. This is a mysterious thing, you know, the mystery of life. We have just enough problems, not too many or too few."<sup>1</sup>

How can we be whole or complete? It is both a leap of faith and a daily discipline of keeping the wandering mind fixed as much as possible on what is important. It is both surrender and a positive constant application of Self-enquiry. We should not be bothered too much with thought or emotions. If we let them come and go, they will soon lose their importance. It is when we try to harness the mind to do what we 'want' that the trouble begins. Sri Ramakrishna said that to say over and over, "Oh, I am a sinner" is of no help. It merely reinforces the negative vasanas which plague us. By denying them importance we lessen their influence on the way we perceive and behave. This is not easy. It requires effort, for we deliberately starve them by focusing on the source of thought, the sense of 'I am'. We need not accumulate merit like a material possession for that only generates pride and avarice. A sattvic mind and its ineluctable benefits will follow naturally when we begin to let go the repetitive, negative thoughts.

And when is enough enough of this spiritual insight, so that we may say we have attained something and are now knowers or *jnanis*? It is the wrong question; for we now have nothing to lose and nothing to gain. This is just the beginning of wisdom. What is necessary will come to us and what is unnecessary will leave us. What more could we ask for? ▲

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<sup>1</sup> Chadwick, David, *Crooked Cucumber. The Life and Teachings of Shunryu Suzuki*. Thorsons, New York. 1999. p.7.



# Everything Is Predetermined

– Is That Scientifically Possible?

GARY WEBER

Sri Ramana's, famous and controversial, statement found in Arthur Osborne's *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, is in response to the question: "Are only the important events in a man's life, such as his main occupation or profession, predetermined, or are trifling acts also, such as taking a cup of water or moving from one part of the room to another?"

Sri Ramana replies, "Everything is predetermined."

At first, it seems that such a belief/understanding would make one unhappy, frightened, nervous and uncertain. It also appears impossible or irrational to contradict our everyday experience. However, the one

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who uttered it, Sri Ramana, was one of the happiest, most content and serene people to have graced our species in recorded history.

One of our greatest scientists, Albert Einstein, echoes Sri Ramana's statement:

"Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect as well as for the star. Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper."<sup>1</sup>

Traditional advaita categorically rejects the ability of 'science' to offer insights into understanding non-dual concepts, hearkening back to Galileo. This approach risks an uninformed and incorrect perspective, much like insisting that the earth is not the centre of the universe. As a contemporary example, Dennis Waite's otherwise excellent tome on advaita, *Back to the Truth: 5000 Years of Advaita*, dismisses science in less than a page.

What possible scientific insights have led world-renowned scientists to these seemingly 'mystical' conclusions on the critical topics of choice, free will and predetermination? I presented just such a scientific approach in my book, *Happiness Beyond Thought: A Practical Guide to Awakening*.

A seminal study was done in 1983 by Benjamin Libet<sup>2</sup> and was described as a profoundly influential paper on the source of human control. Participants watched a clock and noted precisely when they decided to flex their wrist, as well as when the movement actually occurred. Their intention to move was recorded about 200 milliseconds before movement actually began.

Electrodes placed over the motor areas of the brain (areas involved in controlling movements) determined when the brain initiated the movement. By recording the electrical activity of the muscles involved

<sup>1</sup> The quote is from Clark, Ronald W., *Einstein: The Life and Times*. The original publisher was World Publishing Co., New York, NY, 1971, but it has been republished many times.

<sup>2</sup> Libet, Benjamin, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004. This work is widely published but this is a good summary of his work.

in wrist movement, Libet determined precisely when muscle movement began.

The brain initiated movement about 550 milliseconds before the action began. However, as the participants were only aware of the intention to move 200 milliseconds before it occurred, the motor centres of the brain initiated the movement *before* the participant was even aware of it.

Our actions are in process before we even 'know' that they will be occurring. Action is not the result of a conscious process that we initiate. It is a *result* of brain processes initiated prior to our knowledge. This finding has major implications for issues of free will and what the role of the 'I' is.

This study has been replicated many times, with the roots of these decisions being seen to occur as much as ten seconds before they become consciously known.

The Libet work has been expanded recently to more complex thought processes in looking at 'aha/Eureka' insights, when they are known and where they come from. Research shows that "although people are not consciously aware of it, their brains have to be in a certain state for an insight to take place. Moreover, that state can be detected electrically as much as eight seconds in advance of the person even becoming aware of the 'aha!' moment itself."<sup>3</sup>

The article concludes, "Conscious thought, it seems, does not solve problems. Instead, unconscious processing happens in the background and only delivers the answer to consciousness once it has been arrived at."

The concept of conscious, mentally-derived, choice in our actions seems a myth.

Recognizing this inability to predict our actions, is it possible, even after the fact, to have predicted the outcomes of those actions? To look at this, we can draw upon complex systems theory, known as 'chaos' theory. It looks at the impact of small, seemingly insignificant changes

<sup>3</sup> Recently reported in *The Economist*, 'Conscious and unconscious thought', 16th April 2009 and published in *The Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* in July 2009, Vol. 21, No. 7. 'Posterior Beta and Anterior Gamma Oscillations Predict Cognitive Insight' by B.R. Sheth, S. Sandkühler and J. Bhattacharya.

(like choices) on the behaviour of large complex, dynamic systems (like 'our' lives).

In working with a weather forecasting model, a meteorologist found that infinitesimal changes in a single value made the entire weather system change dramatically. This discovery led to the now widely-known metaphor of a butterfly flapping its wings causing a hurricane in a distant part of the world. Some useful insights into predetermination and choice emerged from this approach:

a) Predictions regarding complex systems undergoing change (our lives) are unreliable because accurately defining even the initial conditions would require impossibly large amounts of information.

b) All parts of the system affect, and are affected by, other parts of the system in a complex web of cause and effect and feedback.

c) Predictions based on simple logic ( $a > b > c$ ) cannot work as there are too many other interactions taking place for b and c that are unknowable.

d) The human mind's short term memory holds only about seven pieces of information at a time, hopelessly inadequate for decision making in today's complex world. This gives us great discomfort, uncertainty and fear.

As our world is a complex, moving system with billions of interacting parts, how could we make informed, correct decisions? What meaning do 'responsibility', 'free will', 'good' and 'bad' have in such a context? Without needing to decide whether there is an 'outside



agency' or whether it is 'random', can we accept that all events are beyond our knowledge or rational decision making?

In our everyday lives, consider simple events, like meeting friends. Will the car start or the bus be there? Will traffic be a problem? Will you get a call or e-mail that will change your plans? How long will the others wait? What if someone has a meeting later?

If any of these events happen, then a series of other unexpected events cascade from that event. These experiences have happened to all of us, completely out of our control. A simple event tree, even with only two branches after each event, demonstrates how accurate prediction of subsequent events and real control of our lives is impossible.

As another example, consider chess. Imagine that the game represents the world. In this simple world, there are only two different families each with a father, mother, three sets of older twins and eight younger children. The movements that each can do is limited and defined. Each can only be in one of roughly 60 adjacent parcels of land. If a member of one family tries to move into land occupied by a member of the other family, the current occupant dies. Everyone moves in an alternating-family sequence until all members of one family are gone.

This is obviously a much simpler world than 'ours'. However, the number of possible combinations of interactions of these two families is calculated as 1 followed by 120 zeroes. The number of particles in the known universe is estimated to be 1 followed by 70 zeroes. How can we possibly possess the level of knowledge to predict who and what will be affected by our interactions in our vastly more complex world?

A final approach is to select the most important event in 'your life'. Considering it carefully, can you truthfully say that you were responsible for all the events leading up to and related to it? Were you aware of all choices surrounding it made by others, as well as all that has resulted from this event, and to whom, over subsequent years? If you can't claim responsibility for all facets of the most important event in your life, and all of its results, what do you control that matters?

Take the most terrible calamity of which you are aware, like an earthquake or war. Did everyone affected by that calamity knowingly choose to be there? Did anyone predict all outcomes of that calamity accurately?

Understanding that the outcomes of our actions are not knowable or predictable is often unsettling, even frightening, at first.

In applying complex systems theory to psychological systems, two scientists describe how we typically judge this uncertainty as unacceptable and dangerous. They point out that this failure to accept the reality of the situation causes pain and suffering as we are locked in a futile attempt at stability and equilibrium “in order to maintain an old way of knowing and to resist the inevitable emergent novelty woven into the process of living.”<sup>4</sup> They conclude that the best way to deal with the complexity of today’s world is by using the notion of a continuously restructuring (or non existent?) self.

With an understanding of the impossibility of prediction, control and real responsibility for our actions and choices and all that results from them, a deep understanding arises which leads to surrender and acceptance. Rather than continuing to live in our usual regime of fear, conflict and confusion, we find that a deep peace, stillness and grace open within us and with this, true liberation. Actions occur in a presence and stillness fully attuned to this very moment, without any expectation or fear of regarding results.

With this deep surrender, we can move into the stillness and peace that are so elegantly reflected in those well-known photographs of Sri Ramana’s smile, images that brought comfort and peace to so many.

Another challenge to the claim that events within our conscious decision and control, derives from genetics, which claim that our genes lay the basis for who it is, and what capabilities we have, to make ‘independent’ decisions.

Our current science tells us that our thoughts, feelings and behaviour are determined largely by our genes, learning and

<sup>4</sup> Masterpasqua, F. and Perna, P., *The Psychological Meaning of Chaos: Translating Theory into Practice*, American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. 1997.

environment, none of which we have control over. If you try to change yourself, your goals are determined by the same genes, history and environment. What is possible for ‘you’ to decide is largely determined by what shaped you, which was completely out of your control.

Similarly, if you look at how you choose which information to focus on in the future, those choices are made by your existing ‘I’, which you did not consciously assemble. Whether or not you will intervene in a future series of events is therefore also predetermined.



## Pradakshina With The King

Ana Callam

For a while Rama let me be his walking stick  
as he moved around his sacred hill,  
o god, he could lean on me so beautifully  
and he did, each step of his a miraculous  
rhythm to which my being tuned and  
when he sat, I tilted back and watched  
the sky nourishing its clouds, his  
palm all the while upon my head,  
which in his care had become  
a crown of jewels and lotuses, rising up to Heaven’s crest  
above us and raining softly  
down on man and wood  
and mountain all of it God’s bounty  
offered from His One Heart,  
out of which all i’ had  
been carved, and hewn now to bark and dust,  
a bent branch hollowed  
just enough to be allowed  
to carry him, gleaming  
and hallowed by his handsome  
and o unspeakably tender hand.





# Avudai Akka of Chengottai

KANCHANA NATARAJAN

**I**t was a cold January afternoon in 1946. A perturbed questioner, Mr. Joshi, said to Bhagavan, “I am a beginner. How should I start?”

Bhagavan replied in his characteristic way, “Where are you now? Where is the goal? ... the Self is not somewhere far away to be reached. You are always that...”

This prompted Lokamma, a lady in the audience, to sing a Tamil song that Bhagavan immediately recognized as one by Avudai Ammal.

Bhagavan then reportedly said, “Mother used to sing this song very often. This repeats the very same thing we have been talking about now...”

Dr. Kanchana Natarajan teaches Indian Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy, Delhi University. She is presently a Fellow at Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, translating the songs of Avudai Akkal from Tamil to English.

Bhagavan continued, “Avudai Ammal has composed a great many songs. They are very popular in those parts [Madurai and other nearby districts]. Some of them have been published. Still, so many remain unpublished. They have been handed down orally from generation to generation, mostly through women, who learn them by heart, hearing them from others and singing them along with those who already know them.”<sup>1</sup> Some years ago, as I randomly browsed through Tamil books at the Shivananda Ashram Library, Rishikesh, reputed for its range of rare books in English, Tamil, Sanskrit and various regional languages, by sheer accident — and to my immense good fortune — I came across an old and brittle book of songs composed by Avudai Akka, this great woman Vedantic seer of the eighteenth century. The text left me electrified. Never had I come across works by any self-realized woman seer so driven to communicate the powerful Vedantic truths that lead ordinary mortals to the path to liberation.

It took me some time to come to terms with Akka’s simple, direct, uncompromising, intense and profound songs. They are composed in simple spoken Tamil, carrying the Advaitic message of *sarvatmabhava*, (Oneness of Being) and the eternal bliss of final liberation. Anyone familiar with even colloquial Tamil can access these powerful utterances. Akka’s poems are public songs that address Tamil women as a community. Her song *Vedanta Pallu* was published as early as 1896 by Sarada Vilasa Publication in Tamil Nadu. In 1910, further attempts were made to publish her work. In 1953, a major endeavour was made by A. Venkatarama Sastri to personally collect some songs from widows of Chengottai (Akka’s birthplace) and print them. Many more extant songs were later collected by Gomathi Rajankam who sporadically published them in the Tamil spiritual journal *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*. Swami Nityananda Giri of Gnanananda Tapovanam, Tamil Nadu, has published most of Akka’s songs under the title *Chengottai Shri Avudai Akkal Padal Tirattu* (2002).

<sup>1</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 2002, pp. 95-97.

For over two hundred years, Akka’s songs were sung, circulated and preserved for posterity by women, especially widows, who gained immense solace, comfort and knowledge from the lyrical compositions, and from the awareness that the sage herself had undergone the grim life of a child-widow prior to initiation by her guru. Akka explains the terse metaphysical truths of Vedanta in a simple yet unique way, using familiar motifs rooted in the daily activity of the women of those times.

Who was Avudai Akka? What took her to the great teaching of Advaita? Gomathi Rajankam, a prolific Tamil writer on spiritual issues, spent an extended period in Chengottai and other nearby villages gathering information about Akka’s life and songs from the local women. The following brief account of Avudai Akka’s life draws upon my conversations with an erudite scholar and school headmaster, Mr Janardhan, a resident of one of the *agraharams* in Chengottai village. I have also drawn from Gomathi Rajankam’s introduction to the work *Chengottai Shri Avudai Akkal Padal Tirattu* (2002).

The name ‘Avudai’ is the Tamil form of Gomati Amman, the presiding goddess of the temple Sankaran Koil, some 40 kilometres from Chengottai. This massive temple is dedicated to Shiva, his consort Gomati and Shankaranarayanan. Akka was born into an orthodox Brahmin family of the Chengottai *agraharam*, and her parents raised her with love and care. In keeping with tradition, she was married off at a very young age to a neighbour’s son; so young as to not know who her groom was, her formalised relation to him, or what marriage itself implied. Soon there was weeping in the house, and when she asked about the cause of the gloom and tears she was told that the neighbour’s child had died. Her immediate reaction was, “Why cry so much for a boy who has died in another house?” With her first menstruation she was initiated into the numbing rites of widowhood, such as tonsure, breaking of bangles, mandatory white sari, and relegation to a dark interior room, unending chores, and lifelong stigmatisation as an inauspicious woman. She was inconsolable at the thought that such claustrophobic subjugation was to be her destiny.



## MOUNTAIN PATH

The famous scholar Tiruvisainallur Shridhara Venkatesa Ayyawal, who belonged to the tradition of *namasankirtan*, was invited by the then king of Travancore to conduct the worship of Shiva on Shivaratri day. The master set out with a group of disciples, walking from Kumbhakonam. On the way he passed through Chengottai, and was welcomed by the brahmins of the *agraharam*. As he passed Akka's house, where the threshold was neither swept clean nor decorated with the customary *kolam* because of the inauspicious presence of the child-widow, his legs became transfixed. He stood there singing the name of God. Akka flew out of the house like an arrow leaving the bow of a deft archer, fell weeping at his feet and begged him to save her from her fate as a widow. Ayyawal compassionately told her not to worry but to come to the riverside *mantapam* in the evening to receive initiation.

The onlookers were outraged at Akka's audacity, and pushed her back into the house. They confronted Shridhara Ayyawal and rebuked him for encouraging the child-widow, saying that she was not eligible to receive any initiation from anyone, much less from a saint.

Ayyawal is supposed to have retorted, "If she is not eligible, then no one in this village is eligible for anything. Desire to know the truth is the only criterion for knowledge, and not the nature of embodiment, male, female, widowed or married."

Unhappy at this reply, the brahmins of the *agraharam* threatened Akka's parents with dire consequences if their daughter obeyed Ayyawal's instructions. Heedless of all this, Akka managed to escape the house in the evening, went to the *mantapam* and received the Upanisadic *mahavakya* from her guru. Needless to say, she was ostracised from the *agraharam*, but the master allowed her to accompany him to Travancore. The women of the palace objected to a young child-widow being part of his all-male retinue. But Ayyawal insisted that Akka was a *jnani*. He demonstrated this publicly by making her perform the Shivaratri worship. The king provided ceremonial golden *bilwa* leaves for the *puja* that Akka performed with great concentration. The next morning she collected the golden leaves along with the faded flowers and cast them all into the flowing waters of the nearby river. The fact that Akka made no distinction between



C.V. Chitra

Mantapam where  
Akka received diksha

ordinary flowers and priceless golden leaves was proclaimed by Ayyawal to be an instance of her absolute dispassion.

Akka is supposed to have lived near her master by the holy river Kaveri for many years, experiencing the supreme Advaitic truth. She began singing songs about this experience of sublimity. Her state of deep *samadhi* is legendary. Once, while meditating on the Kaveri bank, there was a flash flood; many of Iyyawal's disciples ran for their lives. Akka, however, stayed totally oblivious to her surroundings; reportedly the surging river piled mud around her in a circular heap, forming an island so she could continue her meditation uninterrupted.

Akka was called an *unmattha* (one who wanders like a madwoman), spiritually intoxicated; she composed her songs while in this state. Her lament *Anubhogaratnamalai*, composed when she heard of the passing away of her master Ayyawal, stuns the readers with the heart-wrenching intensity of its pathos. A few women devotees, probably widows, attended to her when she was in the state of divine inebriation; they followed her, learnt her songs and passed this treasure on to other women. Slowly her songs became known in every local brahmin household. There may have been a time, perhaps, when the women of all brahmin households in Tirunelveli district sang her songs.

The story about Akka's departure from the world claims that she told her three intimate disciples to accompany her to Kuttralam; and when they all climbed the cliff by the Shenbaka *aruvi* (waterfalls) she gestured to them not to follow her further. She walked on, never to return. Her disciples waited for a long time and then searched for her, but there was no trace of Akka or her remains. All that was left was the priceless legacy of her songs, which were taught to younger women and thus kept in circulation.

I offer here a translated excerpt of Akka's song *Paraparai Kanni*.

Worshipping and offering flowers to Him,  
Who emerged from the pillar,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This refers to one of the incarnations of Vishnu who took the form of half-lion, half-man to save his devotee Prahlada. See Pandeya Ramtej Shastri (ed.), 'Sri Badarayana Vedavyasavirachitam' in *Srimat Bhagavat Maha Puranam*, VII: 12-39 (Kashi: Pandit Pustakalaya, 1952), pp. 620-23.

I became free from ego and the three impurities,<sup>3</sup>  
Paraparam.<sup>4</sup>

Adoring my Guru and venerating his lotus-like feet,  
I performed penance to (know) my self, Paraparam. (1)

Mother, Saraswati, constantly honouring you,  
I became Saccidanandam<sup>5</sup> itself, Paraparam.  
The restless mind that surged like incessant waves,  
Now rests unmoving in bliss, Paraparam. (2)

The gigantic tree stump of ignorance uprooted,  
And devastated,  
I stood as conscious witness,  
As all-encompassing space, Paraparam.  
With the weapon of Self destroying the ego<sup>6</sup>  
I attained the indivisible state, Paraparam. (3)

<sup>3</sup> Akka uses the Saiva Siddhanta term *mummalam* or 'three passions', i.e., those generated through ignorance, action and pride.

<sup>4</sup> This is also the title of the song. Akka's passion and intensity is affirmed throughout the autobiographical composition. The song is addressed to the *Paraparam*, the Absolute Being that transcends the duality of both *param* (Supreme) and *aparam* (non-supreme). The Tamil saint Tayumanar, probably Akka's senior contemporary, has also composed *Paraparakkanni*, a widely-read work. This address to the Absolute is used to describe the spiritual journey of the author as well as to detail the nature of the world and its illogical social norms. While Akka uses the *Paraparakkanni* to express her spiritual attainment, she also relentlessly and powerfully criticizes the oppressive prevalent brahminical value systems that she understood well from personal experience as a child-widow.

<sup>5</sup> Satchitanandam, or existence, knowledge and bliss, is the nature of the non-material Self that, even though present in the body, remains unaffected by it. According to Advaita Vedanta, this is the essential nature of one's self; however, we identify ourselves with the composite body-mind-intellect, mistaking this to be the self. This persistent fundamental error is what creates, reinforces and perpetuates existential suffering.

<sup>6</sup> The knowledge of the higher Self annihilates the ego-generated illusion of regarding the transient and defective body-mind complex as our true Self. Hence knowledge of the Self is a weapon that destroys the ego and its creations.



## MOUNTAIN PATH

Understanding the Truth through the tortuous grief of the heart,  
And from the words of the Master,<sup>7</sup>  
I lost the mighty force of both sin and merit, Paraparam.  
Having annihilated the series of interminable births,  
Severing the entanglements,  
I crossed the city of delusion,<sup>8</sup> Paraparam. (4)

Swimming across the ever-flowing ocean of birth and death,  
And ascending the shore,  
I became timeless eternity, Paraparam.  
Diving deep into the ocean of sorrow, reaching the other shore,  
I shunned shame and disgrace,  
And abandoned births, Paraparam. (5)

The idle gossip, falsity and delusion of the world disappeared  
And I became like the sky  
Vast, indivisible, Paraparam.  
All the scriptures I had read became tattered and  
Worn out like an old cloth,  
While I became shoreless and immeasurable infinity, Paraparam. (6)

Renouncing the self-conceit of 'I am the body',  
I understood 'I am That',<sup>9</sup>  
And I stood forever mute and resolute, Paraparam.  
One glimpse was enough to recognise  
the treacherous ocean of *pravritti*,<sup>10</sup> as I stood  
As the beacon light  
To those on the path of *nivritti*, Paraparam. (7)

<sup>7</sup> Probably this is a reference to Akka's tortuous early widowhood and the subsequent arrival of the master who initiated her and gave her teachings on Vedanta.

<sup>8</sup> Akka here uses the term *mayapuri* (the city of delusion).

<sup>9</sup> Giving up the false knowledge 'I am this form' gives rise to the knowledge 'I am That', where there is a recognition or discovery of the true nature of the Self.

<sup>10</sup> *Pravritti* is the path of indulgence, relating to worldly attainments. *Nivritti* is the path of the renunciation of worldly pursuits.



C.V. Chitra

The Banyan tree behind the Mantapam



The idols no more alluring, the three *gunas* hammered to *nirguna*,  
 The desires resolved,  
 I became forever exultant, Paraparamē.  
 Those immersed in *nada* and *bindu* <sup>11</sup> and other cosmic details  
 Will never know this omnipresent Being, Paraparamē. (8)

While wide awake I slumbered (to the world),  
 As though in deep sleep,  
 Thus liberated from pollution and purity, Paraparamē.  
 On arriving There, anger and desire destroyed, I was alone,<sup>12</sup>  
 No-one to talk to, Paraparamē. (9)

The (three) states<sup>13</sup> and their false support now having perished,  
 I remain the witness  
 Ever alone and one, Paraparamē.  
 After the demise of the six enemies<sup>14</sup>  
 I conquered death, Paraparamē. (10)

Explain how the Infinite goes wandering  
 As though enclosed in six measures of length,<sup>15</sup> Paraparamē.  
 Like celestial beings enjoying sense-pleasures,<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Nada* is the first movement of Siva-Sakti towards movement. The term is also used for ovum and sperm. *Bindu* is the undifferentiated point which is ready to manifest as the universe.

<sup>12</sup> With the attainment of the non-dual Absolute Self there is nothing more to be achieved; there is nothing other than the Self present everywhere. Hence Akka's declaration: "I was alone, none to talk to."

<sup>13</sup> According to Advaita, the states on which we rely in this world for all existential transactions are three: waking, dreaming and deep sleep. We cannot conceive of a world or of social involvement in any mode other than these three.

<sup>14</sup> The six enemies are passion, anger, covetousness, delusion, pride and hatred. With the destruction of the six enemies, one becomes immortal.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Akka is evoking the paradox of the Infinite assuming human embodiment and moving about subject to physical limitations.

<sup>16</sup> Celestial beings, such as Indra, are believed to be perpetually in search of sensual experience.

I too wandered for a while,  
 But then seeing the Truth I stood still, Paraparamē. (11)

Feeding the hungry, feeling content,  
 I became satiated, Paraparamē.  
 Silencing the mind, becoming one with every other,  
 I now rejoice in the spring of my Being,  
 Paraparamē. (12)

Father, mother, daughters and sons became  
 A crowd in the market place,  
 Just like a herd is no more than a number  
 For the cowherd, Paraparamē.  
 Just as an object slips from the palm of a sleeping man,  
 despondency slid away from me, Paraparamē. (13)

Ignoring the rivers venerated by the uninformed fools,<sup>17</sup>  
 I dived deep into the perennial river of the Self, Paraparamē.  
 Did the crazy crab, the bulky whale, frog, tortoise,  
 All attain liberation thus,<sup>18</sup> Paraparamē. (14)

When the house called the body became  
 Another object (worthy of rejection),  
 I forgot the cows, calves and relatives, Paraparamē.  
 The delusions of *jati-linga* (caste and gender) gone,  
 I set my eyes on and worshipped  
 the *jyoti linga* (engulfing light), Paraparamē. (15)

<sup>17</sup> Akka is referring here to the ritual of bathing in holy rivers like the Ganga or Kaveri.

<sup>18</sup> This verse satirises the religious belief that bathing in holy rivers will bring about liberation. Akka points out that if this were indeed the case, all amphibious creatures would automatically attain moksha.

As the lower doors closed, the middle one opened,  
 The upper door<sup>19</sup>  
 Became great Space, Paraparamē.  
 That Truth became all forms, and all forms became me,  
 I knew that “every form is but Your”,  
 So I became compliant, Paraparamē. (16)

In the centre of the upper region I raised the *dhvani* OM,  
 Lingering alone, I became the melody OM, Paraparamē.  
 Through worship, at the very core of breath,  
 I was initiated  
 Into the sublime by Manonmani,<sup>20</sup> Paraparamē. (17)

## II

Oh men! You lament *ecchil-ecchil*,<sup>21</sup>  
 But there is no place without *ecchil*, Paraparamē.  
 The forms of gods are *ecchil*,  
 The honey is the *ecchil* of the bee,  
 And is not all nourishing mother's milk also *ecchil*,  
 Paraparamē? (18)

<sup>19</sup> This refers to the three chakras: the *muladhara* at the pelvic region, the *anahata* at the heart and *sahasrara* at the cranium. The *muladhara* is activated for base sexual propensities; the *anahata* for the intensification of exalted emotions like devotion to the Supreme; and the *sahasrara* for the final beatitude. All spiritual explorations is made possible only with the closing of the lowest chakra and the opening of the middle chakra. The final union with the Absolute is enabled through the highest centre.

<sup>20</sup> Manonmani is the name of Sakti the consort of Sadasiva in South Indian Saivism. In the Tamil Siddha systems, Manonmani is the supreme goddess who reveals the truth of alchemical transmutation. Hathayoga texts such as *Gheranda Samhita* posit Manonmani as a state of transcendental bliss. See Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu (trans.), *Gheranda Samhita* VII, 14-15 (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1975), p.58.

<sup>21</sup> *Ecchil* is pollution caused by saliva, anything defiled by contact with the mouth, the refuse of food, leavings, excrement, urine, semen, the residue of sacrificial oblations of pounded rice offered in pots, etc.

The *ecchil* of the fish is in the holy waters,  
 the holy Brahmins who dive into rivers are *ecchil*,  
 Are not (pecked) fruits the *ecchil* of parrots, Paraparamē?  
 The *ecchil* of the insect bores and blights the coconut,  
 The excreta of little cats is everywhere, and I know  
 That space too is covered by *ecchil*, Paraparamē. (19)

The *nadam* is *ecchil*, the *bindu* is *ecchil*,  
 the four Vedas of the Brahmins are *ecchil*,  
 Is not the tongue that chants the Vedas *ecchil*, Paraparamē?  
 The macrocosm and the microcosm, the worlds,  
 are all withdrawn into *ecchil*.  
 Do the dogmatic, frenzied religious men now even dare  
 To open their mouths to complain, Paraparamē? (20)

While their mouth and body are *ecchil*,  
 Simply washing their feet every now and then,  
 How will they be cleansed,<sup>22</sup> Paraparamē?  
 Only the Lord, the Truth is not *ecchil*,  
 Because that Light can never be expressed  
 through language<sup>23</sup> Paraparamē. (21)

I thank Smriti Vohra for her editorial help.

Many of Avudai Akkal's songs are found in the personal notebooks of elderly women. If any reader is in possession of Akka's songs or essays, kindly contact the author at the following email address. [kanchana237@gmail.com](mailto:kanchana237@gmail.com) This is to enable us to gather and preserve all her songs for posterity. ▲

<sup>22</sup> Akka is satirizing the customary practice of washing the feet before entering the house, as the feet might have become polluted by *ecchil*.

<sup>23</sup> The Supreme Self is beyond language, image, and metaphor, beyond the realm of symbol, beyond all discourse.



## VIDEO INTERVIEW

# O Bhagavan!

## Sitting at the Feet of Sri Ramana Maharshi

SHIVANI SHARMA

*The author is the daughter of H.W.L. Poonja. The video interview on which the present text is based was conducted in early 2009 when the author returned to Sri Ramanasramam for the first time since her childhood.*

I came to Bhagavan at an early age with my father in the early 1940s. I was born in 1935 in the part of Punjab which is now Pakistan, but the family came to Bombay when I was still quite young. After two or three years we moved to Madras where my father found employment.

Our religious training was guided by our father. Ever since he was a young boy, he had done lots of puja and he was a devotee of Ramakrishna Paramahansa before coming to Bhagavan Sri Ramana. He used to say that unless we read the *Bhagavad Gita* for one hour and did puja each day, we could not even have as much as a cup of tea!

Having set up our home in Madras, we got the best spiritual training one could ever dream of — regular visits to Bhagavan at



## MOUNTAIN PATH

Ramanasramam. Bhagavan would talk with us in English and Tamil. We children — my brother, sister and I — only wanted to be near Bhagavan. We would go to his room even when he was resting. The attendant would ask us to go away but Bhagavan would say “Let them come, let them come”. We pleaded with Bhagavan to come with us to Madras. I still remember his response: “I cannot come. If I do, what will the people do, who come to see me?” His words are still ringing in my ears. I can still hear the sound of his voice.

Bhagavan used to go up the Hill every day at 4pm and we would follow behind him. He would allow us to go up a certain distance with him and then say, “You sit here on the rocks. When I come back, we’ll return together.”

It was during this time (1942) that the decisive event of my life occurred, something that has stayed with me ever since. As I don’t remember the external details, I leave it to my father who once told the story this way:

[In the years when we were living in Madras,] I often brought my family and business colleagues to the ashram on weekends. Out of all the people I brought, the Maharshi seemed to be particularly fond of my daughter. She had learned Tamil quite well during her time in Madras, so she could converse with him in his native language. They used to laugh and play together whenever we visited. On one of my visits she sat in front of the Maharshi and went into what appeared to be a deep meditative trance. When the bell for lunch went, I was unable to rouse her. The Maharshi advised me to leave her in peace, so we went off to eat without her. When we came back she was still in the same place in the same state. She spent several more hours in this condition before returning to her normal waking state.

Major Chadwick had been watching all this with great interest. After her experience ended, he approached the Maharshi and said, ‘I have been here for ten years, but I have never had an experience like this. This seven-year-old girl seems to have had this experience without making any effort at all. How can this be?’

The Maharshi merely smiled and said, ‘How do you know that she is not older than you?’



Shivani Sharma and her father, H.W. L. Poonja in 1958 at Lucknow

After this intense experience my daughter fell in love with the Maharshi and became very attached to his form. Before we left she told him, 'You are my father. I am not going back to Madras. I will stay here with you.' The Maharshi smiled and said, 'No, you cannot stay here. You must go back with your real father. Go to school, finish your education, and then you can come back if you want to.'<sup>1</sup>

This experience had a great impact on me and after that I only wanted to be with Bhagavan. Not a day has passed since then without some recollection of those hours absorbed in Bhagavan. When people ask me what happened that day, I find myself speechless, unable to respond, and just start crying, "O Bhagavan!"

### Bhagavan's Guiding Hand

The last time I was in the Ashram was 1957. My father had taken a job in the mining industry in the forests near Bangalore while the family remained in Lucknow, no facilities being available for families in the forest. One year our father called us from Lucknow and we went to the Ashram where we stayed with our long-time friend, Dr Syed. The Ashram was different in the absence of Bhagavan but we were grateful to have come nevertheless. It was the Deepam festival time and one day, while our father had returned briefly to Bangalore on business, my brother, sister and I decided to climb the Hill to see the Deepam flame being lit. We didn't tell anyone of our plans and imagined somehow that the top must be very near. We packed some *chai*, water and a torch and started walking in the late afternoon. Not realising how far it was and not knowing the way, we got lost. We remembered that there were tigers on the hill and decided we would not go down into the ravines as that was where they probably lived. We were intent on staying close together so that we wouldn't be separated. Soon we finished our *chai* and water, and not long after, a powerful thirst came upon us. In general, whenever we got into trouble, we prayed to Bhagavan to help us. So we called out in the midst of our predicament, "Bhagavan, Bhagavan,

we're thirsty. We don't have any water. Please give us water." Soon enough we found a big rock with a crevice below it which was filled with fresh spring water. We rejoiced and drank our fill after which we topped up our thermos. O Bhagavan!

As it had become late and there seemed no way to find our way back in the dark of night, my brother suggested we spend the night there where we were. We found rocks surrounded by three walls where we could sleep comfortably. But my sister protested, saying that as long as we were not sleepy, we should keep moving. We held on to each other, slipping and falling on the uneven terrain in the shadow of the night, our knees bloodied by the sharp stones. Suddenly my sister heard the sound of birds below and led us there. As we crawled a little further, we found ourselves at Skandasramam. From there we had no trouble finding our way and ran down the hill, reaching home at 2am.

### Bhagavan's Protection

But the golden years of my life were a decade before this when we were still living in Madras and could come to see Bhagavan regularly. These were the most memorable years ever, as they were for my father as well.

In 1947 my father was staying at the Ashram when Bhagavan learned that most of our family, including my grandparents, were still in our hometown west of Lahore. This was well beyond the eventual line of demarcation that would separate what was to become Pakistan and India, and thus, being Hindus, put them at risk. Bhagavan suggested that my father go and collect them, but my father was resistant, only wanting to remain in Bhagavan's presence. But Bhagavan insisted, giving his blessing for the journey. He said that he would remain with my father for this journey and henceforth. My father recognized this as Bhagavan's wish and decided that he would under no circumstances disobey his guru. When he parted he knew he would never see Bhagavan in the body again, but left content to have Bhagavan's promise that he would remain with him wherever he went from then on.

After taking leave of Bhagavan, my father set off for Lahore. As he neared what eventually became the Pakistan border, there were signs

<sup>1</sup> This selection is from David Godman's *Nothing Ever Happened: Volume I*, Avadhuta Foundation, 1998, pp. 141-42. For other references to Shivani's life, see pp. 284-87.



that things were indeed as serious as people had been saying. When he boarded a final train that would take him to Lahore, he heard Bhagavan's voice telling him not to sit in the Hindu compartments but to take a seat in the Muslim compartments. Apprehensive, he did as the voice instructed. Sometime after the train got underway, it was held up and overtaken by a mob of armed Muslims who ordered all those in the Hindu compartments down from the train. Once on the tracks, the gunmen shot everyone. Because my father was in the shelter of the Muslim compartment and because no one there gave away his true identity, his life was spared. Such was the gravity of the circumstances in this part of the country at the time.

When my father finally reached the family home, he found the family terror-stricken but unharmed. He collected them all, some thirty four people, and obtained travel permits for each of them that very night. The following morning they made a hasty escape on what turned out to be the last train out of Lahore. O Bhagavan!<sup>2</sup>

All 34 made it safely to Lucknow where a family friend provided shelter until everyone could get settled in their new homes. In due course my father sent for us from Madras and we set up house in Lucknow as well. It was during this time that my father began to work intensively as he was in the difficult position of having to support the entire family from Lahore.

For my immediate family and me, fate had intervened and put a great distance between us and Ramanasramam. Forced to leave Madras for good, we permanently settled in the north and were thus unable to come and visit Bhagavan after this.

### Final Darshan

A few years later, in 1950, however, I did speak to Bhagavan once more. This was in a dream. I was about fifteen years old at the time and we were still in Lucknow. Bhagavan appeared to me in my dream and said, "I am going away." I cried out to him, "You can't go away. You have to stay here." I kept repeating these words but then I saw the

<sup>2</sup> For more details on these events, consult *Nothing Ever Happened, Volume I*, pp. 156-161.

image of an empty picture frame where Bhagavan's photo had once been. My heart was heavy. When I woke that morning, I told my father about the dream. He said, "Haven't you seen the newspaper?" When I looked, it said that Bhagavan Ramana was no longer in the body. I began to cry. This was my last darshan.

### Postscript

Since that day in my youth when I sat absorbed in Bhagavan's presence, I have always dreamed of returning to Ramanasramam but because of family duties, work obligations and the great distance, I was never able to do so. My husband passed away some years ago and my children are grown up now, having families of their own. All the while Bhagavan has been present in my heart, and thus I have known that it was not necessary for me to come. Nevertheless, the yearning remained. At long last, by Bhagavan's grace, this longing is realised. O Bhagavan! ▲

## Venkataraman's Advice On Jayanti

Ana Callam

Why not mourn, he said,  
a birthday? Why not grieve,  
he suggested, your entry  
into life, into this dream  
of need and loss and strife?

Why not celebrate instead  
the sweetness of your being  
once the rusted, useless  
machinery of mind has  
lost its lustre, has yielded  
to being crushed into  
oblivion, its absence  
swinging wide the door  
back into Heaven?



S. Gopalakrishnan

## KEYWORD

# Satsang

**Sanskrit:** holy company; association with the good; (from *sat* = good, truth, holy + *sanga* = come together, meeting).

**B**hagavan Sri Ramana redefined, in his inimitable way, what has often been called an aid to Self-realisation. In Advaita works, *satsang* is usually presented as a proximate aid to one's spiritual practice and is defined as, "keeping the company of the holy." It entails associating with, and keeping the company of noble personages, devotees of God, God-minded people, saints, *gurus*, and especially, the Self-realized. However, there are some Advaitins who define the term in a manner similar to Sri Ramana and base this on the etymological meaning of the term '*Upani-sad*'. Generally the term '*upani-sad*' is said to mean, 'to sit close by or near' derived from the verb root *ad* 'to sit' plus the prefixes *upa* 'near' and *ni* 'down'. Thus, the *Upani-sads* were those teachings given by Sages to their disciples who were sitting steadfastly near their teachers. The implication was that in order to receive the wisdom teachings, one had to be in the direct presence of the sage and

receive his or her blessings, experientially. However, some Advaitins interpreted the term *upani-sad* to mean, 'steadfastly sitting close by the inner Self', in other words, the wisdom teachings simultaneously applied to both an external and an internal relationship.

Sri Ramana employed *satsang* in both the above meanings, but he gave priority and preference to the latter meaning. For, after all, what is a sage? A sage is certainly not his/her body. (S)he is an embodiment of the Self. Thus, if one understands this, being in the presence of an embodied sage is a remarkable thing. One is in the presence of the Self, manifesting itself, whether one realizes this or not and the benefits which accrue from such an association cannot be praised enough.

Sri Ramana said: "Everyone is apt to be confused from time to time. Although the truth is heard and understood, at times it is forgotten, and mistakes are committed when facts face the person. Knowledge gives place to ignorance and confusion is the result. But the Sage alone can give the right turn to our thoughts from time to time. That is the necessity for *Satsanga* i.e., association with the Wise."<sup>1</sup>

Of all aids to Self-realization, the presence of a *jnani*, a Self-realized individual, is the greatest aid. This presence is known as *satsang* or 'holy company' or the association with Being, according to Sri Ramana. Bhagavan sometimes said that the real 'Being' is the Self and therefore no physical form is needed for *satsang*. Nevertheless, he often spoke of the immense benefit that association with an embodied *jnani* brings.

"The flow of power from the *Guru* can be received by anyone whose attention is focused on the Self or on the form of the *Guru*; distance is no impediment to its efficacy. This attention is often called *sat-sanga*, which literally means 'association with being'." Ramana wholeheartedly encouraged this practice and frequently said that it was the most efficient way of bringing about a direct experience of the Self. Traditionally it involves being in the physical presence of one who has realized the Self, but Ramana gave it a much wider definition. He said that the most important element in *sat-sanga* was the mental

connection with the *Guru*; *sat-sanga* takes place not only in his presence but whenever and wherever one thinks of him."<sup>2</sup>

The centre of life at the ashram during the physical lifetime of Bhagavan was the Old Hall. Devotees would sit in his presence as often as they could because they knew that being close to him helped in a subtle and deep way beyond description. Sri Muruganar joked that when he was in Bhagavan's presence all was clear but the moment he stepped outside, the confusion of his *vasanas* resurfaced and clouded his discrimination.

Sri Ramana knew the supreme value of *satsang* and this is confirmed when he translated five stray verses concerning the glory of *satsang*, into Tamil and incorporated them into his *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* (*Forty Verses on Existence*):

1. By *satsang* the association with the objects of the world will be removed. When that worldly association is removed the attachment or tendencies of the mind will be destroyed. Those who are devoid of mental attachment will perish [or become one with] in that which is motionless. Thus they attain liberation. Cherish their association.
2. The supreme state which is praised and which is attained here in this life by clear enquiry, which arises in the Heart when association with a realized person is gained, is impossible to attain by listening to preachers, by studying and learning the meaning of the scriptures, by virtuous deeds or by any other means.
3. If one gains association with Sages, of what use are all the religious observances? When the excellent cool southern breeze itself is blowing, what is the use of holding a fan?
4. Heat will be removed by the cool moon, poverty by the celestial wish-fulfilling tree and sin by the Ganges. But know that all these, beginning with heat, will be removed merely by having the blessed *darshan* of incomparable Sages.
5. Sacred bathing places, which are composed of water, and images of deities, which are made of stone and earth, cannot be comparable to

<sup>1</sup> M. Venkataramiah (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Sri Ramanasramam, 1978. p. 566, Talk no. 609.

<sup>2</sup> Godman D., *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Penguin. 1992. p.100.



those great souls. Ah, what a wonder! The bathing places and deities bestow purity of mind after countless days, whereas such purity is instantly bestowed upon people as soon as Sages see them with their eyes.<sup>3</sup>

Sri Ramana said that the benign influence of a *jnani* steals into the devotee in silence. “The gaze of a *jnani* has a purifying effect for certain. However, just as a piece of coal takes a long time to be ignited, and a piece of charcoal takes a shorter time, and gunpowder ignites instantly, so too with individuals who come into the presence of a *jnani*, there are grades of individuals.”<sup>4</sup>

For many of us who did not have the chance to be in his physical presence, he remarked: “Do you mean the physical proximity of the Sage is helpful? What is the good of it? The mind alone matters. The mind must be contacted.”<sup>5</sup>

And, “What *satsang* does is to make the mind sink into the Heart. Association with the Sage is both physical and mental. The extremely visible Being of the Sage pushes the mind inward. The Sage is also in the Heart of the seeker and so he draws the latter’s inward-bent mind into the Heart.”<sup>6</sup> We know this through our personal experience of Bhagavan that though he is not physically present there is no doubt that a powerful guiding presence heals and invisibly guides us when there is that *satsang* in the Heart.

“First, you must decide what is *satsang*. It means association with *Sat* or Reality. One who knows or has realized *Sat* is also regarded as *sat*. Such association with *Sat* or with one who knows *sat* is absolutely necessary for all. Sankara said (Bhagavan here quoted the Sanskrit verse) that in all the three worlds there is no boat like *satsang* to carry one safely across the ocean of births and deaths.”<sup>7</sup> ▲

<sup>3</sup> See Sadhu Om (tr.), *The Original Writings of Sri Ramana*, ‘Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham’, vv. 1-5. Unpublished translation.

<sup>4</sup> Venkataramiah M., op.cit., p.573, Talk no. 115.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.144, Talk no.171.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.186, Talk no. 223.

<sup>7</sup> Mudaliar D., *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2006. 16-7-1946. p.273-4.

# Ulladu Narpadu

Based on Lakshmana Sarma’s  
Commentary

Verse Twenty Five

S. RAM MOHAN

## Introduction

In this verse, it is taught that the ego arises in connection with the body, the awareness of which comes only in the waking state or the dream state and not in the deep-sleep state. What is not continuously in existence, cannot be real; this is the test of reality. However, unless the Truth is diligently sought by dedicated quest, untruth will appear as the Real, causing delusion.

## Verse Twenty Five

The ego comes into existence by taking hold of a form. It continues its existence by remaining bound by those very names and forms as it

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine *Ramanodhayam*, dedicated to Bhagavan.

is sustained by them (the objects of enjoyment). When it leaves one form, it takes hold of another. But when the enquiry into the substance of its own existence is made this formless ghost, the ego, takes flight and disappears.

### Commentary

The birth, continuance and growth of the ego are all due to its taking hold of a corporeal body. It can never arise without a body nor does it subsist without one. When the time comes for it to let go its hold of a body, it takes hold of a new body: then the new corporeal frame becomes identified with the 'I'. As long as the ego is not uprooted and annihilated completely, this *samsara*, consisting of the eternal cycle of births and deaths, will not cease.

Bhagavan says that for putting an end to *samsara* and its primal cause — the ego — the direct method is seeking the truth of the ego or to enquire (*vichara*) into its source.

The ego arises from Pure Consciousness. Intellect (*buddhi*) and mind (*chittam*) arise from it. With the arising of the mind, the world of name and form also come into existence. This ego is the originator of all names and forms. After creating the world of names and forms, the ego forms attachments to some of them and develops aversion or fear to others. The *manas-buddhi-chittam* complex is thus created by ego; it associates itself with them and tries to enjoy experiences through them. On going into deep sleep, it withdraws from the world of names and forms into itself.

Thus the ego creates the world of names and forms. But does the ego have any form? Bhagavan says "No." It is formless. Ego is a phantom which projects the world of names and forms and then withdraws this world into itself. When you launch the enquiry "What is this ego that is the cause of all this *samsara*?" it immediately disappears without a trace; what is left is Pure Consciousness. This is the path of Self-enquiry (*atma vichara*) taught by Bhagavan. Ego is referred to as a ghost here, because it is only a phantom which cannot survive serious enquiry.

In darkness, a child or a deluded person may take a stick for a ghost. But if a torch lights up the area there is no ghost there just a stick. The ghost is merely a creation of our imagination. Similarly, the ego is an imaginery creation. When you enquire into it, the ego's manifestations of names and forms recede back into the ego. It finally merges in Pure Consciousness (*chit*) and loses its identity. This process has to be repeated until, at last, the ego dissolves in Pure Consciousness.

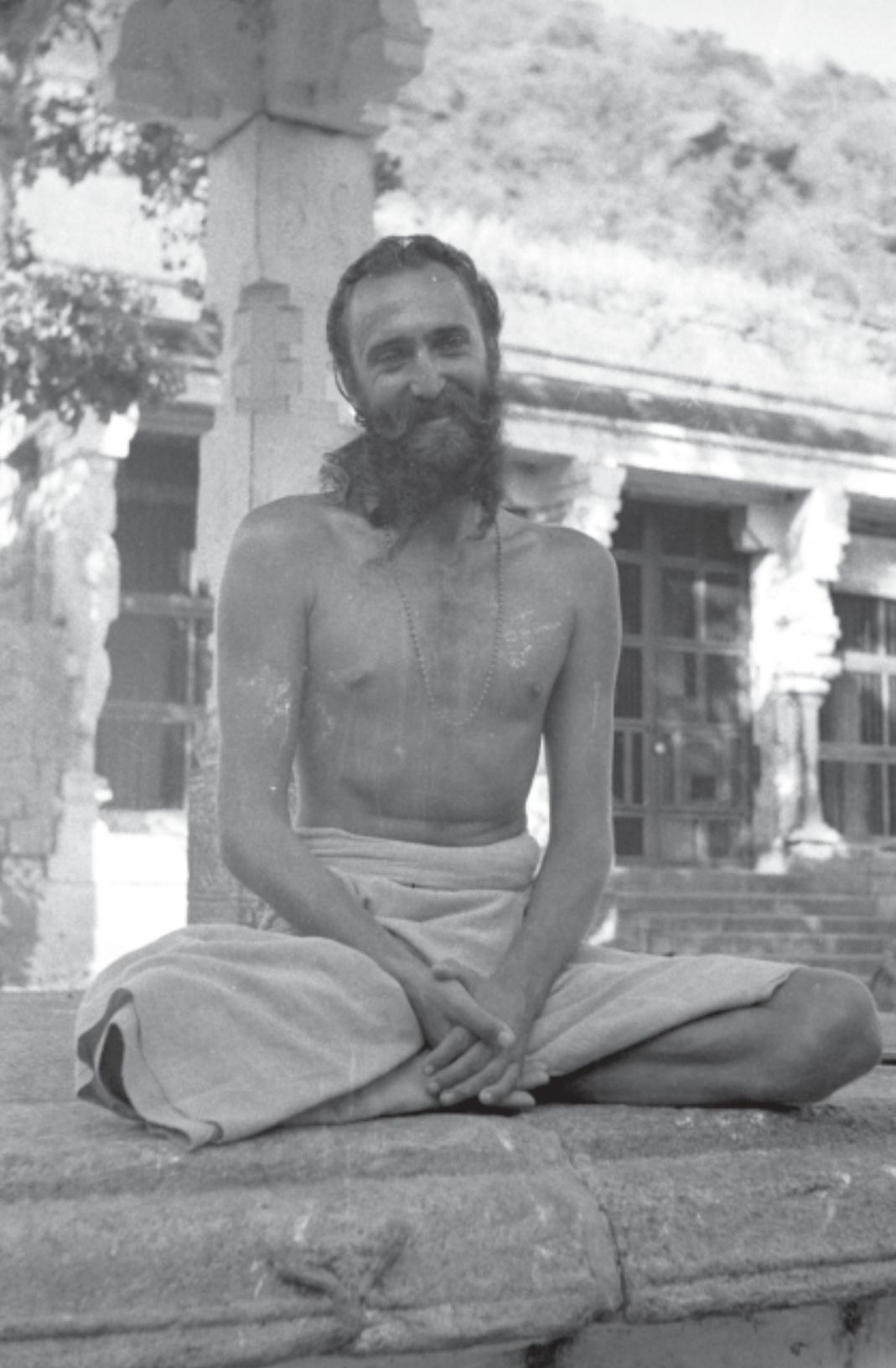
To illustrate this truth, Bhagavan tells us the story of the 'bridegroom's guest'. While a marriage was being celebrated, an uninvited guest came in, saying that he was a close friend of the bridegroom so that the bride's party received him with respect, and treated him with great courtesy. Similarly, with the bridegroom's group, he posed as a member of the bride's party. Neither the bridegroom's party nor the bride's party knew who he was. So long as no enquiry was made as to his identity, he continued to exploit their hospitality. But as soon as an investigation regarding his true identity was made, the cheat disappeared at once. So too with the ego: so long as there is no enquiry, the ego's claim to be the Self is conceded and its activities (*samsara*) continue. When enquiry is made, it vanishes.

The ego is the false 'I' notion which arises from the Self. It is the root of the mind. It creates the individual's sense of the first impression of separation. The ego is the cornerstone of the universe. When it dissolves our universe disappears and the Self alone exists. When the subject disappears, the object cannot remain. The ego dissolves in the Self which alone remains. ▲

### Sri Vidya Havan

The date for the annual Sri Vidya Havan has been re-scheduled to the *first friday* in the month of *Panguni* (March/April), which is the traditional time for performing this Havan. In future years the Havan will continue to be performed at this time, in the month of *Panguni*. This year the Havan will be on Friday the 19th March 2010.





# Swami Ramanagiri

DAVID GODMAN

Per Alexander Wertin, who later took the name of Swami Ramanagiri, was born into an aristocratic Swedish family in June 1921. Though he was related to the king of Sweden, it was the 'royal' yoga of Patanjali that finally claimed him. In his youth he came across Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and found he had an immediate affinity with the subject matter, so much so that he began to develop yogic *siddhis* soon after beginning the practices.

He came to India in 1947 on a two-year scholarship to study philosophy at Banaras Hindu University, but the principal aim of his

David Godman has written and edited many books on Bhagavan, his teachings and his devotees. Recently, in collaboration with Dr. T. V. Venkatasubramanian and Robert Butler, he has published English translations of *Padamalai* and *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, both of which contain Bhagavan's teachings as recorded in Tamil by Sri Muruganar.

journey was to find a competent teacher who could help him to make progress with his yogic practices. The Danish devotee of Bhagavan, Sunyata, recalls meeting him soon after his arrival:<sup>1</sup>

It was on a sunny, winter day in holy Benares, in the 1940s, that I met Per A. Wertin. He came gliding along by the shore where the washermen were busy splashing the dirty linen of respectable egojis [Sunyata's affectionate name for all embodied *jivas*]. I was sharing my leftover food with donkey friends, as human friends would always give me too much to eat. Per seemed touched by my donkey friendship. Birds of a feather and kindred asses flock together! Per was in a body of some twenty-five summers – tall, dark and slim. He was studious looking, civilised, respectable and balanced. His upper lip had been slightly damaged by some explosion [he had received] during military duty.<sup>2</sup>

The two soon became friends. When summer came, Sunyata invited Per to stay with him in Almora:

Per came to my Himalayan retreat in the spring when the heat came upon the plains. He stayed in my upper Sunya cave on the hill's crest. It had vast scenic views and a vaster expanse of silence. He imbibed the gracious solitude in the pure, Krishna-blue azure realm, while *Paramahansa* wings grew and unfurled.

Per Wertin had been awarded a two-year scholarship in India to study religious and philosophical lore, but he renounced it all when he took to yoga and intensive self-enquiry. I later

introduced him to Maharshi Ramana in Tiruvannamalai. In and through Maharshi, he eventually came to full 'awakening', conscious 'Self-awareness', or '*advaita* experiencing'. Hanuman, the name given to him in Varanasi dropped off and 'Ramanagiri', conferred on him by Ramana Maharshi, emerged.<sup>3</sup>

At some point, while he was still living in Benares, Per took *sannyasa* via a formal initiation. His *diksha* guru is simply referred to as a 'holy man of Benares'. On taking *sannyasa* Per renounced both his academic studies and his considerable personal fortune. At the time of his initiation his *diksha* guru stipulated that he should never ask for anything, and only accept what was offered to him. On the day following his initiation he passed by a friend's house, but his friend failed to recognise him because of his shaved head and orange robes.

When he saw the *sannyasin*, he shouted to his wife, 'A mendicant is going by! Give him the rotten bananas!'

This was his first *bhiksha*.

On the following day he was walking in front of the palace of the Raja of Benares when a soldier accosted him and asked him to step inside.

'Why?' asked the swami.

The soldier replied that it was the practice of the raja to offer food daily to the first *sannyasin* he saw walking in front of the palace gates. So, on that day, he was taken in, accorded a royal reception, and given a feast, personally served by the raja himself.

When he later narrated both of these incidents to his *diksha* guru, he was told that both should be treated with equal indifference, as food is only for physical sustenance. For the rest of his brief life he never asked for anything and never handled money.

In early 1949 he came to Tiruvannamalai to meet Bhagavan for the first time. Though he had a natural inclination for *raja* yoga, having practised it for years, Swami Ramanagiri felt an immediate attraction to *atma-vichara*, the path of Sri Ramana. Since this was a departure from the practical teachings he had been taught by his *diksha* guru,

<sup>3</sup> Sunyata, *ibid*.

<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly shorter version of an article I posted on my blog in January this year (<http://sri-ramana-maharshi.blogspot.com/2009/01/swami-ramanagiri.html>). I have taken material from an article on Swami Ramanagiri that I wrote anonymously for *The Mountain Path* in 1994 (pp. 144-8). This, in turn, was largely derived from an article on Swami Ramanagiri that was written by Prof. K. C. Sashi, which appeared in *The Mountain Path* in 1986, pp. 71-4. I have also utilised a seventeen-page manuscript of Swami Ramanagiri's writings that was given to me many years ago by Michael James.

<sup>2</sup> *Dancing with the Void*, by Sunyata. In chapter ten (pp. 59-63) he gives a brief description of his association with Swami Ramanagiri.

Swami Ramanagiri felt that he should consult him about this change of direction. The *diksha* guru let him know that Bhagavan was his true Guru, and he encouraged him to follow the teachings he was being given at Ramanasramam.

Swami Ramanagiri did self-enquiry intensively for forty days in Bhagavan's presence and was rewarded, on Sivaratri day 1949, with a direct experience of the Self. When asked later about what had happened on that momentous day, he would usually say, 'On that day I became a fool'. For the rest of his life he referred to himself in the third person as 'this fool'.

Speaking of the effect this experience had had on him, he wrote in one of his notebooks:

I don't know anything, and that 'I' which knows is nothing but an ignorant fool. I think, when I don't think, that I have no end and no beginning. That which thinks has to take thousands of births. When there is 'I', He is not; when He is, I am not.

It is not known how long Swami Ramanagiri stayed with Bhagavan. At some point he returned to Almora, for it was there, in March 1950 that he had a premonition that Bhagavan was about to pass away. The narrative is now taken up by an anonymous writer 'A Chela' who later became a devotee of Swami Ramanagiri:

At the time Bhagavan Ramana's *nirvana* was approaching, Swamiji was staying in Almora in the Himalayas. About two weeks before the event Swamiji had a psychic message from Bhagavan, his Guru, about his impending *nirvana*. Swamiji made haste to reach Tiruvannamalai and the ashram.<sup>4</sup>

Swami Ramanagiri made it to Ramanasramam in time. On the black-and-white film that was taken around the time of Bhagavan's passing away he can be seen paying his respects to the body of Bhagavan shortly before it was interred. There is a line of people filing past the body; he is the tall, thin foreigner with long hair.

<sup>4</sup> From an article entitled 'Guru', written anonymously by 'A Chela', and published in *The Mountain Path*, 1980, p. 229.

'A Chela' continues with his story:

After the *Mahasamadhi* of Bhagavan he [Swami Ramanagiri] wanted to go back to the Himalayas. En route he was persuaded by a friend to spend a few days at Madras with him. One day, as he was walking along the beach, he had a vision of Bhagavan who, signalling with his hand, directed him to proceed further south and stay there. This led him to Tiruvanmiyur, then a fishing village.

Here he sat on the beach immersed in *samadhi*. His host, not knowing where his revered guest had gone, grew anxious. A search was organised and Swamiji was at last located sitting on the beach under the scorching sun, deep in *samadhi*.

When he came back to the physical plane, he was requested to return to his host's residence. However, Swamiji said that Bhagavan had directed him to stay there at the seaside, and so stay there he would. So, his host decided to put up a hut of coconut palm leaves for him on the beach. Arrangements were made by his host for food to be sent to him daily.

Often, when the fishermen would swarm around Swamiji, he would give the food meant for himself to them. On other occasions he would be in *samadhi*, totally unaware of the needs of his body. It was this continued neglect which brought on the tuberculosis which ultimately consumed his body. At first he refused treatment but was persuaded by his host, whom he treated as his father, to go back to the city for treatment.

During his time on the beach he began to attract devotees. He always refused to play the role of the Guru, saying that this was not a mission that Bhagavan had given to him, but nevertheless, he did attract disciples and he did end up advising them on spiritual matters. In the next story 'A Chela' describes how he ended up becoming a devotee:

As time passed and it grew dark, a sudden fear assailed me. Would this meeting also prove fruitless? I looked towards the



Swamiji. He had suddenly become serious and was looking out of the window. Then I saw him close his eyes. I also closed my eyes. Everything became very still. I had not known such deep silence and calm before. Then, abruptly, I felt jolted by what I can only call a shock in my heart which shook me and, simultaneously, a tremendous pull from Swamiji like that of a jet engine sucking air. My whole being seemed to go totally still, but I felt no panic, only a great peace enveloping me. My Guru had pierced my heart and taken my mind in very deep into it.

Mentally I asked Swamiji: 'Will you please take me as your disciple?' The answer 'Yes' was also an unspoken one. But it was a very firm and unhesitating 'Yes'.

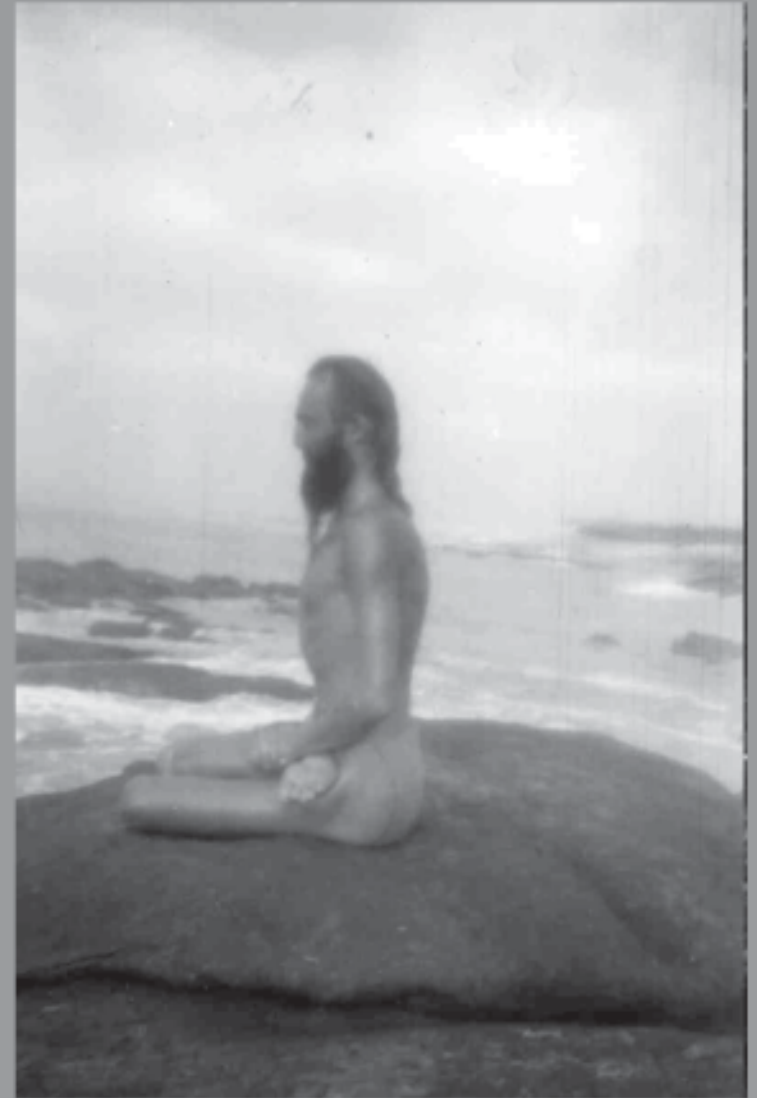
After this experience, it seemed as if Swamiji and I both opened our eyes simultaneously and looked at each other. Swamiji bent towards me with a bewitching smile and peered into my eyes, as if enquiring if I had received his message, and if I was happy and satisfied with it. What joy and relief that look gave me! I knew I had been accepted as a disciple. That was enough. I offered a *pranam* and left.

At the beginning of his account 'A Chela' described how Bhagavan had somehow commanded Swami Ramanagiri to stay on the beach. This 'command' followed a major experience that took place in the grounds of the Theosophical Society in southern Madras. Swami Ramanagiri described the experience and its aftermath in a letter he wrote to Sunyata:

Dearest Sunya,

In this letter I must tell you that I have sailed away. I have sailed to a far-off place, a place which cannot be described by words. To describe it is to pollute it. The steamer on which I sailed is a very powerful one, but it rolls hard in the sea if the weather is stormy. The place is called by many names, but still no name can cover its reality.

Some used to call the place *nirvikalpa*, others *satchitananda* or *nirguna Brahman* – some call it God or Self; others call it



Swami Ramanagiri at Kanya Kumari

pure consciousness or the egoless state. To describe it, I have to put up a big wall before it.

The name of the steamer is 'mind'. With the help of *prana* one reaches the place that for the *jiva* seems so far away; but really speaking, is nearer than one's own breath. If the sense-weather is stormy, the steamer will roll badly on the samsaric ocean. By now, you must understand the art of my sailing, and why I have been so silent. Let me tell you what happened and why I have been so silent.

The same day as I was going back to North India I visited the Theosophical Library at Adyar. And while walking in the garden, Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi appeared before me. He asked me to follow him. I went along the seacoast to a little place where I sat down for meditation. There Sri Bhagavan's voice told me that my only duty (dharma) from now onwards was the Self. Further, he gave me some *upadesa* which I followed for some days.

One night, between 12 and 2, *kundalini* was aroused to *sahasrara* and the *jiva* merged into the Self. On account of the sound *Om* from the waves of the sea, I was brought back to body awareness; otherwise I would have left my body because in that state there is no one to come back, and no one to make any effort. After having regained body-consciousness, I discovered that I had lost all my memory. All events before the time of Sri Bhagavan's appearance in the garden had gone out of my mind. Friends who had been very close to me looked like strangers. People whom I thought I had never met before came and told me that we had met in Madras only a few days before. Everyone and everything looked so new and strange and unreal.

Now I am getting back my memory, but mostly recollections connected with spiritual experiences and deep love. That is why I am writing to you, because those who are near my heart turn up again in this mind, which is so different from the previous one.

The village people have built a little hut for me, but there is no post office in this little fishing village, the name of which I do not even know, so I cannot give you any address yet. I don't think any postman will take the trouble to come down to the sandy beach, but I shall let you know later.

With all my love  
Ramanagiri in Him

The stay in Madras proved to be a short one. A few months later Swami Ramanagiri received another message from Bhagavan, telling him to go to Madurai. While he was there, wandering around in the countryside, Bhagavan appeared before him in a vision and directed him to go and stay in the Sirumulai Hills, about twenty miles from Madurai. He spent the rest of his short life there, continuing his practice of yoga and enquiry.

He frequently became absorbed in ecstatic or blissful states, so much so that he had little awareness of his body or its needs. Of one experience he wrote:

The whole night nothing but fire, light, bliss and *pranava*.  
O Father! O Father! What happiness! No thought, only the enjoyment and the enjoyer. O Father! How near I was to losing myself completely in your embrace. O Father, why do you turn me back to the state of the mind where I suffer from thoughts and where I am tormented by an ego?

In a more sober and reflective mood he made the following assessment of the blissful states he was experiencing through his *pranayama* and *atma-vichara*:

Bliss is not a product of fantasy, but the most convincing experience we are capable of. If this experience would be a product of the imagination, the hair would not stand on end, nor would tears of happiness come in streams from the eyes, nor would the nose start flowing, nor would there be any shivering of the body, the skin would not turn red-hot, and there would be no levitation of the body. How many times have I found the body at another



place in the room after having enjoyed Mother's bliss. In *padmasana* the body is not capable of moving.

Swami Ramanagiri eventually contracted tuberculosis, a disease which claimed him at the young age of thirty-four, in 1955. He spent his final days in the Perundurai Sanatorium. Though his body was lean and emaciated, his spirits were high.

'It is the body which suffers,' he told his visitors. 'I am all right. *Sakti* is now stronger than ever before, and it is here' [indicating a spot between the eyebrows].

It was summer and mangoes were just beginning to appear. Accepting some as an offering, he alluded to his forthcoming death by saying, 'I will eat a nice mango now, but it will become garbage tomorrow morning'.

For more than an hour before his death he was completely withdrawn in a deep meditative state, with his hair standing on end. At his last moment he whispered 'Let us go,' and he left his body in true yogic fashion, through the fontanelle at the top of his head. Blood was seen to ooze out of a hole there.

His body was interred at the foot of the Sirumulai Hills, at a place he had named 'Ramana Padam', and a Siva *lingam* was installed over his *samadhi*. It is near Vadippatti village, which is about 25 km from Madurai. Twice a year there are gatherings at the shrine to commemorate the day of his great experience with Bhagavan, and the date of his final passing away. A poor feeding is conducted and crowds of over 2,000 assemble to pay homage to this foreign son of India.

During his stay in the Sirumulai Hills a devotee called Ramachandran persuaded Swami Ramanagiri to write down a few words every day. Though he had little interest in writing or in recording his thoughts and experiences, Swami Ramanagiri agreed. This is how he began his notebook, which he entitled 'Cold Fire':

Beloved Ramachandran has asked this fool, at least for his sake, to write a word every day, and my dearest Ramu is deluded by *maya*, so he has given this big book.



John Maynard

Swami Ramanagiri Samadhi

The 'Cold Fire' manuscript that I was given contains statements and advice that other devotees say was sent to them by Swami Ramanagiri in letters. It is probably a mixture of advice given out through the post and stray thoughts written down in the privacy of his room. Here are some of the comments:

His Name, taken once with wholehearted love and a one-pointed mind, is worth more than the knowledge collected from every book all over the world.

Learning is learned ignorance. Unlearning is learning.

What you speak about others doesn't reveal anything about them, but about you.

The power of listening attracts more than the power of speaking.

*Jnana* and *bhakti* are not separate from each other. One cannot know Him without loving Him, and one cannot love Him without knowing Him.

Non-attachment does not mean indifference; love does not mean attachment; attachment is that which takes; love is that which gives.

Shut the doors and the door will be opened.

Religion is experience. It should be practised, not studied or discussed, and at the very least not preached. Those who preach don't know; those who know don't preach.

About your worldly troubles: you must do as you think best yourself, but it is good policy to keep away from other's plates, however sweet and inviting they look. Both sugar and arsenic are white.

If the ego is allowed to play with our emotions, it is capable of causing havoc. Only by drawing the ego to its source can the saddest feeling be converted into *ananda*.

Perfection in any form is the manifestation of the divine. The greatest service to humanity is self-enquiry, and the greatest

remedy for this world is Self-realisation, but that does not mean that we should not do anything for others. As long as we have not got the power to withdraw the mind from the objects of sense perceptions, we should do, and must do, whatever we can for others. Selfless activity will soon give the power of introversion, but when the mind has become introverted, we should not spoil what we have gained by outward activity.

The main thing with worship is not what we worship, but *that* we worship, and if we have got love, we can easily surrender the feeling of 'I' which is the wall between ourselves and God.

The disciple's love for the Guru is more important than the Guru's power.

The best weapon of defence is *ahimsa*. The best weapon of offence is love.

The ego will cry like a mad man when he sees that he is going to be killed.

The human body is the greatest hindrance in realising the Self, but it is also the only means.

O Mother! What a painful bliss you gave this child! Mother is always the same, but we are different, depending on the purity of the body, mind and heart. That is why Mother's bliss sometimes gives extreme pain, sometimes extreme joy.

Renunciation of that which renounces is renunciation.

In my father's lap, Mother, Father and I are one; or there is none; but IT is.

We are imprisoned within the walls of our thoughts.

One doesn't take to *sadhana* out of miseries, but on account of happiness. Only a happy person can become a good yogi. Nor does one take to *sannyasa* because one has lost something, but because one has gained something.

I feel a boiling pressure in the region of the navel and a kind of nervousness as if I was going to appear in an important examination. I cannot sleep any more. As soon as I lie down I get electric shocks in different parts of the body, and when it occurs in the head, I go mad. As long as we try to balance on the razor's edge, we are bound to fall and cut ourselves to pieces, but we have to try till we give up trying. It is not a question of balancing, but balancing without effort.

Mother's bliss is just like a thrilling screw of boundless joy inserted into every cell of the body.

Discrimination is our destiny.

Lord Ramana, Lord Subramania, Lord Siva, my Father and the Self are one and the same. Mother is His tool, Arunagiri their child, and Ramanagiri this fool. ▲

### Ashram Archival Photographs

We have decided to publish for the first and possibly the last time, the damaged archival photographs of Sri Bhagavan on the following four pages. The photographs are so scratched, lacking in definition or disfigured that so far, all efforts to restore them even with our modern computer technology has not been possible. Rather than allow them to remain unknown except for those working in the Archives we present here for devotees an opportunity, to see them at least once, in their original condition.

# O Bhagavan, Please Wake Up!

or Whom Are You Waking?

V.V. RAGHAVA

The ninth month of the Tamil calendar, *Margazhi*, or *Dhanurmasam* in Sanskrit, is auspicious for spiritual and religious practices. When requested by Arjuna to identify the Lord's manifestations upon which to meditate, Lord Krishna declares that he is the *Margasirsha* (*Margazhi*) among the months and the sun amongst the stars. The early morning from 3 am is considered apt for meditation. One year of human time is said to be one day for the celestial beings (*Devas*) and the entire month of *Margazhi* happens to be the early morning period for them. Hence the focus is maintained on religious and spiritual practices to the extent of suspending all social engagements such as marriages and household ceremonies for this period, in order to concentrate only on spiritual matters.

Sri Andal of Srivilliputtur in Tamil Nadu, one of the great devotees of Lord Vishnu, wove a garland of thirty songs in Tamil called *Tiruppavai*, assuming the voice of one of the maidens of Brindavan

V.V. Raghava is originally from Kanchipuram district and is a long term devotee. He is a firm believer in the efficacy of *giri-pradakshina*.

longing for the company of Lord Krishna and going around the streets waking up the other girls to join her for a bath in the river on a *Margazhi* morning. Legend has it that finally Sri Andal bodily merged in Lord Krishna in the Sri Ranganatha Temple at Srirangam, near Tiruchchirappalli, even as saint Meera merged with Lord Krishna at Dwaraka and saint Manikkavachakar merged in Nataraja at the Chidambaram Temple.

The meaning of the verses is explained as *jiva-brahma-aikya*, that is, the individual soul merging with Universal Consciousness. Sri Manikkavachakar, the famous Tamil Saivite saint who is said to be the incarnation of Nandi, the vehicle of Lord Shiva, also composed sets of *Margazhi* songs: *Tiruvembavai*, *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi*<sup>1</sup> and segments of his *Tiruvachakam*, which is believed to have been transcribed by Lord Nataraja himself in Chidambaram. It is said that when Manikkavachakar travelled through Tiruvannamalai, he saw some young girls of Adiannamalai village observing *katyayani vratam*, a religious practice for young girls desiring husbands and a good marriage. He was inspired to sing in the same mood. The *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi* was composed in Tiruperundurai where Manikkavachakar chose to sing nineteen of the fifty one types of songs contained in the *Tiruvachagam*.

The gist of the tenth verse of the *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi* is Vishnu and Brahma's petition to Lord Siva, namely: "Since we are not born on earth — the place where You bestow Your grace on jivas — our lives have become futile! O wondrous Lord, You have come down! Take us into your fold; please wake up!"

These *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi* songs by Manikkavachakar and many other saints are familiarly known as *suprabhatam* and are sung in the temples of Tamil Nadu every morning throughout the year but in the month of *Margazhi* recorded songs are broadcast through loudspeakers early in the morning in many temples.

Sri Muruganar, a great devotee of Sri Bhagavan, wrote about forty thousand verses in Tamil on Bhagavan and his teachings under various titles. His *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* includes *Margazhi* songs in the

<sup>1</sup> *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi* means 'The holy ones awakening from sleep' in Tamil.

style of *Tiruvembavai* and *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi*. Soon after his coming to the feet of Bhagavan, impressed by the devotee's poetic gift, Sri Bhagavan encouraged Muruganar to style some of his verses on Manikkavachakar's *Tiruvachakam*. In his characteristic humility, Muruganar said that as Manikkavachakar was the sun and he being only a candle flame, how could he be so presumptuous as to imitate him? Bhagavan kept looking silently at Muruganar. Later, Muruganar said that during those five long minutes of Bhagavan's silence and gaze of grace, verses began to flow forth within his heart.

He wrote, beginning with the lines, *Annamalai Ramanan anbarcku arulmari kannale peyyum karunai thiram padi*, the meaning of which is as follows:

Sing Ramana's compassionate power  
That showers such grace on devotees,  
Sing his ministry that quenches  
His servants' burning cares and griefs.  
Sing the true wealth of bliss that wells up  
In hearts turned inward and away from differences.  
All creatures alike, male and female  
Or hermaphrodite, with hearts turned inward  
His praises sing in song nectareous, sweet,  
And in its coolness, stillness and sweetness,  
Dive and bathe, O maidens, dive and bathe.

Sister, what has happened to you?  
Get up, unlatch the jewelled door.  
"I shall be," last night you told us,  
"The first to wake up, and sing my song,  
Praising Gangadhara Ramana whose Feet  
Join as a coronet on my head,  
My song shall soar and fill the heavens,  
Spread to all the quarters eight,  
And rouse you, lazy, slumbering maidens."  
This you said, and now you lie there,  
Tightly tied to your bed.



Wake up, wake up, join us, quick.  
 "Incomparable, high Master Venkata  
 Would not scorn the meanest mortal,  
 Me. No! To his Presence summoning me,  
 He kindly made me his own servant."  
 All this you forget and as of yore,  
 You slumber late. It is morning,  
 Wake up. See, sing the Master's glorious face.  
 Sing maidens, dive and bathe, bathe,  
 In the flowery sweetness of the song.<sup>2</sup>

The subtitle in *Tiruvachagam* for *Tiruvembavai* is given as, 'Adoration of the divine power (*Saktiyai Viyandadu*)' for the bestowal of grace, and for *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi* as 'Removal of veiling' (*Tirodana Suddi*; *Tirodana* - veiling, *Suddi* - cleansing).

Sri Bhagavan once said, "I do not teach only the *ajata* doctrine. I approve of all schools. The same truth has to be expressed in different ways to suit the capacity of the hearer. The *ajata* doctrine says, 'Nothing exists except the one reality. There is no birth or death, no projection or drawing in, no sadhaka, no *mumukshu*, no *mukta*, no bondage, no liberation. The one unity alone exists ever.' To such who find it difficult to grasp this truth and ask: 'How can we ignore this solid world we see all around us?' the dream experience is pointed out and they are told, 'All that you see depends on the seer. Apart from the seer, there is no seen.' This is called the *drishti-srishti vada* or the argument that one first creates out of his mind and then sees what his mind itself has created. To such as cannot grasp even this and who further argue, 'The dream experience is so short, while the world always exists...' they are told, 'God first created such and such a thing, out of such and such an element and then something else, and so forth.' That alone will satisfy this class..."<sup>3</sup>

So Sri Bhagavan while accepting traditions and traditional practices never missed even the smallest opportunity to give devotees a push

<sup>2</sup> Muruganar, *Homage to the Presence*. Verses 1453-5, p.136. Tiruvannamalai 1994. Translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan.

<sup>3</sup> Devaraja Mudaliar, *Day By Day with Bhagavan*, 15th March 1946, Afternoon.

towards the ultimate truth. An example of this is an incident that occurred during a special *Tamil Parayanam* one year in the month of *Margazhi*. During the 1920s and 1930s, Sri Bhagavan would get up around 3 am and work in the kitchen and be back in the hall around 4-30 am. The routine would start with chanting and meditation by devotees. During the month of *Margazhi*, Sri Bhagavan would get up at 2-30 am, go to the kitchen, cut vegetables, give instructions to the kitchen staff for the day's menu, and return to the sofa in the hall around 3-30 am. By that time devotees would have begun to assemble before his couch and to chant *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi* and other hymns.

The ten verses of Muruganar's *Tiruppalli-Yezhuchi* end with *Venkata Ramana Palli-Yezhundarulaye!* which means, "O, Venkata Ramana, please wake up!" During one such chanting Sri Bhagavan amusingly remarked that since he had woken at 2-30 am, who were they now trying to wake up?

So will it not be fair to conclude that though Sri Bhagavan graciously accepted the traditional practices, yet by his words he wished to drive home to devotees that they must go beyond such practices, investigate within themselves and enquire, 'Who is waking up whom? Who am I to wake up the Lord, is it not I who should now wake up from the slumber of dark ignorance and enjoy the light of the Self which is the real inner meaning of these early morning songs?' May Sri Bhagavan grace all of us to comply with this wish of his which is a command.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya! ▲

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# Tale of an Accomplished Artisan

NAWAZUDDIN

*We think that God and the universe are separate. In Islamic mysticism however, the universe is just a manifestation of God and, as such, has no independent existence.*

*This doctrine in Sufism is called Wahadatul wujud (Oneness of Being). The Real Being is both immanent as well as transcendent. An ecstatic Sufi in his muraquiba (meditative state), sees the immanence of God. This is the highest stage of exaltation and the ecstatic Sufi proclaims 'Anal Haq' (I am the Truth). Mansur is an example.*

*However, the Islamic God is absolutely and unequivocally transcendent. That God or, Brahman in Hindu terminology, is both*

Nawazuddin belongs to a traditional Sufi family of *Qadriya Tariqa*. He is an employee of the State Bank of India, Tiruvannamalai Branch. He spends his leisure time in the study of comparative religion. His particular passion is the translation Sufi literature from Urdu into English.

*within and beyond the universe, in it but not of it. In Sufi terminology this doctrine is called Wahadatul wujud dar shuhud (Oneness of Being through manifestation).*

*A contemplative Sufi is one who witnesses the oneness of Being in the multiplicity of manifestations. He recognizes that the Real Being or the Essence manifests through all the aspects of phenomena.*

*The following extract from Khadre Alam poems elaborates this Oneness of Being.*

Once, an accomplished artisan, contemplating an idea,  
acquired wax.

He was skilled in his art and had demonstrated it.

He obtained many-hued wax as was required by the circumstance,  
His expertise became evident when the diverse colours were mixed.

Every form or object has two faces.

One is Substance and the other is Form.

The real nature of wax is the pure wax-syrup.

The second face of the wax is its quantifying nature.

Howsoever one moulds it

It will accordingly take that shape.

Whatever is real does not change.

Whereas an object has no substantial essence.

Though wax is the source of the whole art

It remains hidden in the light of the manifestation.

When the quality of limitation is removed from objects

The wax, in the end, remains as pure wax.

The artisan commands through his knowledge

And reveals the manifold forms of objects.

He fashions an image of a tree in his mind

And proceeds to make it out of wax.

He made various sizes of trunks, branches, leaves big and small,  
Buds and flowers; some fresh and some withered.  
Many ripe and raw fruits did he make.

Then randomly, he joined the different pieces  
And named them 'a tree' and raised it up.

Based on the tree's distinctive structure  
People said, this is such and such tree.

Howsoever the artisan conceived the shape  
He manifested it with an assigned name.

O dear one, do we call the tree the art of the artisan  
or his knowledge?

Or do we call it wax or the result of tools and craftsmanship?

Though the tree is the product of all these  
It appears to be different when perceived .

When the wax took the distinct form of a tree  
Essence became hidden in the midst of art.

Perhaps to say that everything is real is stupid,  
Again to say that everything is false is equally unfitting.

If you split a betel leaf it is still a betel leaf.  
Again if you spoil a flower it is still a flower.

Likewise everything has a unique name.

—What was it previously? And how did it attain this honour now?

If you rub all the individual parts down to their essence  
They become wax again after giving up their forms.

Form and formlessness —

Verily we are from God and to Him we shall return.

Though one real face is manifested  
It is hidden in the multiplicity of forms.

When you go beyond the multiplicity of forms  
Constancy becomes the real face of Divinity.

The true meaning of 'everything returns to its origin'  
 Becomes visible and clear through His grace.

Objects become manifest arising from the core of the Artisan.  
 When it remained His knowledge, no one could see the wax as a tree;

And after its existence, it is reabsorbed  
 Into the core of the Artisan.

People possessed with reason say, "it is perpetually a tree",  
 Because they are devoid of the knowledge of the tree's source.

People possessed with vision,  
 Say "It is purely wax", when they beheld a tree.  
 They are resolute in their knowledge of the source.

People of reason and those of vision have beheld the tree  
 Either as an expression or as true essence.

However, in the phenomenon of the tree,  
 Both witnessed the beauty (*jamaal*) of the Artisan.

When Knowledge engaged in creation,  
 The tree became the site of manifestation.

Those who are the upholders of Unity and are unwavering,  
 Behold the beauty of the Artisan in the form of the tree.  
 They see the Artisan in the light of all creation.

O Khadre Alam, reflect on the qualities of Divinity  
 You will then know the essence of existence. ▲

## BHAGAVAN'S HANDWRITING

# Sri Ramana Gita

B. V. NARASIMHASWAMI

The following pages contain reproductions from a manuscript of *Sri Ramana Gita* composed by B. V. Narasimhaswami, which was recently discovered in the ashram archives. BVN was a highly intelligent and dynamic person who wrote the first English biography of Bhagavan. Around 1930, he began a project to make *Sri Ramana Gita* more approachable by composing a prose adaptation. Some of the answers in this new manuscript are quite elaborate compared to the original dense Sanskrit text of Ganapati Muni. BVN explained in his introduction that he sought clarifications from Bhagavan and this is confirmed by Bhagavan's participation in the existent typed proofs. Bhagavan wrote in the Sanskrit verses in his meticulous hand.

The BVN manuscript contains 36 typed legal-size sheets, reproduced from 25 handwritten pages, and 18 handwritten pages never put into typed format. His manuscript leaves out five of the eighteen chapters of *Sri Ramana Gita*: chapters 8, 10, 11, 17, & 18.

*The Maharshi* newsletter has produced chapters I, II and III in 2009.

The following pages contain proof corrections by Bhagavan of the typed manuscript. We present seven pages from Chapter XXI and XXIV respectively. The last four pages of the latter chapter were omitted because Bhagavan's handwriting is minimal. However we have included the entire chapter in the subsequent modern transcription of the pages.



On a certain day during the winter of 1915, Shri

Maharshi  
Ramana set in the Skandigrama. Before him sat Jagadisa Sastri  
a young man well versed in Sanskrit who had previously and  
has since composed Sanskrit verses. On that day J. Sastri  
wrote on a piece of paper as part of the first line of a stanza  
the words 'हृदय कुहर मध्ये,' and his mind in spite  
of effort (or perhaps on account of it), could not proceed further,  
and he did not complete it. Then Maharshi asked:-

Maharshi, ~~then asked:-~~  
What is it you are writing? Sastri handed over his paper.

Maharshi: Go on. Complete the verse.

Sastri: I am trying, but my mind refuses to work.

Maharshi: Then took up the verse, and then and there

completed the verse as under. The verse was taken later to  
Kavya Kanta Ganapathi Sastri at Mandassa, who later incorporated  
it into his Ramana Gita as Chapter II. In fact this is  
strictly speaking the Ramana Gita, as it was sung (or was a song  
composed) by Shri Ramana. The stanza runs thus:--

“हृदय कुहर मध्ये केवलं ब्रह्म मात्रं  
ब्रह्म ह मिति साक्षा दात्मरूपेण भाति ।  
हृदिविश मनसास्वं चिन्वता मज्जतावा  
पवनचलन रोषा दात्मनिष्ठो भवत्वम्॥”

It means:--

Within the cavity of heart, pure Brahman, as "I, I,"  
immediately  
shines with immediacy as the Self (i.e. as the soul or inner  
core of your personality). (Therefore, Oh! pupil!) either  
as seeking the Self, or diving in it, or by means of Pranayama  
(Breath Control), let thy mind enter the heart. Take thy firm  
stand as Atman (i.e. Be firm in Self-Realization).

Kavya Kanta Ganapathi Sastri on a later occasion requested  
the Maharshi to explain fully the meaning of the term  
"Heart" and the facts stated about it, for purpose of realization.

Maharshi's reply is embodied in Chapter XXIV Infra.

CHAPTER XXIV.

What is the Hridaya, (heart or centre).

Night of 9-8-1927.

On 9th of August 1917, Sri Ramana Maharshi sat up at night in the Skandasramam. <sup>av</sup> ~~Rama~~ Kanta and other <sup>b</sup> ~~Shaktas~~ had gathered at his feet. For the benefit of all, Ramana Kanta requested the Maharshi to explain fully "the heart" "हृदयं" mentioned in his poem composed in 1915, ~~and referred~~ <sup>(See ch XXI)</sup> to ~~the poem~~.

Maharshi thus <sup>answered:++</sup> began: ++

Maharshi said: 'हृदयं' i.e. the heart (or centre) ~~(is that~~ ~~from which all thoughts spring)~~ ~~It is the Mount and source~~

~~of thought~~ <sup>is that from which all thoughts spring.</sup> A description of it is given in various passages

of the Vedas: (1) ~~and~~ Parashva Sukt पञ्चकोशप्रतीकारः

हृदयं चाप्यनौमुखं । अधौ निष्ठुः पितृभ्यो नमः ।  
नाभ्यामुपरि तिष्ठति

Narayana Upanishad XIII.2.

The comparison of the heart <sup>to</sup> the plaitain bud or lotus bud and various other physical descriptions <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ given to assist the Yogi's practice of meditation.

Now do we proceed to trace all thoughts, to their source, you may ask. ~~Well~~ Well, let us discover if all thoughts could in the first place be traced to some one thought as their base of operations; and let us then go deeper and <sup>find</sup> ~~find~~ the source of the basic thought. Is there then any such basic ~~thought~~ or fundamental thought underlying all other thoughts? Do you not see that the thought or idea "I"—the idea of personality is such a root thought?

For as Maharshi explained later, whenever any thought arises, the question arises and should be raised by the aspirant aiming at Realisation, "Does this thought exist independently of any person thinking, or does it exist only as the thought of a person, and if the latter is the case, etc whom does it arise? The answer <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ "This thought exists only as a person's thought and this thought arises in me." So the "I" idea may be regarded as a stem from which other thoughts branch forth.

Upanishad compares it also to the leaf of Aswatha

(Ficus Religiosa).



Next let us see the root source of this (stem). But how? Dive deep in ecstatic concentration within yourself (i.e. within the "I" thought) and perceive its source. There is nothing there to perceive <sup>or through</sup> in the senses. You have no guidance from sensation and rationalisation for this search. But if you have the right intuition, the centre 'हृदयं' is immediately felt; and the above or former "I" which inquired ~~itself~~ disappearing into this "the centre". This 'हृदयं' centre is the source ~~then~~ of the "I" thought and of everything else.

The term 'हृदयं' (heart) is however persistently identified by <sup>some who</sup> these practising Yoga with one of their six centres\* चक्रं i.e. their fourth centre called the 'अनाहत चक्रं' situated in the <sup>chest</sup> breast. <sup>These</sup> The school of Yoga add it that हृदयं denotes the <sup>source or</sup> abiding place of the personality. Well then, if <sup>these</sup> Yogis wish to face or promote the development of their personality or soul from its source or abiding place to its highest reach, as they profess to do, they should start its course from अनाहत चक्रं, where-as they invariably start their course from मूलाधार <sup>which they</sup> ~~and~~ style it their first chakra. Hence one is perhaps well advised to confine the term 'हृदयं' "i.e. the centre", to the Universal centre or Brahman.

\* Corresponding perhaps to nerve ganglia running parallel to the spinal cord.

Brahman is often indicated in Scripture as 'अयं हृत्' which make up हृदयं when conjoined. Even the practising Yogi does not identify the हृदयं ~~as~~ (heart) or अनाहत with the organ forming the centre of blood circulation (with its ~~Arteries~~ and ~~Venetricks~~), and in the above stanza (Vide Ch. XXI) the heart हृदयं is not used in a physiological sense, but rather as a metaphor and refers to the centre of consciousness. There is no harm <sup>however</sup> in taking हृदयं to indicate an actual spatial region as is done in various parts of the Scripture. There हृदयं is said to be <sup>on</sup> the right side (not on the left where the blood propeller is situated) of the breast. From it, radiates the Sushumna Katak Nadi (or nerve), up which the current of consciousness or light goes to Sahasrara (the thousand petalled - evidently referring to the brain with its numberless cells). From that Sahasrara, the light of consciousness passes again (evidently through the nerves) to all parts of the body and thereby the outside world is experienced by one. But if the experiencer views the

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 \* The Scriptures in which Brahman is styled हृदयं are -  
 B.G. अयं हृदि स्थितस्साक्षः सर्वेषां भविष्यतः।  
 तेनैव हृदयं प्रोक्तं शिवस्सारमोयकः।  
 in Brahma Gita - Sata Samhita, itself based on  
 'सत्त्वादाय आत्मा हृदि तस्यैतदेव निरुक्तं हृदयमिति  
 तस्माद्धृदये' (Chandagyanopanisad VIII:3:3.)



experienced object as something distinct from himself i.e. from the Self, then he is caught up in the whirl of Samsara ~~the wheel of~~ <sup>metem</sup> psychosis or chain of birth and deaths. The Samsara (i.e. brain) of the Atma Niyata i.e. the Self Realizer is pure light or enlightenment. If any flitting or passing desires approach it, they perish therein immediately. They have no soil to flourish upon there. The Sankalpas or seeds of desire that occur to the Atma Niyata staying in pure light or Sudha Satvam are referred to in the Upanishads as getting parched or fried. Such a <sup>seed</sup> ~~seed~~ <sup>भूतजीर्ण</sup> does not give birth to fresh Vasanas (tendencies) or Karma (action), ~~as~~ as they consume themselves "nor leave a wreck behind".\* This expression is frequently found in other Upanishads, in <sup>the Upanishads</sup> Vasishtha and pieces of Sri Sankaracharya. But this reference will suffice.

With the pure light mentioned just now, outside objects विषयाः ~~are~~ <sup>may</sup> be sensed or experienced and their impress received. But if these impressions are colored or swallowed up in the prevailing non-differentiation of the Yogi (Self-realized), his Yoga or Self realization is not marred thereby. Even when receiving outside impressions, the Yogi maintains his consciousness of the Unity of Existence; and it is this

<sup>which means:</sup>  
(a) the Vasana, if sincere results in fresh births, if pure results in liberation of, i.e. release from birth.  
(b) As in the case of fried seeds, ~~immediately~~ sprouting into fresh births is avoided.

The following is a transcription of the original typed manuscript on the previous pages with Bhagavan's handwritten corrections.

## CHAPTER XXI The Swami's Verse

On a certain day during the winter of 1915, Shri Ramana Maharshi sat in the Skandasrama. Before him sat Jagadisa Sastri a young man well versed in Sanskrit who had previously and had since composed Sanskrit verses. On that day J. Sastri wrote on a piece of paper as part of the first line of a stanza the words "हृदय कुहर मध्ये" and his mind in spite of effort (or perhaps on account of it) could not proceed further.

Maharshi: What is it you are writing?

Sastri handed over his paper.

Maharshi: Go on. Complete the verse.

Sastri: I am trying, but my mind refuses to work.

Maharshi then took it up, and then and there completed the verse as under. It was taken later to Kavya Kantha Ganapathi Sastri at Mandasa, who incorporated it into his Ramana Gita as chapter II. In fact this is strictly speaking the *Ramana Gita* as it was sung (or was a song composed) by Shri Ramana. The stanza runs thus:—

हृदय कुहर मध्ये केवलं ब्रह्ममात्रं  
ह्यहमह मितिसाक्षा दात्मरूपेण भाति ।  
हृदिविश मनसास्त्वं चिन्वता मज्जतावा  
पवन चलन रोधा दात्मनिष्ठो भवत्वम् ॥

It means:—

Within the cavity of 'Heart,' pure Brahman, as "I, I," shines immediately as the Self (i.e. as the soul or inner core of your personality). (Therefore, Oh! pupil:) either as seeking the Self, or diving in it, or by means of pranayama (breath control), let thy mind enter the heart. Take thy firm stand as *atman* (i.e. be firm in Self-realization).

Kavya Kantha Ganapati Sastri on a later occasion requested the Maharshi to explain fully the meaning of the term "Heart" and the facts stated about it, for purpose of realization. Maharshi's reply is embodied in chapter XXIV.

## CHAPTER XXIV

What is the *Hridaya* (Heart or centre)

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1917, Sri Ramana Maharshi sat up at night in the Skandasramam. Kavya Kantha and other bhaktas had gathered at his feet. For the benefit of all, Kavya Kantha requested the Maharshi to explain fully “the Heart” “हृदयं” mentioned in his poem composed in 1915. (See ch. XXI).

Maharshi thus answered: हृदयं i.e. the Heart (or centre) is that from which all thoughts spring. A description of it is given in various passages of the Vedas: (1)

पद्मकोशप्रतीकाशः हृदयं चाप्यधोमुखम् । अधो निष्ठया वितस्त्यान्ते  
नाभ्यामुपरि तिष्ठति ॥ Narayanopanishad XIII.6.

This comparison of the Heart to the plantain bud or lotus bud and various other physical descriptions are given to assist the Yogi's practice of meditation.

How do we proceed to trace all thoughts to their source, you may ask. Well, let us discover if all thoughts could in the first place be traced to some one thought as their base of operations, and let us then go deeper and find the source of the basic thought. Is there then any such basic or fundamental thought underlying all other thoughts? Do you not see that the thought or idea “I” — the idea of personality — is such a root thought?

For as Maharshi explained later, whenever any thought arises, the questions arise and should be raised by the aspirant aiming at Realisation,<sup>1</sup> “Does this thought exist independently of any person thinking, or does it exist only as the thought of a person, and if the latter is the case, to whom does it arise?” The answers are: “This thought arises only as a person's thought and this thought arises in me.” So the “I” idea may be regarded as a stem from which other thoughts branch forth.

Next let us see the root source of this (stem). But how? Dive deep in ecstatic concentration within yourself (i.e. within the “I” thought) and perceive its source. There is nothing there to perceive in or through the senses. You have no guidance from sensation and rationalization

<sup>1</sup> The Upanishad compares it also to the leaf of Aswatha (*ficus religiosa*).

for this search. But if you have the right *intuition*, the centre हृदयं is immediately felt; and the above or former “I” which inquired disappears into this “the centre”. This ‘हृदयं’ centre is the source of the “I” thought and of everything else.

The term ‘हृदयं’ (Heart) is however persistently identified by some who practice yoga with one of their six centres<sup>2</sup> चक्रं i.e. their fourth centre called the अनाहत चक्रं [anahata] situated in the chest. These admit that हृदयं denotes the source or abiding place of the personality. Well then, if these yogis wish to trace or promote the development of their personality or soul from its source or abiding place to its highest reach, as they profess to do, they should start its course from Anahata चक्रं, whereas they invariably start their course from मूलाधारं which they style their first chakra. Hence one is perhaps well advised to confine the term हृदयं i.e. “the centre”, to the universal centre or Brahman.

Brahman is often indicated in scripture as ‘अयं हृत्’ which make up हृदयं<sup>3</sup> when conjoined. Even the practising yogi does not identify the हृदयं [Heart] or अनाहत (anahata) with the organ forming the centre of blood circulation (with its auricles and ventricles), and in the above stanza (vide ch. XXI) the heart हृदयं is not used in a physiological sense, but rather as a metaphor and refers to the centre of consciousness. There is no harm however in taking हृदयं (Heart) to indicate an actual spatial region as is done in various parts of the scripture. There हृदयं [Heart] is said to be on the right side (not on the left where the blood propeller is situated) of the breast. From it radiates the *sushumna nadi* (or nerve), up which the current of consciousness or light goes to *sahasrara* (the thousand petalled — evidently referring to the brain with its numberless cells). From that *sahasrara*, the light of consciousness passes again (evidently through the nerves) to all parts of the body and thereby the outside world is experienced by one. But if the experiencer views the experienced object as something distinct

<sup>2</sup> Corresponding perhaps to nerve ganglia running parallel to the spinal cord.

<sup>3</sup> The Scriptures in which Brahman is हृदयं are:- e.g. अयं हृदि स्थितस्साक्षात् सर्वेषां मविशेषतः । तेनैव हृदयं प्रोक्तं शिवस्संसारमोचकः ॥ in *Brahma Gita Suta Sambhita*, itself based on स वा एष आत्मा हृदि तस्यैतदेव निरुक्तहृदयमिति तस्माद्धृदयम् (*Chandogyopanishad* VIII:3:3.)

from himself i.e. from the Self, then he is caught up in the whirl of *samsara*, the wheel of metempsychosis or chain of births and deaths. The *sahasrara* (i.e. brain) of the *atma nishta*, i.e. the Self Realizer, is pure light or enlightenment. If any flitting or passing desires approach it, they perish therein immediately. They have no soil to flourish upon there. The *sankalpas* or seeds of desire that occur in the *atma nishta* staying in pure light or *sudha sattva* are referred to in the Upanishads as getting parched or fried. Such a seed भृष्टबीजं does not give birth to fresh *vasanas* (tendencies) or *karma* (action), as they consume themselves “nor leave a wrack behind.”<sup>4</sup> This expression is frequently found in other Upanishads, in Vasishta and the works of Sri Sankaracharya. But this reference will suffice.

With the pure light mentioned, outside objects विषयाः are sensed or experienced and their impressions received. But if these impressions are coloured or swallowed up in the prevailing non-differentiation of the perfected yogi (Self-realized), his yoga or Self-realization is not marred thereby. Even when receiving outside impressions, the Yogi maintains his consciousness of the Unity of Existence; and it is this state of central conscious Unity with a (so to speak) peripheral experience of objects (the central light swallowing up the peripheral rays) that is called *sahaja sthiti*. But when the Yogi completely shuts out cognizance of outside objects, his state is described as *nirvikalpa samadhi*, i.e. pure concentration, or the Absolute Consciousness without attributes or characteristics.

What are these objects which constitute the external universe? The entire universe or macrocosm is found in man the microcosm. The entire man is found in the Heart or ultimate centre. Ergo, the entire universe is found within that centre, the Heart हृदयं. Again look at the matter in another way. The external world does not exist without the mind perceiving it. That is unless a mind perceives and notes the

existence of the worlds, how is that existence to be posited? And the mind does not exist without the centre हृदयं. Ergo, the entire world of experience ends at the centre. The respective positions of the Heart (the centre) and the mind may be illustrated by an analogy. What the sun is to the universe — the origin of all, the supporter of all, and that which lights up all — that the centre, (i.e. the Heart, or that which has intuition) is to man. What the moon is in the external universe, casting a delectable but uncertain light, incapable of creating or sustaining real life or throwing clear light on all objects, that the mind is when it works in or with the brain (*sahasrara*). Just as the moon borrows its light from the sun, so does the mind derive its power of knowing from the centre or Heart. It is when man has no intuition or illumination from that centre or Heart, that he sees the mind as the only basis of his conscious activity, — just as one may have, at night (i.e. when there is no sun) to be content to work with moonlight. At such a time the man is ignorant (पामर), as he does not see the source of all light (i.e. consciousness), viz. the real, the Atman, but sees objects with the help of the mind alone, and sees them as different from himself, and hence he wanders as in a maze. The *jnani* on the other hand stationed in the centre sees within it the mind no doubt; but that mind is of as little significance to him as the moon is when seen in daylight. The term *prajna* in its superficial denotation (*vachyarthā*) denotes the mind, but it is in reality i.e. in its essential content (*lakshyarthā*), the centre (हृदयं) the heart. Brahman is naught but that. To those who perceive with the help of the mind only, the difference of seer and seen exists. But to those at the centre, they are one and the same.

Now as for the advice given in the second half of the stanza (i.e. chapter XXI) that you should enter into the Self in the heart, there are, apart from spiritual enlightenment, other instances of the mind disappearing into the centre by reason of faith, deep sleep, excessive emotions of joy, sorrow, terror, rage, catalepsy or possession or coma. These strike the mind and drive it into its source. But in these states, there is no illumination or even awareness of one's individuality. But in the condition of *samadhi*, the Self-realization achieved by the yogi, one has such awareness and illumination. That is the difference between *samadhi* and the above mentioned states. ▲

<sup>4</sup> मलिना जन्महेतुः स्याच्छुद्धा जन्मविनाशिनी etc  
पुनर्जन्माङ्कुरं त्यक्त्वा स्थितिः संभृष्टबीजवत्

See *Muktikopanishad* II:61/62 which means:-

(a) The *vasana*, if impure, results in fresh births; if pure, it results in destruction of, i.e. release from rebirth. (b) As in the case of fried seeds, the sprouting into fresh births is avoided.





Sri Bhagavan with unknown attendant, and Lucia Osborne with her three children, Adam, Catherine (Kitty) and Frania (Noona).

# The Quest

## Chapter Two

LUCIA OSBORNE

### Arrival at Arunachala

Our stay in Kashmir was nearing its end in September 1941 as Arthur's six months leave from the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok was nearly up. We were getting ready to return to Siam without having seen Ramana Maharshi because our friends maintained that it would have been far too hot for the children to go there from April to September. Unexpectedly we received a letter from the British High Commissioner that women and children should not go back as there was the likelihood of the war extending to Siam. Men holding positions of prestige should return. One of our friends, David McIver, had a cottage in Tiruvannamalai and it was arranged for me and the children to stay in it as he himself would be travelling most of the time. I was delighted, probably because of the possibility of making a sculpture of the Maharshi. We all left Kashmir and parted at Lahore,

Lucia Osborne was the wife of Arthur Osborne, the founder of *The Mountain Path*. She was editor of the magazine from 1970 to 1973.

Arthur on his way back to Bangkok, our friends on their travels and the children and myself to Tiruvannamalai. David had already informed the Ashram about our visit. At the station in Tiruvannamalai we took two horse-carts (*jutkas*), one for the luggage and the other for us. I did not notice much on the way not even the mountain Arunachala as I was too preoccupied with the children, three live wires, and seeing to it that they did not fall out of the cart and that the street urchins hanging on to the back of the running cart did not get hurt. There was also excitement over Frania who was nearly one year old suddenly starting to speak for the first time and fiercely telling the little boys “Jao, Jao” in Hindi which means “Go, Go” or “Let go.”

Our friend's commodious cottage was in a spacious garden full of flowers; a riot of colours, red and yellow predominating. The first few days I was very busy getting settled and did not go to the Ashram. Kitty who was five years old then was the first to see him. A sadhu-swami friend of David's was also living in one of the rooms and he took Kitty to the hall of the Maharshi. She was the first western child to come to the ashram and created quite a stir with her golden locks and appearance. She was used to being stared at and admired and blest. There was a small table or stool before the couch on which the devotees put their offerings but when Kitty stood with her tray of fruit, not quite sure what to do with it, the Maharshi smilingly pointed to the stool and so Kitty, still holding the fruit, sat herself down on it with her back towards the Maharshi! Someone, possibly Bhagavan himself, remarked that Kitty was making an offering of herself. I wondered later how Marpa the Translator, the Guru of the great Milarepa, would have interpreted it.

Before leaving Bangkok for our holiday in India Arthur showed me a booklet, probably *Who am I?* or *Spiritual Instruction* received from India with a picture of the Maharshi in it. The picture impressed me greatly as a model, so caught up in sculpture was I at the time. Perhaps this was a sort of *vichara* (Self-enquiry), in clay to express the essence of the model “Who are you?” Never have I seen a face so alive, so serene and wise, so interesting. Even as a child I used to watch

myself and wonder who I was and here was a book showing the way to find out but I was not interested to read it, or simply it did not occur to me to do so. If Arthur was disappointed he never showed it. After arriving in Tiruvannamalai I still had the conceited attitude of judging for myself and finding out just by seeing the Maharshi without ever having gone deeply into his teaching.

On entering the Ashram hall for the first time, from the door I perceived a figure reclining on a couch. Actually I did not see anything much except his extraordinary eyes transparent like water, looking at me. There was no more any question of judging for myself or finding out. Genuine, so transparently genuine, was he that to doubt it would have been like doubting the innocence of a baby; an extraordinary combination of such innocence and great wisdom. I greeted him in Indian fashion with the palms folded in namaskaram and sat down on the floor among others near the couch. I closed my eyes and the thought came to me or it had, I could almost say ‘recalled itself to me’, “There is only God. All is one.” There was a feeling of great ease mixed with unease. Those eyes could see through me. I sat like that for ten or fifteen minutes. Someone told me that the Maharshi never shifted his eyes from me and that it was very remarkable. But it was not initiation. This happened later.

I started going to the hall mornings and evenings and concentrated on the heart, the spiritual heart on the right side. I did not find meditation difficult but sitting cross legged was another matter. How painful it could be in the beginning. But I persisted.

One early morning I sat down in the hall a few yards from the couch to meditate. Bhagavan was busy with some letters and papers brought from the office. Suddenly it happened. What actually happened is very hard to say. Indescribable bliss of not being weighed down any more, waves of bliss and fear, of lightness, as if my heart was expanding, expanding. In the midst of it I noticed Bhagavan suddenly turning to me with a searching, almost startled look, letters and papers forgotten. Afterwards I tried to describe this experience and it turned out to be a poem which was surprising, as I was not given to writing poetry and find it hard enough to express myself even

in prose. The beginning of it I have forgotten. It was something about my confined heart trying to free itself; like a fluttering bird flying out of its cage into the boundless sky, into freedom void.

High, higher so near,  
Over waves of bliss and fear  
High, higher so near,  
fly heart shrank in fear of death  
Was it Life?

Actually the expression 'high' does not express it. It was without dimensions or embracing all dimensions, including a bottomless precipice or void. Nothing to hold on to in fearful blissfulness. Words are so limited. I showed it to Bhagavan in the evening. He read it with obvious interest, sat up from his reclining position to read it, then put it under the pillow. A little later I saw him read it again. He did not give it back to me. It felt very much like a near miss.

Soon afterwards the war extended to Siam, the Japanese having invaded the country and all communications from Arthur ceased. Not a single letter for four years. No news at all even through the Red Cross. Prompted by me, Adam, who was about three years old, went up to Bhagavan and asked him: "Bhagavan, please bring back my daddy safely." Bhagavan nodded, graciously assenting. That was enough. It was astonishing how we did not worry on the whole. Really strange, for someone like me who was given to anxiety and worrying over matters of scarcely any import, watching my anxious thoughts angrily, unable to shut them off. Yes 'to shut them off' like a tap, that is what I felt one should be able to do. Worrying never helps, never changes anything, so why harbour and activate such negative feelings?

Often the children would come into the hall, Frania still in the crawling stage on all fours as if prostrating. Once she crawled first to Bhagavan, then to me. He patted her saying to those around, obviously delighted: "You see she did not go first to her mother; Bhagavan comes first with her." This he said in a most impersonal way. Adam would run jumping for joy and breathing loud like a little colt up and down

in the hall between the two rows of seated devotees, men and women apart, occasionally stopping in his tracks to give me a brief hug. Bhagavan looked on with a smile which Kitty described to her father probably in the last letter to reach him from us: "Oh Daddy, I am so happy to be here. When Bhagavan smiles everyone must be happy."

A most amazing vital period of my life had started. ▲

## Flawless

Ana Callam

The final vestiges of ego unthreading  
themselves as he lay on his bed,  
watching his flesh separate from  
his breath, without flinching,  
he let die what seemed dead,  
and still, he watched, finding  
himself perfectly endless,  
the little i having fled,  
leaving only spaciousness,  
silence swimming round  
in his head, and the name  
of his father graven into  
his chest, as he rose,  
sixteen years old, and mad  
for his Master, the mountain,  
he took off down the road,  
barefoot, just a note to his  
family amidst his schoolbooks,  
foodless and famished for God,  
whom he thought would leap  
down from a tree and besiege  
him, but it had already happened,  
God himself implanted in each  
cell of his being, no longer boy  
but divinity supreme.



# Sri Ramana Maharshi on Self-Enquiry

COMPILED BY D. SAMARENDER REDDY

*Self-enquiry is the cornerstone of Bhagavan's teachings. In the following compilation of forty short selections we present a comprehensive explanation of the method and practice of Self-enquiry, which will be of great value to those of us who seek to actively follow the path of jnana.*

What exists in truth is the Self alone. The world, the individual soul and God are appearances in it, like silver in mother-of-pearl; these three appear at the same time. The Self is that where there is absolutely no 'I'-thought. The Self itself is the world; the Self itself is 'I'; the Self itself is God; all is Siva, the Self.<sup>1</sup>

Unbroken 'I-I' is the ocean infinite; the ego, 'I'-thought, remains only as a bubble on it and is called *jiva*, i.e., individual soul. The

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Statue of Bhagavan at Arakandanallur Temple, Tirukoilur where He saw a *jjyoti* (light) coming from the Siva lingam

bubble too is water; when it bursts it only mixes in the ocean. When it remains a bubble it is still a part of the ocean.<sup>2</sup>

The mind is nothing else than the 'I'-thought. The mind and the ego are one and the same. Intellect, will, ego, and individuality are collectively the same mind. It is like a man being variously described according to his different activities. The individual is nothing else than the ego, which again is only the mind.<sup>3</sup>

The mind is a bundle of thoughts. But the source of all thoughts is the I - thought. So if you try to find out who this 'I' is, the mind will disappear. The mind will exist only so long as you think of external things. But when you draw it from external things and make it think of the mind or 'I' – in other words introvert it – it ceases to exist.<sup>4</sup>

Yes [the intellectual understanding of the Truth is necessary]. Otherwise why does not the person realize God or the Self at once, i.e., as soon as he is told that God is all or the Self is all? That shows some wavering on his part. He must argue with himself and gradually convince himself of the Truth before his faith becomes firm.<sup>5</sup>

[The intellect is a help for realization] up to a certain stage. Even so, realize that the Self transcends the intellect – the latter must itself vanish to reach the Self.<sup>6</sup>

The mind, turned outwards, results in thoughts and objects. Turned inwards, it becomes itself the Self. Such a mind is sometimes called *arupa manas* or *suddha manas*.<sup>7</sup>

Atman [Self] is realised with *mruta manas* [dead mind], that is, mind devoid of thoughts and turned inward.<sup>8</sup>

Self-Enquiry is really possible only through intense introversion of the mind.<sup>9</sup>

There is no other adequate method [for destroying the mind] except Self-Enquiry. If the mind is lulled by other means it stays quiet for a little [while] and then springs up again and resumes its former activity.<sup>10</sup>

Realisation is nothing new to be acquired. It is already there, but obstructed by a screen of thoughts. All our attempts are directed for lifting this screen and then Realisation is revealed.<sup>11</sup>

The 'I-thought' will be found to be the root cause. Go deeper; the 'I-thought' disappears and there is an infinitely expanded 'I-consciousness'.<sup>12</sup>

Without uttering the word "I", to quest with the mind turned inwards, as to whence the "I" rises, is alone the enquiry leading to Self-knowledge. Other than this, can contemplation, "This I am not; That I am," be by itself the enquiry, though it may be an aid thereto?<sup>13</sup>

In the quest method – which is more correctly "Whence am I?" and not merely "Who am I?" – we are not simply trying to eliminate saying 'we are not the body, not the senses and so on', to reach what remains as the ultimate reality, but we are trying to find whence the 'I'-thought or the ego arises within us.<sup>14</sup>

If the mind is distracted, ask the question promptly, "To whom do these distracting thoughts arise?" That takes you back to the 'I' point promptly.<sup>15</sup>

To enquire 'Who am I?' really means trying to find out the source of the ego or the 'I'-thought.<sup>16</sup>

There is no investigation into the *Atman*. The investigation can only be into the non-self. Elimination of the non-self is alone possible. The Self being always self-evident will shine forth of itself.<sup>17</sup>

That which makes the enquiry is the ego. The "I" about which the enquiry is made is also the ego. As a result of the enquiry the ego ceases to exist and only the Self is found to exist.<sup>18</sup>

There is an absolute Self from which a spark proceeds as from a fire. The spark is called the ego. In the case of an ignorant man it identifies itself with an object simultaneously with its rise. It cannot remain independent of such association with objects. The association is *ajnana* or ignorance and its destruction is the object of our efforts. . . . Its true nature can be found when it is out of contact with objects or thoughts.<sup>19</sup>

The thought 'I am this body of flesh and blood' is the one thread on which are strung the various other thoughts. Therefore, if we turn inwards enquiring 'Where is this I?' all thoughts (including the 'I'-thought) will come to an end and Self-knowledge will then spontaneously shine forth.<sup>20</sup>

The 'I-thought' is like a spirit which, although not palpable, rises up simultaneously with the body, flourishes and disappears with it. The body-consciousness is the wrong 'I'. Give up this body-consciousness. It is done by seeking the source [of] 'I'. The body does not say 'I am'. It is you who say 'I am the body!' Find out who this 'I' is. Seeking its source it will vanish.<sup>21</sup>

The ego is described as having three bodies, the gross, the subtle and the causal, but that is only for the purpose of analytical exposition. If the enquiry were to depend on the ego's form, you may take it that any enquiry would become altogether impossible, because the forms the ego may assume are legion. Therefore, for the purposes of self-enquiry you have to proceed on the basis that ego has but one form, namely that of *aham-vritti* ['I'-thought].<sup>22</sup>

Trace, then, the ultimate cause of 'I' or personality. From where does this 'I' arise? Seek for it within; it then vanishes. . . . When the mind unceasingly investigates its own nature, it transpires that there is no such thing as mind.<sup>23</sup>

Search for the source of the 'I - thought'. That is all that one has to do. The universe exists on account of the 'I - thought'. If that ends there is an end of misery also. The false 'I' will end only when its source is sought.<sup>24</sup>

You are the mind or think that you are the mind. The mind is nothing but thoughts. Now behind every particular thought there is a general thought which is the 'I', that is yourself. Let us call this 'I' the first thought. Stick to this 'I'-thought and question it to find out what it is. When this question takes strong hold on you, you cannot think of other thoughts.<sup>25</sup>

What happens when you make a serious quest for the Self is that the 'I'-thought disappears and something else from the depths takes hold of you and that is not the 'I' which commenced the quest.<sup>26</sup>

*Sadhakas* [seekers] rarely understand the difference between this temporary stilling of the mind [*manolaya*] and permanent destruction of thoughts [*manonasa*]. In *manolaya* there is only temporary subsidence of thought-waves, and though this temporary period may even last for a thousand years, thoughts, which are thus temporarily stilled, rise up as soon as the *manolaya* ceases. One must therefore watch one's spiritual progress carefully. One must not allow oneself to be overtaken by such spells of stillness of thought. The moment one experiences this, one must revive consciousness and enquire within as to who it is who experiences this stillness. While not allowing any thoughts to intrude, one must not at the same time be overtaken by this deep sleep [*yoga nidra*] or self-hypnotism.<sup>27</sup>

The very purpose of self-enquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source. It is not, therefore, a case of one 'I' searching for another 'I'.<sup>28</sup>

It is not meant that you should go on asking 'Who am I?'. In that case, thought will not so easily die. . . . concentrate within yourself where the 'I'-thought, the root of all other thoughts arises. As the Self is not outside but inside you, you are asked to dive within, instead of going without.<sup>29</sup>

Some say that one should never cease to engage in hearing, reflection and one-pointedness. These are not fulfilled by reading books, but only by continued practice to keep the mind withdrawn.<sup>30</sup>

Disputing the nature of the Self without attempting Self-realization merely constitutes delusion.<sup>31</sup>

Gradually one should, by all possible means, try always to be aware of the Self. Everything is achieved if one succeeds in this. Let not the mind be diverted to any other object. One should abide in the Self without the sense of being the doer, even when engaged in work born of destiny, like a madman.<sup>32</sup>



An examination of the ephemeral nature of external phenomena leads to *vairagya*. Hence enquiry (*vichara*) is the first and foremost step to be taken. When *vichara* continues automatically, it results in a contempt for wealth, fame, ease, pleasure, etc. The “I”-thought becomes clearer for inspection.<sup>33</sup>

The ego in each one must die. Let him reflect on it. Is there this ego or is there not? By repeated reflection one becomes more and more fit.<sup>34</sup>

The one who feels utter distaste when his mind has to move among sense objects and who is conscious of the transitoriness of the body is said to be a competent one for Self-Enquiry.<sup>35</sup>

Men attached to objects and having endless thoughts due to the strength of latent tendencies find it difficult to control the mind.<sup>36</sup>

The degree of freedom from unwanted thoughts and the degree of concentration on a single thought are the measure[s] to gauge the progress.<sup>37</sup>

There is Consciousness along with quietness in the mind; that is exactly the state to be aimed at.<sup>38</sup>

Self-Realisation will come to an earnest seeker in a trice.<sup>39</sup>

[The marks of an earnest disciple] are an intense longing for the removal of sorrow and attainment of joy and an intense aversion for all kinds of mundane pleasure.<sup>40</sup>

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A black and white photograph of a stone well. The well is constructed from rough-hewn stones, with a wide rim at the top and a narrower opening at the bottom. The water inside the well is calm, reflecting the sky and the surrounding foliage. A single butterfly is perched on the water's surface, its wings spread. The background shows a dark, leafy tree on the left and a clear sky above the well.

## SHORT STORY

# An Invisible Force

PREMA SASTRI

He awoke to the smell of dust; acrid and all pervading. He got off his cot, put on his slippers and went out on to the verandah of the cottage.

Before him was a tank. People were washing clothes, raising their hands above their heads, hitting stone with sharp slaps. Beyond them was the sacred hill of Arunachala. Peacocks strutted down the paths, eyes alert for grain. When not successful they screeched and tried to fly, prevented by their long tails from rising too far. Above them crows flew high in the sky, cawing as if in derision; yet equally alert for scraps of food, or the untended baby squirrel.

Prema Sastri is a writer of short stories, plays and novels. Her stories have been selected in anthologies and magazines along with works by Doris Lessing, Isaac Singer, Paul Theroux and Woody Allen. She is the author of four books. Prema Sastri lives in Bangalore. She is a devotee of Bhagavan who is the ruling force in her life.

John Maynard

He was in Tiruvannamalai in South India, a town famous not only for the temple of Arunachaleswara but for the ashram of Sri Ramana Maharishi, where he was now staying. It was a place he would never have heard of, except for his friend, Neelakantan.

“Chander, if you are not doing anything this summer why don’t you come with me? I’m visiting some south Indian towns, to get material for my research on The Great Masters. It will be a change for you.” Chandrasekhar agreed. He had not returned to India, since he had left thirty years ago. Also, he wanted to get out of New York.

Neelu had made an efficient itinerary. They had already seen the Ramakrishna Ashram at Kanya Kumari, the Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry, and the Narayana Guru ashram in Kerala. The next stop was to be the ashram of Sri Sri Ravisankar, where Neelu had booked himself for an advanced course on the Art of Living.

Neelu needed it, thought Chander. He had never seen him fully alive. His head was generally bent over books, with peeling covers. This was when he was not entombed in some meditation centre or the other.

He himself believed in experiencing life. He was the vice president of a bank, courted by many. There was talk that he would become senator for New York. He kept company with the rich and the powerful. There was always a beautiful girl on his arm. They did not last long. He got tired of them, and craved for a new sensation. The bottle was his only constant companion. He stayed awake at parties all night, yet arrived at his office on time, turning out faultless work. When asked how he did it he laughed. “I have an invisible force working for me.” He did not tell them that the force that drove him was the craving to be above all others.

He saw Neelu coming towards him. Neelu had woken up at four, and completed circumambulation of the hill. “You must come with me, tomorrow. You will get great spiritual benefit.”

“Not me. I like my early morning sleep.”

They bathed and went to the dining room, where iddlis and sambar were being served on leaves. Chander was not an adept at sitting on

the ground or scooping liquids into his palms. It was a relief to go outside near the old well.

Neelu sensed his friend’s discomfiture. In spite of being the only Indians in the same block of apartments in Queens they had never been more than casual acquaintances.

Neelakantan was a professor of philosophy at New York State University. He took his position seriously, and kept himself engaged in research and writing. He performed Hindu rituals assiduously. His wife, Saroja, and sons, Jagdeesh and Chidambaram, were willing participants in the ceremonies. Saroja did not like Chander. “He is no good,” she declared.

“We can change him,” said Neelu. Saroja’s reply was a burst of laughter. Neelu ruminated over her reaction. He felt responsible for Chander, and tried to include him in his religious activities, only to be met with side stepping tactics. He was surprised that Chander had agreed to this trip. Saroja had dropped out at the last minute. Chander accepted Neelu’s suggestion that he take her place.

Chander was already regretting his decision. Oppressed by the heat and dust he took refuge in the ashram book store. He bought a biography of Bhagavan. It would help him to while away a tedious time. During the afternoon he turned the pages, as Neelu made copious notes.

As he read Chander was amazed. Here was a man after his own heart. The young Venkataraman had survived a death experience. He had left Madurai with a few rupees without informing anyone, and made his way to Arunachala. He had followed his dream without bothering about what people thought of him. He became the centre of a community, which attracted people from all over the world. Chander put the book down. It was a good story to tell at the next cocktail party.

The afternoon was over. Above them a clear sky opened out, like a freshly ironed bedsheet. Chander made up his mind to climb the lower slopes of the hill. On the way was a colony of thatched huts. Women washed vessels, goats bleated, pigs foraged in mounds of garbage. Dust and the stench of animals clogged his nostrils. He had given up a



weekend at a luxury farm house in New Jersey, a boat trip on the Hudson with a Hollywood actress, and other pleasurable activities to come here. He was revolted. He would cut short his visit and return immediately. He turned back.

He saw a tall thin man on the edge of the slope beckoning to him. "You need a guide." Too dispirited to say no, Chander nodded. He followed the guide up a flagstone path where a large boulder stood, perched at the side of the hill. The guide waved a hand. "Where Bhagavan used to sit." He waved the other hand upwards. "The Virupaksha cave."

Chander's reading had made him familiar with the setting. He looked at the wooded slopes with lack of interest. Why was he here? It hit him like a pneumatic drill. It was because of Subadra.

Subadra was the press secretary to a political candidate, who claimed to work for various noble causes. She believed in the candidate, and in his causes. Chander promised to help her, though he had no intention of doing so. Subadra went out with him a few times, but eluded his overtures. She married the candidate and dropped out of his life, refusing to take his phone calls.

It hurt. In Subadra he had found a person he wanted, to keep with him forever. When she left, he felt destroyed. He could not function. Neelu's offer promised a diversion, a road out of hell.

Except that he carried his hell with him. His parents had died when he was a child. He was brought up by an uncle in Salem. He did his best, but could not control his restless nephew. From Salem, Chander found his way to America. He felt at a disadvantage, as he did not have a degree from a leading Indian College, and was not part of an old boy's network. He found short-cuts to success, mostly by underhand methods. He had no friends. He trusted nobody. He was alone. Within was an emptiness he could not fill. He could not bear the weight of his own thoughts. All of a sudden the torturing thoughts fluttered away from him like pages being torn out of a book. His mind went blank. He felt a presence near him. He faced the boulder. On it sat an old man dressed only in a loin cloth. His eyes were fixed on Chander. They beamed with love and approval. He felt his body being consumed by an invisible

force which burned away the image of himself he had so carefully created. His thoughts turned to ashes. He became unconscious.

When he recovered the old man had gone. So had the guide. He picked himself up and found his way back. He passed the colony of huts, feeling strangely linked to the people in them; as he did to Lakshmi the cow and Jacky the dog, whose memorials he passed on the way. He had thought of Neelu as an interfering bore. He now saw the kindness and concern which moved him.

He went to the big hall. The evening chanting had begun. He looked up at a picture of Bhagavan. Again he saw the same gentle smile and loving eyes. The emptiness within had become a clear space filled with joy. He did not have to struggle for power. He was the source. All he had to do was to receive and spread divine bliss. With this realisation he went into the small hall and sat before the sofa where Bhagavan had reclined for so many years. He would give up his job in New York and move to California to work for an organisation which sheltered sick animals. Subadra and his old associates meant no more to him than bits of discarded toffee wrappers. Bhagavan had shown him the way. Hell was behind him. He wept.

It was here that Neelu found him and heard his stammered apologies for an abrupt departure. He was disappointed, but did not object. Saroja was right. There was no use in trying to change Chander. He was a kite without strings. For his part he was happy. He had enough material for his articles.

They went out of the compound. A peacock took a short run and reached a wall, from where it screamed its triumph. Crows flew overhead in droves, returning to their nests. The two men walked back to their cottage. ▲

We wish to inform the readers that the article 'The Ant Kissed the Moon' by Sri G. Kameshwar which appeared in the issue of October-December 2009 had earlier been carried in *The Direct Path*, the bi-monthly publication brought out by Ramana Kendra, Delhi.



# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## The Pilgrimage of Vithoba

NABAJI SIDDHA

**A**mong the many spiritual texts on Advaita and devotion which were kept either in the rotating book shelf beside Bhagavan's couch or in the small library which the ashram established, Bhagavan often referred to *Maha Bhakta Vijayam* in his discussions with devotees. There are numerous references to it in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, *Day by Day* and *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*.

The *Maha Bhakta Vijayam*, a hagiographical treasure-trove, is bigger in volume than either the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*. It was first written in the then popular patois language of Hindustani in the year 1630 by Nabaji Siddha who was said to be an incarnation of Lord Brahma. It related the life stories of seven hundred devotees and its original name was *Bhakta Sara*. The stories were narrated by Nabaji Siddha to Uddhava Siddha and other disciples. Later, Uddhava Siddha wrote down the stories in a shortened form in the language of Gwalior and renamed it *Bhakta Mala*.

A certain Mahipati Bavaji from the Maratha region, in 1760, removed the dialogues emphasising the *jnana* aspects and collected the devotional stories of one hundred and nine saints in the Marathi language, naming this collection the *Bhakta Vijaya*. The remaining stories of other saints and sages were reworked in two other volumes entitled *Santa Vijaya* and *Santa Leelamruta*.<sup>1</sup>

It was a pandit Dipdev who later added the stories of *jnana* in the *Bhakta Vijaya* of Mahipati Bavaji and named it *Diparatnakara*. Sometime later, all these volumes were translated into Tamil by Chittoor Venkatadasar with help of some other pundits. This translation was eventually published by Saidapuram Umapati Mudaliar in 1864.<sup>2</sup>

*Maha Bhakta Vijayam* relates in detail the lives, travails and triumphs of saints particularly those from Maharashtra including Namdev, Tukaram, Jnaneshwar, his father Vithoba, Samarth Ramdas and Eknath. The great Tulsidas, who wrote the Ramayana in Mythili, a dialect of Hindi, also features prominently.

Bhagavan was especially fond of several sections notably *Siddha-Sadhaka Samvadam* (a conversation between a *siddha* and a *sadhaka*) which was a dialogue between Jnaneshwar and his father who sought clarity from his enlightened son. Namdev's encounter with a *siddha* whose feet rested on a *lingam* was also often cited by Bhagavan as was Namdev's praise for the name of the Lord.

Such was Bhagavan's interest in the text that he carefully read it through and proofread a small section of it. He also instructed Nagamma who was translating parts of the Tamil *Maha Bhakta Vijayam* into Telugu on how she might begin the narrative of the life of Jnaneshwar where he goes to the forest, argues with his father (in the *Siddha-Sadhaka Samvadam*) and brings him back to the city and family.

A devotee from Anand Ashram, Kanhangad, has translated into English the principal chapters which are of interest to our readers and the *Mountain Path* will serialise this inspiring text in the foreseeable future.

<sup>1</sup> There is an English translation of Mahapati's *Bhaktavijaya* by J.E. Abbott and Pandit Narhar Godbole, 1933 and reprinted in 1982 by Motilal Bararsidass, Delhi.

<sup>2</sup> From the Preface to the Tamil *Maha Bhakta Vijayam*, preserved in the Ashram Archives.

## Chapter One

### The Pilgrimage of Vithoba (The father of Sant Jnaneshwar)

Uddhava and other mystics who play (*leela*) with the eight-fold *siddhis*, and yet ever abide in the Self, approached the great saint Nabhaji in the early hours, after their bath in the river Chandrabagha and their morning ablutions. They went around him, and prostrated to him with reverence, and said, "O blemishless jewel! Peerless teacher! Please deign to bless us with the narration of the descent of *Trimurti* and *Adishakti* on the Earth."

Pleased with their request Nabhaji uttered these sweet words to the gathered assembly, "The divine life and sport of *jivanmuktas*, the liberated ones, bestows countless virtues on both the narrator and listener, like compassion towards all beings, peacefulness, right attitude, fruition of *saguna* and *nirguna* worship, eightfold *siddhis*, knowledge of the Self, the bliss of the transcendental state and absorption in the Absolute. There is no greater fortune than listening to their stories. What more then can one say about the noble lives of the great devotees of the Lord? The *Bhakta Vijayam* which contains the stories of these bhaktas is indeed,

- the saviour of the world as it removes the darkness of ignorance and bestows the effulgence of the Reality;
- the cool inferno as it quenches the fire of hatred and illumines the heart with rays of love and peace;
- *Arya*, the lofty, as it bestows a guileless heart, destroying the evil tendencies of the mind;
- *Hiranyagarbha* as it gives birth to Truth in place of ignorance;
- *Vanamali* as it prevents the fall of the *jiva* into the deep pit of sinful deeds;
- *Nidalaksha* as it destroys the knot of 'I' and 'mine';



- *Mayesha* as it casts the spell of the bliss of the Self on the *jiva* (soul) who remains deluded by sense-pleasures;

- *Sadasiva* as it closes the trap-door of obsession with sense-pleasures even in dreams and instead immerses the soul in the nectar of transcendental bliss;

- *Para Brahman* as it removes all sense of duality and 'otherness' and establishes the *jiva* in supreme peace.

If the good fortune of both the narrator and listener of *Bhakta Vijayam* itself baffles description, then how can the glory of the great Jnaneswar be measured? Now, listen to his story with one-pointed devotion and attention." With these words, Nabhaji began to recount the story of Sant Jnaneshwar by chanting the divine names of the Lord:

O beloved friends, on the bank of river Godavari, in the village of Apegaon, there lived a noble Brahmin by name Govindpant, who was a Kulkarni, the revenue official of the village. His wife was Nirabai. Govindpant had a keen intelligence, was well read in the scriptures and adhered to the scriptural injunctions. There was no sin of miserliness attached to him. Feeding and serving the mendicant-sadhus and noble souls with great love was the couple's way of life. Govindpant spent his earnings generously and joyfully in this way, yet the lack of progeny weighed him down.

The couple repeatedly appealed to their family deity Vithoba to bless them with a child. In due course, a male child was born, whom they named after their favourite deity Vithoba. The parents poured out their love on the precious child. When Vithoba reached adolescence, he was invested with the sacred thread. He became well versed in the scriptures. Soon, his parents started looking for a suitable bride for Vithoba. However, he had different plans. He begged them to permit him to proceed on a pilgrimage.

The parents, growing apprehensive said, "Our beloved child! Our precious one! Pilgrimage has to be necessarily undertaken by those who are detached from worldly life, as an expiatory act on the part of sinners who have committed unmentionable crimes, or persons who

cannot attain a steady mind or are destitute. We are indeed surprised that you, who have just entered the threshold of adolescence, should choose such a course, forsaking your parents in their old age. Pray, what kind of despondency has taken hold of you? Please enter the life of a householder and be a sanctuary to us in our old age."

Bowing down to them, Vithoba replied, "O beloved parents! I have heard you often talk about the fleeting nature of life, the transitory nature of possessions, like writing on water or whitewash on the wall, like a ripple on the water or a cloud covering the sun. I have also learnt that one's youth is short-lived; that our life-span is beyond our control, like an arrow already released from the bow; that the life-breath is precarious and that the mind, throttling the *jiva* with the rope of transmigration is ever unsteady, and that our discrimination is as feeble as a glow worm, in the human heart. Yet, you choose to impose the burden of a householder's life on me. Is it possible to go on the pilgrimage after marriage? It will be like walking on a path surrounded by pitch darkness on a new moon night. I won't therefore even dream of sense pleasures, let alone living with a woman.

"I cannot opt for stumbling along the rugged path of worldly existence, losing my direction, the direction leading to Truth. Is there a single householder who is free from troubles and travails? Trapped in *samsara*, how can I dedicate my life to the guru who is the All-knowing Witness and who leads the *jiva* to the Absolute? Immersed in *samsara*, how can I serve the Teacher and get my doubts dispelled in the scriptures? Even if doubts are cleared, how can I attain steadiness of mind amidst a householder's life? Even if mind is stilled, can I hope to abide in the transcendental state which is beyond the three states of wakefulness, dream and sleep? Can I attain the rarefied state of *Satchidananda* through mere scriptural knowledge? Of what avail are expositions on this exalted state without inner experience?"

Vithoba added further, "O beloved parents, just as the quest for the Self based merely on the scriptural studies and without dispassion, discrimination without wisdom, beauty and youth in a widow, a well-fed body without strength, the adornments of an unfaithful woman, a life led without performing meritorious deeds, the austerities

of a woman of ill-repute, worship without devotion, or meditation while maligning the guru and *japa* with a distracted mind are utterly futile; so is the life of a man who does not choose the path of liberation in his youth. Before getting married, I would first like to visit and worship at the holy places in the country, and learn the exalted knowledge from noble souls. I will return to you in a couple of years and fulfil your wish.”

His parents blessed Vithoba and said, “O darling son! Noble one among those who follow austerities! Obstructing a person from treading the right path or from giving charities will beget untold sufferings. Therefore, we will not stand in your way. However gladden our hearts by promising that you will return to us from the pilgrimage.” Overwhelmed with joy, Vithoba made this promise and set off.

He took dips in the sacred *tirthas*, worshipped in holy places like Dwaraka, Sudamapuri, Prabhasa, Somnath, Saptashringi, Tryambakeshwar, Brahmagiri, Bhimashankar and so on. Arriving at Alankavati, presently known as Alandi, he took a dip in the holy river and performed *japa* and other practices. In that sacred village, a respectable Brahmin, by name Siddhopant, lived. He was known for his hospitality. He would take the Brahmin pilgrims home and feed them with great love. One day, he was very distressed, as he couldn't find any guest who would honour his house. While he was searching for pilgrims, he came upon Vithoba. Immensely pleased and marvelling at the piety, beauty and humility of the young man, he took him home and served him food. They spent the day discussing scriptural topics.

Nabhaji said, “O sages, please listen carefully.” Now, Siddhopant requested Vithoba to spend a few more days with him. He delighted in Vithoba's company, dwelling on the subject of the Divine. That night the Lord appeared in the dream of Siddhopant and bade him arrange his daughter's marriage with Vithoba the very next day. Awakening from the dream, Siddhopant was struck with wonder. He thought, “My wish was to get my daughter married to such a noble boy. Is it my heart's wish that took the form of this dream or is it truly the Lord's divine will?”

When Vithoba woke up at the auspicious time of *brahmamuhurta*, Siddhopant appraised him of the dream, saying, “The Lord has instructed me in a dream to give my daughter to you in marriage. Please comply with the wish of the Lord and attain all felicity. Don't ignore the divine command.”

Vithoba was terrified. He lamented, “O what kind of fate is about to befall me? It is like the appearance of a vampire instead of water, while digging a well, or the death of the husband when the wife went to pray for a child. Defying the scriptural injunction that the father's words are more sacred than a mantra, I got away from that situation and went on this pilgrimage (*yatra*). But this Brahmin is trying to entangle me in this same bondage.”

With a tumultuous heart, he spoke to Siddhopant, “Swami! You don't know anything about my background or the antecedents of my family, yet you are rushing into this proposal. It is like the fate of the *rishi* who left the forest for the town to get away from the advances of two prostitutes, but was cornered into marrying the king's two daughters. Is it for this purpose of dragging me into the nightmare of *samsara* that you brought me to your home, and fed me with sweet puddings and delicacies? Please do not utter such words to me hereafter.”

Upon learning about the lineage, i.e. the *gotra* of Vithoba which was compatible with his own, Siddhopant said, “It is guru's grace that has brought us together. You are the ideal match for my daughter.” Overwhelmed with joy, he called his wife and told her everything. He said, “O beloved woman, have you seen our prospective son-in-law? Are you happy?”

Frightened at the turn of events, Vithoba exclaimed, “Alas! Just as a thief who became blind when he went out to rob; or a person who became possessed by a ghost when he went to a temple for worship, so have I been afflicted. O Brahmin, is it fair to trap me in wedlock when all I want is renunciation? Does it befit you to bring ruin to my austerity? How can you thrust a bride on one who abhors marriage? Why do you place obstacles in the way of my pilgrimage?”

“O handsome youth, one should never go against a king's command; one may even defy the king, but never disobey the parents; one may

## MOUNTAIN PATH

not comply with parents' words, but should never disregard guru's advice; one may even pay no heed to guru's words, but one should never ignore the command of the Lord. Therefore, don't brush aside my words, which reflect the Lord's command. Without causing me anguish, please marry my daughter this day itself and then proceed on the pilgrimage with your wife. Please get ready for the function by wearing the appropriate raiment and ornaments."

Vithoba wailed in despair, "It is like smearing oneself with mud in the river instead of taking bath; it is like getting into a quarrel with the *sadguru* whom one sought to venerate. Why didn't that same Lord visit *me* in my dream?"

"He will certainly appear in your dream tonight. Therefore, you should stay here with us for the night."

At sunrise, they bathed in the river, and completed their *japa* and prayer. Redirecting their steps towards home, they had breakfast and spent the rest of the day in chanting and singing the praise of the Lord. In the middle of the night, the Lord appeared to Vithoba in a dream and urged him to marry Siddhopant's daughter, who was a noble woman.

Becoming awake, Vithoba became distraught. He thought to himself, "God himself is wrecking my pledge to remain an ascetic. Further, if I marry without the knowledge of my parents, will they not feel hurt? I will enter hell for this kind of act. Will one who has attained heaven wish to live in hell? Will one who drinks nectar thirst to taste poison? Will one who has royal status wish to take to mendicancy or a virtuous man resort to slander the preceptor? Will one revelling in eternal bliss wish for the transitory life; or one who knows how precious human birth is, waste his life in futile ways? Will one who has fragrant unguents on his body smear himself with filth? Even so, will one who yearns to abide in motionless *samadhi* take to the ever-changing worldly life? Is it not said that one should prefer to be possessed by a ghost even if it means death, rather than by a woman?"

"A bird is ruined by the call of its mate, an elephant by touch, a moth by the glow of fire, fish by taste, bees by smell; whereas man is ruined by all the five senses which come to him in the single form of



John Maynard

Archives: Ornamental stand used  
in the Old Hall during Sri Bhagavan's lifetime



woman. Our scriptures say that once a person is enmeshed in this snare, he cannot attain release even in millions of births. O Lord, knowing well the endless demands forced on the householder for wealth, status, houses, relatives, children, cattle, in this perilous *samsara*, am I such a fool as to jump into this fire?"

Thus, contemplating the possible consequences, Vithoba spent a restless night. Deciding to flee the scene, he walked out of the house stealthily into the street like a thief. At that moment, Rukmabai, the daughter of Siddhopant, who had been worshipping the Divine Mother for a noble and wise husband, and was happy to hear about her good fortune to be betrothed to Vithoba, was indulging in fanciful thoughts about her married life. Thus she was also sleepless that night. When she heard the soft footsteps, she realized that Vithoba was sneaking out.

She reflected to herself, "From the moment my father decided that he has to be my groom, I have started looking upon him as my husband. Now he is forsaking me, being averse to marriage. It will be sheer foolishness to lose such a noble man to deserve whom I must have accumulated immense merits. He is trying to escape, for the Lord must have appeared in his dream. Even if he had not had the vision of the Lord, I have already accepted him as my husband and placed my life at his feet. That being so, how can a faithful woman live apart from her beloved?"

Assailed by such thoughts, Rukmabai ran after him in the street and falling at his feet, wailed, "O my Lord, why are you sneaking out like a thief? If you don't want to be here, let us go and live wherever you desire. We will get my father's permission."

Struck by the captivating beauty of the damsel, Vithoba questioned, "O young lady, who are you?"

She replied, "My father has decided to marry me to you. Unaware that you are giving us the slip, he is sleeping peacefully. I have come here to take you back home."

He countered, "O woman, until a girl is legitimately married, she should look upon her parents as God and it is inappropriate for an unmarried girl to talk to a man alone. She should live in such a way

that even her neighbours should be unaware of her presence in the house. That is the mark of a virtuous woman. Instead, you are acting like a street woman, blocking the way of a wayfarer in the middle of the night. If a man marries such an indecent woman, the door to hell will remain wide open for him. You are too shameless to be taken for a respectable housewife. It is a sin even to see your face. Go away."

Vithoba started to walk hurriedly, but Rukmabai standing in his way pleaded with him, "My *swami*, master of my life, beloved of my life, my heart has been given over to you as my all-in-all. This is the real vow of marriage, not any formal ceremony. It is the state of mind which is important. Is formal marriage alone real marriage? If you depart from here without my parents' knowledge, I will follow your footsteps. If you reject me and push me away violently, I will give up my life at your feet."

Nonplussed at this course of events, Vithoba lamented, "O God, what awful mess is this? Parents may enquire about many boys while looking for a match for their daughter. Does it mean that the girl can enter into wedlock with all of them? Even after betrothal, many proposals have fallen through. Don't you know this fact or are you so obtuse? If anyone hears this, it will bring disgrace. Go home quickly. I am a wanderer; moreover I have no interest in matrimony. Will any decent girl force herself on a man who wishes to become a *sannyasi*? You appear to be a crazy woman!"

In reply, she said, "O my master, after accepting someone as a husband if a woman's mind strays towards another even in a dream, she is worse than an ass. In such a case, surely sin will befall you even if you see her face. How can I remain estranged from you when I look upon you alone as my life partner? I am not so evil minded as to think of anyone other than you."

Vithoba retorted, "O woman, it is evident that you want only your own happiness; it doesn't matter to you if it is at the cost of another person. It is indeed strange that you prefer to run away with a stranger, betraying your parents who have brought you up dearly so long. It is a crime even to talk to you. Get out of my sight!"

Rukmabai said, “O Lord, it is already destined that you and I should become husband and wife, hence God appeared in my father’s dream. The Lord must have appeared before you also. Can human will supersede the Lord’s will? One who defies His will cannot remain happy. O master of my life, wise one! You must be testing me. You may abuse me or ill-treat me; whatever is my lot with you, I will bear with it happily because I am yours, I belong to you. You have the right to treat me in any way you please.”

Vithoba cried out in despair, ‘Ah..Ah..., I am surely ruined. My fate is like that of the brahmin who went on a *yatra* only to return as an outcaste. O God! What was my aspiration and what is my present predicament? Now, let me speak to her in kind words and strengthen my dispassion.’ He addressed her again, “O noble woman, you are innocent indeed. I am no match for your beauty. Our association will be like that of the moon afflicted by the planet Rahu during the eclipse. Are you not ashamed of desiring a commoner like me? Strikingly beautiful maiden as you are, you should not prefer an ugly fellow like me, even in your dreams. Your father seems dull-witted, but you are intelligent enough to note this absurdity. If anyone happens to hear of this, they will ridicule us.”

Rukmabai, ignoring his remarks said, “A chaste woman will not swerve from her devotion and desire another, even if her husband is poverty-stricken, diseased, ugly, or stupid. She will not prefer even the god of love to her husband. Did Nalayini hate her leper husband? Did not Amba embrace death when she was rejected by Bhishma? Did not Damayanti choose Nala over the lords of heaven? Having learnt about their exemplary lives, will I ever turn elsewhere? I don’t want to suffer the agony of hell by choosing to live with another man. O Lord of Pandarpur! Why are you causing this humiliation to me?”

Vithoba wailed miserably, “O Lord! How shall I get out of this sticky situation? How you have trapped me! O evil woman, falling at my feet and shedding copious tears, you are bent upon achieving your devious purpose. Get out of my sight! Or else, I will lay a curse on you.”

Rukmabai meekly bowed to him and said, “O my Lord! Whatever is my lot at your hands, I will cherish it as my good fortune and accept it happily.”

Getting furious about the situation, Vithoba screamed abuses at her. Disturbed by the noise, Siddhopant and his wife, awakening, reached the scene. Siddhopant said, “O young man, you are well versed in the *Vedas*, you know the code of right conduct. Why did you stoop to this act of calling this girl out alone at night to talk to her? This will bring shame on us.”

Closing both his ears and overtaken by grief Vithoba said, “God is my witness! If I had truly desired this woman, let that dreadful destiny befall me which awaits sinners like the miser who is heartless to the distressed, the cruel one who betrays those relying on him, the disciple who insults his guru, the pitiless coward who exploits the downtrodden, the fool who is insolent to the noble, the malicious one who doesn’t worship God, the evil one who murders his father, the depraved adulterer, the wicked one who takes pleasure in evil deeds, the unkind one who abuses beggars, the degenerate one who makes noble men shudder, the mean fellow who eats without feeding the guest, the sinful despiser of the wise, the brute who slaughters the cows. O sir, are you not satisfied with the trouble you have already brought upon me? Please leave me alone, let me go on my way.”

Siddhopant addressing Rukmabai said, “O crown jewel among chaste women, you rescued me from great anguish by not letting him go. I will convince him now; you please get back to the house.” To Vithoba, he said, “O young man, did not the Lord appear in your dream?”

“Even if the Lord urges me, I will not become a householder! I am even prepared to give up my life, but I will not agree to marry.”

“You will be causing me great sorrow, as my daughter will surely die if you forsake her; I will also die of grief. After incurring the sin of being the cause of death of a woman and a brahmin, what kind of merit will you earn through your austerities? Will your pilgrimage bear any fruit? Can you at all attain liberation?”

Becoming miserable at heart, Vithoba let out a loud wail, “O God! Purest of the pure, compassion-incarnate! Look at this brahmin, how

he is obstructing my way, how he is cursing me! O Lord of lords, please set me free from this situation!"

At that very moment, an ethereal voice broke out, "O Vithoba, I would like you to wed this noble man's daughter immediately and live happily."

While Vithoba was stunned, Siddhopant jumped with joy saying, "I am indeed fortunate to have this great man for my son-in-law and my daughter is thrice blessed."

Eventually, a marriage took place between Vithoba and Rukmabai. On the third day, Vithoba approaching Siddhopant said, "You are happy that you have attained your wish. My plan of pilgrimage has been foiled, my austerities have been thwarted. Now permit me to complete my *yatra* without placing any more obstacles in my way."

As Siddhopant had no faith in Vithoba's words, he also accompanied him on the *yatra*. They travelled to several places like Pandharpur, Ahobilam, Tirupati, Rameswaram, Chidambaram, Kandy, Kathirkamam, Subramanya and Mahabalipuram.

On their return, Vithoba said, "It is a long time since I left my parents. They are not aware of my marriage. I want to start for Apegaon tomorrow."

The next day, all of them set out together. Reaching home finally, after a long journey through dense forests, Vithoba prostrated to his parents and informed them about the happenings during his pilgrimage. Siddhopant and his daughter also prostrated to them with reverence. Govindpant and Nirabai were thrilled at being reunited with their son. Their joy knew no bounds to learn of his marriage. Nirabai was impressed by the comeliness and humility of her daughter-in-law. Her delight was comparable only to that of Kousalya on meeting Vaidehi or Kunti on seeing Panchali. Embracing Siddhopant with gratitude, Govindpant thanked him profusely for making his son a householder. Siddhopant felt rather more fortunate now, on meeting such gracious souls, than when hearing the Lord's words in his dream. ▲

## BOOK REVIEWS



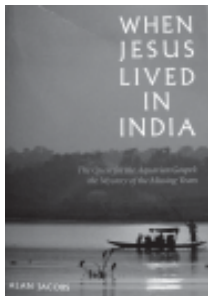
SWAMI KARPATRI: THE LINGA AND THE GREAT GODDESS. Edited by Jean Louis Gabin. Trans. by Gianni Pellegrini, Girish Chandra Tiwari & Vimal Mehra. Indica Books, D40/18, Godowlia, Varanasi 221001 UP. 2009. Rs875(HB), pp.634. ISBN: 81-86569-70-7 [www.indicabooks.com](http://www.indicabooks.com)

This book contains a brief biography of the life of Swami Karpatri (1907-1982) as well as recent (re)translations of two of his long articles: one on the significance of the *linga* and the other on the nature of the Great Goddess. He was a revered contemporary Sarasvati *sannyasin* in Sankaracarya's lineage and was a disciple of the greatly revered Swami Brahmananda Sarasvati. In him one found a blend of social reformism, political acumen, saintliness and learning. During his lifetime, he was a deep and prolific scholar who wrote over forty works. Swami was an active proponent of the traditional approach to *Sanatana Dharma*. Though a *sannyasin*, he propounded, and practised every Hindu rule regarding caste, food, pilgrimage, bathing in the *Ganga*, and fasting. In his teachings, Karpatri expounded both Advaitic wisdom as well as devotion to God with name and form, though he used to say that, compared to the formless *Brahman*, the level of reality of manifestation was inferior.

What makes this book intriguing is that although the noted French artist, musician, and spiritualist, Alain Danielou, originally translated nine of Swami's articles into French in the 1940s and revised these translations in 1992, the present book, providing English translations alongside the original Sanskrit *devanagari* text, reveals how these French translations are both inaccurate, incomplete, and even downright dishonest in that they present doctrines that are in total opposition to those contained in the original works of Karpatri. For instance, Swami had an all-embracing attitude and repeatedly declared that all paths, *jnana*, *bhakti*, *yoga*, non-dualism, Saivism, Vaishnavism, and Saktism, are complementary, like brothers born of the same Vedic mother. Danielou's translations depict Swami solely as a Saivite, degrading all



other paths. Danielou wrote that Karpatri founded the political party *Jana Sangh*, when he actually founded a political party, the *Ram Rajya Parishad*, which was opposed to the *Jana Sangh*. Danielou translated the term *linga* as a phallus, a sexual organ, an organ of urination – a translation that not only distorts Swami's thought, but totally misrepresents it. Karpatri wrote, "The *linga* is *Siva*; the unmanifested principle of manifestation; a sign, an indicator of the Highest Reality; the supreme God; the egg-shaped Reality as a symbol of the invisible universal *Brahman*." In other words, Karpatri's views were traditional and universal. Danielou wrote that *Siva* was a non-Aryan god, and that the *Vedas* originated from outside India when, in fact, Karpatri's views were just the opposite. Examples are numerous. Regarding social reformism, Karpatri fought against the government's interference in matters of religion. He struggled for Indian independence, world peace, the untouchables, acknowledging the sacred cow, the harmony of all creatures, and against the partition of India and against most of the tenets of the Arya Samaj such as their rejection of the *Puranas* and funeral rites. This book makes a fascinating read, well researched, and the two articles by Swami are informative, deep, and most illuminating. I found the book fascinating and unputdownable. — John Grimes



WHEN JESUS LIVED IN INDIA. The Quest for the Aquarian Gospel: the Mystery of the Missing Years by Alan Jacobs. Watkins Publishing, London. 2009. pp.216. £10.99. ISBN- 978-1-906787-17-2.

The story of Jesus in India has been called, 'The Tale That Won't Go Away' because of the interest it has generated in today's popular imagination. The connections between the great religions of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and

Buddhism, have become more apparent and many wonder if there is truly something to those 'missing years' of Jesus on which the Bible is silent.

Did the Lord Jesus Christ ever visit India and Tibet? The question seems bizarre and an impossible dream of wish-fulfilment rather than an actual possibility. However, this notion has been alive and discussed for over a thousand years. The Koran specifically states that Isa (the

Arabic form of the name of Jesus) did not die on the cross. The Ahmadiyya sect of Islam asserts that Jesus escaped the crucifixion as the Koran claims, and journeyed to Kashmir to escape the Romans and dwelt among the Jewish Lost Tribe of Manassah already known to have settled in Kashmir after they escaped the Assyrian persecution and expulsion of the Jews. The folk traditions of the Tibetan and Kashmiri peoples also contain tantalising stories of an unusual person who came from the west. The legend had been recharged by a purported discovery in the late nineteenth century by the Russian explorer, Nicolai Notovitch. He claimed to have found the Gospel of Isa which records the young Jesus' visit to Hemis monastery in Ladakh. The subject was given a new lease of life when a German, Dr. Holger Kersten, published, in the 1990s, the result of his extensive research in his *Jesus Lived in India*.

Alan Jacobs has investigated this gripping story fully using the archives of the great British Library, which contains the whole literature on this topic. He provides a detailed study of the scriptural and doctrinal parallels between Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism to draw conclusions about the universality of Truth and to see if the teachings of Jesus could have been influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism.

The book is a sober sifting of the facts and myths and comes to the conclusion that such a journey to India and Tibet is a possibility. He leaves it to the reader to come to his own conclusion, and has presented all the evidence for and against this 'Tale That Won't Go Away'. I was more impressed with Alan's restrained presentation of the 'facts' than the Kersten book with its somewhat wild assumptions based on skimpy information. Kersten desperately wants us to believe while Jacobs gives us a calm overview. — Christopher Quilkey



SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI'S MOKSHA: A HINDU ASTROLOGICAL PILGRIMAGE INTO THE LIFE AND MOKSHA OF SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI, by Sankara Bhagavadpada. Yogi Impressions Books Pvt. Ltd. 1711, Centre 1, World Trade Centre, Cuffe Parade, Mumbai -5, 2008. pp254, Rs295. ISBN 978-81-88479-40-5

*Sri Ramana Maharshi's Moksha: A Hindu Astrological Pilgrimage into the Life and Moksha of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, as the long

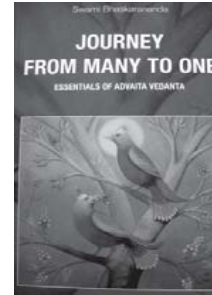
title suggests, takes on quite a challenge and leaves the reader wondering about the author's intended direction. Is this book about Sri Ramana Maharshi's life and liberation, about Vedic astrology, or about Hindu dharma and a personal spiritual journey? The title suggests an in-depth look at Sri Ramana's life but it never seems to come. Finally, after being repeatedly reminded that he or she is being taken on an 'astrological pilgrimage', the reader longs to know what on earth an *astrological pilgrimage* is and why he or she should want to be taken on one.

In fairness, it should be stated that there are moments of lucidity in this narrative. The author is moderately persuasive when he sets out on a particular theme and follows it through. The section on the basics of Vedic astrology, for example, has pedagogical merit. And the sections containing astrological analysis are convincing. One would have liked, however, to have had more detail as to the astrological justification for the significant rectification to Sri Ramana's birth time, an adjustment of more than 40 minutes. (B.V. Raman and Bhagavan's own family give a birth time of 1am, 30 December, 1879 — and thus, by most reckonings, a *tula lagna*, while the author moves it back to 12.19 am, giving a solid *kanya lagna*, and of course a very different *navamsa*). The author may have good astrological reason for opting to make such an amendment but any devotee familiar with Bhagavan's accepted *rasi* chart will want some explanation. Similarly, one would have liked more information regarding the author's chart for the death experience. Since the actual date is unknown, did the author arrive at the 16<sup>th</sup> July using astrological methods? And regrading Bhagavan's birth chart — is he working off the B.V. Raman chart given by ChinnaSwami in the 1940s? References please.

Finally, it could be said that as we live in a time of text saturation, the imperative for writers is to be word-economically. Regrettably, *A Hindu Astrological Pilgrimage* falls short in this regard. — S.Padmanabhan

JOURNEY FROM MANY TO ONE. Essentials of Advaita Vedanta by Swami Bhaskarananda. Viveka Press, Seattle. 2009. pp206, US\$15.95. ISBN: 978-1-884852-12-1 [vivekapress@vedanta-seattle.org](mailto:vivekapress@vedanta-seattle.org)

Advaita is so subtle, profound and complex that it is difficult to gain a clear grasp of its intricacies without guidance from a qualified teacher. Because of its arcane and radical philosophy it can be easily misunderstood



and misused as witnessed today with the juvenile approaches, that the proponents of Neo-Advaita advocate. The Ramakrishna Order is in the forefront of efforts to make available to the world the treasures of Hinduism and, in particular, the truths of Vedanta. We can be sure that any publication which comes from their press both in India and in the rest of the world has the imprint of authority.

Swami Bhaskarananda is a distinguished senior monk of the order and is the resident swami at the Seattle Vedanta Society. He has travelled widely, given innumerable lectures and has several books to his credit.

A book which seeks to present in an easily understandable form the ancient teaching of Advaita is fraught with challenges. Only a person who is fully conversant with its complexities and has a solid background in its language can deliver something of its richness without compromising its integrity. Swami Bhaskarananda is fully qualified for this task.

His presentation is a joy to read. It cuts to the core of Advaita and elucidates its principles with apt, fresh analogies and stories. The swami covers all the salient points helpful in understanding the nature of Brahman: the essential aspects of time (eternity), space (infinity) and causation (changelessness). The importance of a pure mind is intelligently explained and the conundrum of whether the world exists or not is convincingly presented. There is much food for reflection.

To quote an example from the swami's book about the Advaitic claim that the world has not really been created: "Let us suppose a magician has cast a hypnotic spell on his audience. By hypnotic suggestion he creates an apple tree. Under the spell of the magician's hypnotic powers the audience will see an apple tree. But the magician will not see it, since he is not under the spell of his own hypnotic power. Similarly *Isvara* or *Saguna Brahman* has created this world by His power of magic (*maya*). Therefore, from *Isvara's* point of view, this world has no real existence. It was never really created."

The book has been published by Viveka Press, Seattle and is somewhat costly for Indian readers. It is hoped that an Indian edition may become available soon for those who not only cannot afford the American price but find it difficult to obtain a bookshop copy. — T.V. Ramamurthy

# ASHRAM CALENDAR 2010

<b>Bhagavan's 130th Jayanthi</b>	Friday	1st January
Pongal	Thursday	14th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Friday	29th January
<b>Maha Sivaratri</b>	Friday	12th February
Sundaram Iyer Day	Friday	5th March
Telugu New Year Day	Tuesday	16th March
Sri Vidya Havan	Friday	19th March
Sri Rama Navami	Wednesday	24th March
Tamil New Year Day	Wednesday	14th April
<b>Bhagavan's Aradhana</b>	Tuesday	11th May
<b>Maha Puja (Mother's Aradhana)</b>	Sunday	6th June
Cow Lakshmi Day	Wednesday	23rd June
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Sunday	25th July
<b>Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day</b>	Wednesday	1st September
Navaratri Festival commences	Friday	8th October
Saraswati Puja	Saturday	16th October
Vijayadasami	Sunday	17th October
Deepavali	Friday	5th November
Karthigai Festival commences	Friday	12th November
<b>Karthigai Deepam</b>	Sunday	21st November
<b>Bhagavan's 131st Jayanthi</b>	Thursday	23rd December

## ASHRAM BULLETIN





### **Fifth Samvatsara (annual) *Abhishekam* (consecration) of the Sri Ramaneswara Temple (Sri Bhagavan's samadhi-shrine) and the Sri Matrubhuteswara Temple**

A Special Puja and Homam was conducted on Sunday, the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2009 at Sri Ramanasramam to commemorate the Special *Kumbhabhishekam* of Sri Ramaneswara and Sri Matrubhuteswara shrines which was performed on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2004. The programme included, among other things, Mahanyasam, Maha Ganapati Homam, Navagraha Homam culminating in Purnahuti and Maha Deeparadhana.

### **Karthikai Deepam**

Aside from Bhagavan's Jayanti, the highpoint of the year for many devotees is Karthikai Deepam, the festival of lights which is celebrated throughout Tamil Nadu during the month of Karthikai (November-December) when the moon is in conjunction with the earth and the star Krithika (the constellation of the Pleiades) is on the ascendant. This usually occurs on a full moon day. It is said to be one of the oldest festivals celebrated in the state, and holds a special place in the hearts of all Tamils. Lights are lit in homes throughout the state on the tenth day, Maha Deepam day. The lighted lamp is considered an auspicious symbol. It is believed to ward off evil forces and usher in prosperity and joy. The great fire lit on top of Arunachala commemorates the appearance of the Lord Siva as a *jothi sthambam*, an infinite pillar of light.

### **Veda Parayanam**

Each year now, as part of the Kartikai Deepam celebrations, a group of pundits who came especially for Deepam from various parts of Tamil Nadu, chanted the *Yajur Veda Ghana Parayana* and the *Sama Veda Parayana* at Bhagavan's samadhi-shrine from 7.15 to 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. respectively. The pundits chanted on all ten days starting from the day of the flag-hoisting at the Sri Arunachaleswara temple in the town until Deepam day, the 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

Sri Bhagavan took a deep interest in Vedic chanting and the ashram has continued this tradition and encouraged pundits to chant at the

samadhi. Many ashramites and devotees sat for the parayanas and enjoyed the felicity of the chanting by the accomplished pundits.

### **Maha Deepam**

On Tuesday the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2009, the day of Kartikai Deepam, ashramites and other devotees assembled in front of Sri Bhagavan's samadhi, and witnessed the lighting of the Holy Beacon on top of Arunachala at 6 p.m. Sri Bhagavan's *Arunachala Akshara Manamalai* was sung with great devotion.

Large numbers of pilgrims attended the festival particularly the last three days. It was said that over two million pilgrims attended the festival.

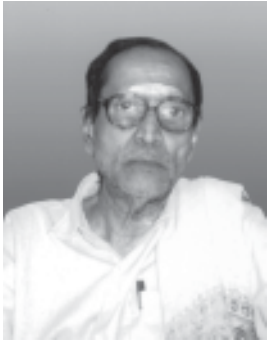
The Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation organised 350 special buses from different parts of the state to help people.

### **Obituaries**

**Smt.P.Syamala**, aged 58, a long time devotee of Bhagavan Ramana attained Arunachala *sayujya* on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2009 at Tiruapti. She was a retired lecturer teaching English at Tirupati. She regularly visited the Ashram with her family members since 1987. Quiet and reserved, she would invariably do *giri pradakshina* as often as possible and would spend many hours in the old meditation hall. She loved to spend time in Skandarsarma and Virupaksha cave and would make fine flower garlands for Bhagavan's picture in the Samadhi hall.



Syamalamma served many Ramana devotees and Sri Ramakrishna Math sadhus. Syamalamma was one of the founder members of Sri Ramana Kendra of Tirupati and would never miss Monday evening satsanghs of the Kendra. Deeply devoted to Bhagavan Ramana she would constantly think of Arunachala and introduced several devotees to the Ashram. Syamalamma is survived by her husband, a son and daughter, all of them deeply devoted to Bhagavan Ramana.



**Sri C.R. Rajamani** aged 87, passed away at this residence in Trichy on 11th November, while listening to *Aksharamana Malai*. He was in contact with the ashram since he was 22 years old and had been an ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan and Arunachala ever since. He was an avid reader of works of and on Sri Bhagavan and had collected every one of the ashram's publications. He went through these works with such passion and thoroughness that he was able

to recite portions from memory. Talking about Sri Bhagavan's philosophy and comparing it with other great spiritual works was his abiding activity during the last ten years of his life.

**Sri V.S.V. Mani**, aged 86, passed away suddenly in the night on the 21st November at Tirunelveli. He first came to Bhagavan as a boy of 12 in 1926 and had been a devotee for over seven decades. During his active career in banking he was Chairman of the Bank of Tamil Nadu. He helped many young men associated with the ashram to get a job and he financed the publication of some of Muruganar's books.

*Mountain Path* will publish sometime in 2010 the transcription of his 'Video Interview' about his life with Bhagavan. ▲

### Direct Path-Ramana Gyan

*Direct Path-Ramana Gyan* is a bi-monthly magazine published by the Ramana Kendra, Delhi. It provides articles about Sri Bhagavan's teachings and includes experiences of devotees. It is bilingual and carries an English and a Hindi version. The latter at present runs a serialisation of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* and is intended for the benefit Hindi speaking readers.

The cost per issue is Rs.10/-. Annual subscription is Rs.60/- within India, including postage charges. The annual international subscription is US\$25. Those interested in subscribing may please send their payment through cheque/demand draft payable to 'Ramana Kendra' to: The Hony. Secretary, Ramana Kendra, No.8, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003, India.