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Comparisons

70. ओ सद्व्यवानोपदेशः नमः
oṁ saddrśanopadeśṭre namaḥ
Prostration to the Teacher of Satdarshan, revealer of Reality.

In the years following 1922 Ulladu Narpadu (Forty Verses on Reality) came to be written at the request of devotees. Its translation in Sanskrit by Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni is named Sat-Darshan. There are commentaries on this work by Kapali Sastri, ‘WHO’, Sivaprakasam Pillai and Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan.

Just by his very presence Sri Ramana revealed and demonstrated the truth of sat-chit-ananda. To receive his darshan was to be in the presence of Sat.

71. ओ सद्भक्तव्रंदपरिवर्त्याय नमः
oṁ sadbhaktavrṇdparivrṛtyā namaḥ
Prostration to the One surrounded by bands of lovers of Truth.

Like a magnet the Sadguru Sri Ramana attracted more and more those sincere sadhakas in search of Truth. These true devotees or seekers surrounded him and opened their hearts to the endless stream of His Grace.

I murmured because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet. — Persian Proverb

We all look out and see in others what we think we want for ourselves. Comparisons, by definition, are made from the outside, but if we could see the world and life from behind the eyes of another it would become immediately obvious that what we wish for is very rarely what it seems.

We know all too well the notion, ‘If only I knew beforehand...if only I had more money...if only, if only’. This refrain punctuates our thoughts or feelings; it colours our wishes, our fears. Happy they who are content with their lot. It is so rare that when we experience a moment of complete fulfilment we cherish the memory. We live for such moments.

Easy indeed is Self-knowledge as our Sadguru assures us but to most of us the path to inner wisdom seems complex. It requires perseverance and a refusal to be defeated. We learn slowly but surely
that happiness is found not in possessing people or objects but in the state of pure being which needs nothing. There are many synonyms to denote the same state: 

- samadhi
- ecstasy
- satori
- fana
- grace
- hesychia
- revelation
- holiness.

Our minds have certain qualities which aid us in this quest. In all the traditions there are stories of the innocent who sets out in quest of wisdom, gold or a sacred object. In the end he returns to where he came from only to understand it was before his very eyes all the time. Why are we blind? It is a paradox that we first have to comprehend what we have lost before we can begin to appreciate what we have. To become what we are not before we can realise who we are.

We exercise the power of discrimination to see what is real and what is false. The mind compares ideas, feelings or objects to arrive at a conclusion. In philosophy it is called thesis, antithesis and synthesis. We begin with an observation or assumption, then compare it with its opposite; or perhaps we find something that is similar which aids us in arriving at a conclusion. Life would be impossible without this procedure. For example, how would we recognise what is up if we did not know what is down? How can we see light if there is no darkness to set it off? In this world where the laws of duality exist it is imperative to know who we are in any relationship, be it with a person or an object, otherwise we would be lost; some people become unhinged because they cannot function in this climate of distinction and are insensitive to others. Frozen by a view that has no counter-balance, they are blind to any other purpose than their own selfish view.

The strength of our discrimination (viveka) depends on the strength of our aspiration. Those who totally surrender may carry the heaviest burden. Or they may enjoy the lightest of journeys. Again, we do not know and it is presumptuous to judge others. If we follow a spiritual path we see all round us the admirable qualities of another and are given the option of either admiration or jealousy. We may praise them and vicariously rejoice in the virtue or sneer, deny and be depressed. We may through the power of comparison observe, see our shortcomings and be motivated to cultivate that virtue. We may also smugly think that ‘they’ are not as evolved as ourselves, much to our detriment for we can learn from everyone, without exception.

If we aspire to nurture spiritual wisdom, negative thinking is a dangerous spiral that has no end. Ill-judged comparisons will detract from the focus of attention on the subtle realm of inner transformation. We therefore discipline our minds and hearts to remain one-pointed. This is called 

- sadhana

We do not compare ourselves with others how ‘advanced’ they are; we accept whole-heartedly where we are now in the confidence that the higher power or the guru knows best. We delight in the grace of the guru and savour that the best is yet to come. There is of course the view that everything should be harsh or else it has no value. We pray for a reward but deny that we are worthy. Perhaps we should tell God that He has got it wrong and only the severest penance is acceptable?

There is the well-known Puranic story of the soul who was told he had but eight births left and was depressed. Another soul was told he had eighty births left and rejoiced in his good fortune. It all depends on our attitude. The modern analogy is the glass which is either half-full or half-empty depending on our inclination.

Whatever we most value, be it our 

- sadhana
- or our family or say, a prized possession, it will be the determining principle by which we live and the miracle of the universe is that whatever is necessary will naturally unfold at that moment for us to learn a lesson no matter how hard or seemingly impossible. The universe is not a static object; it responds and changes according to our thoughts and feelings. Just as dreams at night reflect the tensions and joys of the preceding day so also does the external world present us with a mirror. We create our own heaven and hell.

There is the well-known saying, “Comparisons are odious.” That may well be. For if our imaginings are impractical, we will be caught in the vicious quicksand of vanity, pride and anger. If we compare ourselves to our immediate superior or boss, and imagine what we would do in his place, though it has to be said, we would naturally do it much better, it is harmless; but when we believe that position is our right, or that we should be treated in the same measure, the comparison between our present position and his gives rise to
delusion. We will be in conflict not only with others who have a different view to say the least, but also with ourselves, because though we may be able to fool ourselves for much of the time, there is the small soft voice deep inside, which, if we care to listen will tell us we are much like the emperor without clothes. Comparisons then are necessary to know our place in the scheme of things.

Bhagavan taught that everything is predetermined in our lifeline. Our body, our mind and life-span are already fixed in a groove. Our one choice is whether to identify with our destiny or not. If we choose to surrender to the ‘will of God’ all will proceed without resistance. This is not a death sentence. Bhagavan has also taught that Isvara, the Divine Principle, has allotted to us that providence which will be of the greatest benefit for our release from the wheel of karma. We need to see it is unique and not compare our fate to another. For example, we may have just eaten and are satisfied. Do we then look enviously at another who is hungry and is now eating? We may but we know it would be unintelligent on a full stomach to start eating again. Does that mean the other person is better off because they are eating and we are not? It is an absurd proposition and yet based on this theme we do it all the time in subtle variation. When will we be satisfied and not look jealously over the boundary to another and see the grass is apparently greener? It is a fallacy for a person with arthritis to think that those who move freely are happy. The poor make the same mistake about the rich. Their miseries are not less, but merely different.

In the grand scheme of events if everything is as it should be, then why should we compare our destiny with another? Consider the evidence in our own lives when we suffered a painful accident which eventually turned out to be a blessing. It would be foolish then to judge circumstances as favourable or unfavourable simply because we do not know at our level of understanding what is good for us.

The solution is one-pointed devotion to a higher power. In our particular manifestation, it is Bhagavan or Arunachala. What this does is relieve us of the burden of trying to decide for ourselves based on our laughably poor store of information. We can never know all the origins and ramifications of our behaviour. They stretch back to the beginning of time. Like the blind men who feel the diverse parts of the elephant we each arrive at a different conclusion. When we behave as if we are in command, events tend to spin out of control. Surrender to what is happening right now is arduous and the mind easily revolts, for that is its nature to weave webs of what might be. We cannot stop its doing its work but what we can do is focus its ability. Living in the present seems to be an incarceration but actually it is the great release. It is full of possibility as we observe the moment without pre-conception.

In Advaita Vedanta we should be aware of the fundamental difference between the absolute (paramarthika) and the relative (vyavaharika). In the absolute sense there are no distinctions; in the relative the differences are endless. We do not measure up to Bhagavan because he exists on another plane of reality, turiya, the supreme reality. We cannot be like him, we can only be Him. As Sri Muruganar cautions us in his Ramana Tiruvembavai, “Let us not be deceived by deeming this Satchitananda Sivam Principle to be a man.” If we apply the same logic to our true nature there is no comparison. It is because we forget the absolute sense of ‘I’ we fall into the miasma of difference and compare our identification with a distinct name and form with that of other names and forms. How can we compare our sense of ‘I’ with another? It is impossible. Even on a relative level there is a clue: if someone advises us, “If I were you, I would do this,” this cannot be so because if that person were I, he would do exactly as I would do.

What does it mean that we do not compare what we are now with what we want in the future or were in the past? It means our mind does not move from the moment. It means we are in the centre as the world spins. Though we feel the effects of our actions we are unmoved by the manifestations which come and go. It is important to understand that Arunachala Ramana is not one numerically; it is one indivisibly. To be absorbed in Arunachala Ramana is not to transfer our identity, as if we travel through space and time. It is not a material unity, nor even a subtle one of mind with mind. It is alive in our Heart. That is why liberation (moksha) is instantaneous. Our task is to realise this.
Self-enquiry is ordinarily said to proceed in three steps. Firstly, the stream of thoughts in the mind is brought to a halt in order to bring the ‘I-thought’ into focus. The source of this ‘I-thought’ is then investigated to attain abidance in the Self. Next, the state of abidance in the Self is allowed to last as long as possible. The cycle is repeated till all the *vasanas* are eliminated, culminating in Liberation.

Of the three steps enumerated, the first one is plain enough to understand and follow. At any rate, it is soon found to be redundant. The third step requires no special skills since it is only a matter of holding on to what has been gained in the second step. So, if any difficulty is experienced with Self-enquiry, it is only with the second step of investigating the source of the ‘I-thought’. Many seekers find it difficult to understand the true nature of this step. It shall be our
endeavour here to delve into and obtain as clear a picture as possible of this crucial step.¹

Thought and Feeling

Our mind operates broadly on two planes of consciousness, namely, thought and feeling. To take an example, we all know what it feels to be angry. At such times, what we sense with our mind is the ‘feeling of anger’. When a Guru speaks to his disciples on the need to shun anger, by recounting its many evils, what occurs in the minds of those people is the ‘thought’ of anger. Thus, thought and feeling are entirely different things.²

‘Feeling’ may be said to be more intimate to us than ‘thought’. We can see this clearly from the fact that, generally speaking, we can change a thought quickly at will, but not so a feeling. While thought may be said to be ‘superficial’, being essentially confined to the the mind, feeling would somehow appear to run deeper in our being. Feeling is therefore said to belong to the category of experience, while thought is to that of knowledge.

I-thought and I-feeling

The I-thought and I-feeling occupy a central place in Self-enquiry, because the very purpose of Self-enquiry is to unveil the Self, which is our true ‘I’. As with any other thought-feeling pair, the I-feeling is more intimate to us than the I-thought. It means, of the two, the I-feeling is closer to our Self, and plays by far the greater role in the practice of Self-enquiry.³

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¹ When we try to explain matters closely related to the Self, we cannot avoid some degree of ambiguity. This is because the Self is non-dual, whereas all our analysis rests on dualistic concepts. Whenever advancement in understanding is obtained, it is only by pushing the anomalies and uncertainties to a yet higher level where they do not immediately bother us.

² It does not mean that they are necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, the thought of anger and the feeling of anger occur together when a person shouts angrily, “I don’t get angry for nothing.”

³ “Thoughts must cease … Feeling is the prime factor, and not reason.” Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, §24 of 4.2.1935 (p.21), 9/ed., 1994. “… the actual intuition is akin to feeling …” Talks, §28 (p.31).
unexpectedly. Another is when we offer our grateful thanks to a stranger, who had gone out of his way to help us in a crisis situation. The feeling of ‘I’ that we become aware of and experience in ourselves at such times is what we call the ‘I-feeling’. In the examples cited, this I-feeling plays a subordinate role to the I-thought which actually runs the proceedings. We may call it the ‘implicit’ I-feeling. We can see that even such a second-grade I-feeling occurs a little deeper in us than the I-thought we have when we make a matter-of-fact statement like “I like poetry better than prose.”

Once we have some inkling of what I-feeling is, we may be able to summon it at will with a little practice. The practice consists in merely turning our attention inwards, and looking for a feel of our subjective ‘I’. In other words, we straightaway intuit the I-feeling. It is an ‘explicit’ type of I-feeling, in which thought, if any, takes a mere secondary role. It is the only kind of I-feeling that is relevant in Self-enquiry. Hence from now on when we say ‘I-feeling’, we shall mean only the explicit kind.

Initially, we may find the I-feeling a little too elusive, but after some practice, will be able to hold it for a few moments at a time. Even at this early stage, we can see how remarkably different it is from the I-thought. We distinctly experience some kind of ‘abidance’ within us: we feel we are at one with where we belong, untouched by any objective feature of our existence. We get a feeling of being in something of a safe-house, beyond limits for intrusive thought. The world would seem to lie somewhere ‘out there’, and not in our immediate ken. It will appear there is nothing that can threaten our existence in that ‘pure’ state, and so we feel we ought to be eternal in that state. All these we experience within the brief span over which the ‘I-feeling’ lingers. The criss-crossing of any thoughts expressive of this state does not seem to hamper the feeling of our ‘abidance’. Such a state of abidance co-existing as a capsule alongside ‘non-intrusive’ thoughts, is what we shall call the ‘impure’ I-feeling. It is the key element in the take-off to Self-enquiry.

Although we have deduced the I-feeling as only a kind of I-thought, in which we identify ourselves mostly with the subjective ‘I’, we see that it is profoundly different from the usual, predicative type of I-thought, in which we identify ourselves with all kinds of insentient things. We shall therefore treat them as two separate and distinct entities. The I-thought may then be broadly characterised as being predicative, conceptual, of the nature of knowledge, and dualistic. The I-feeling, on the other hand, is largely subjective, intuitional, of the nature of experience, and unitary (or integral).

**The Essence of Self-enquiry Practice**

The second step in Self-enquiry, which is our main area of concern here, might be stated somewhat thus: “When we investigate the source of the I-thought (or ego), there results our spontaneous abidance in the Self.”

We are usually deceived by the simplicity of the statement. If we take it literally, we find it odd that we do not get the real non-dual experience, said to be characteristic of the Self, upon an attempted investigation of the I-thought. All that we get to is the I-feeling, with a few thoughts fluttering about. But, then, we arrived at the I-thought only after eliminating other thoughts, and now its investigation brings us back to some thoughts again. We wonder if we are to proceed once more with the question, “To whom are these thoughts?”, and if so how it would end.

The fact is that the statement of the second step is an over-simplification. Taken literally, it holds good only in the case of a very advanced sadhaka (to whom the one-step model of Self-enquiry applies). To the rest of us, the abidance in the Self can come only over a period of time, and not spontaneously. Alternatively, if we want to

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10 The investigation takes the form of the question, “Whence am I?” The question is put by the ego to itself. Hence it is equivalent to asking, “Whence is this I-thought?” *Cf. Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 1.12.1945, p.47, (1989).

11 The inclusion of ‘spontaneous’ is felt justified in view of the exclamatory ‘ayi’ in *Upadesa Saram*, v.19, and Sadhu Om’s interpretation of *Ulladu Narpadu*, v.30, in *The Path of Sri Ramana*, v.i., Ch.8, p.142.

12 *The Garland of Guru’s Sayings*, v.399. See Part One of the article for the meaning of the one-step model.
rely on the term ‘spontaneously’, then we have to take the statement in a different sense. Then the statement applies to practically all of us. We shall return to this point later.

Strictly speaking, for the practice of Self-enquiry, we do not need any more understanding than what has been given above of the I-feeling, and a general insight into the method as given in Part One. We can then, if we have normal levels of intuition, practise Self-enquiry to its logical end. The practice consists in merely holding on to the ‘abidance’ found in the I-feeling all the way, till, at long last, Realization is obtained. The state of Realization will be unmistakeable, and so we will know when we come to it. It lasts for some time, and then the former duality sets in. We have then to go through the cycle once again. Eventually, when all the vasanas are destroyed, we attain Liberation.

In case a sadhaka finds it beyond his capacity to intuit the I-feeling, he need not be disheartened. He can take to a vocal or mental japa of ‘I’, incessantly. His mind will then automatically catch the I-feeling within. It must be understood that the practice must be continued each time till the onset of I-feeling, which must then be held on to. Without it, merely indulging in the I-thought fleetingly, howsoever often, does not serve any purpose.

A useful suggestion at this juncture is that the seeker should not over-exert himself for obtaining or retaining the I-feeling. This is because when the mind gets active, intuition takes a back seat. Only intuition can bring in abidance. Folding up the analytical mind, and adopting a laid-back attitude, is what is needed to bring intuition into play. It is like withdrawing into the ‘now’ of the moment.

The practical-minded seeker can, therefore, straightaway plunge into practice on the basis of these indications. He has everything to gain and nothing to lose thereby. If, however, the seeker is one of an inquisitive type, who would not take a step forward before he understands the in and out of a thing, then he needs put himself to a little more study. In this cyber age, we may suppose, most seekers would belong to this category. We shall, for their sake, attempt a detailed analysis below.

**Identity of the I-feeling vis-à-vis the Self; Evolution and Involution**

When the unmanifest Self begins to manifest, its light issues out as ‘I’ or aham. We may refer to it as the ‘undifferentiated-I’. Bhagavan often refers to it as the ‘light of I—I’ (or ‘reflected light from the Self’). Sometimes he calls it ‘light of I’ in the sense of ‘the I that is light’. The Maya mode begins here.

The ‘undifferentiated-I’, upon further evolution, divides itself into what we may designate as the ‘particularised-I’ (also known as aham), and the object, idam. The two may be looked upon as the sentient and the insentient principles respectively. The particularised-I, by its very nature, seeks an object for its identity. So it grabs a part of the idam, such as the body, and superimposes itself on the latter forming the ‘ego’. The rest of the idam takes on the role of the ‘world’. The particularised-I, that now forms the sentient constituent of the ego, is what we have called the ‘subject-I’ (i.e., subjective ‘I’). The portion of idam constituting the insentient part of the ego, is called the ‘predicate’.

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13 “Thus it is sufficient if we cling to the feeling ‘I’ uninterruptedly till the very end.” *The Path of Sri Ramana* , Part One, Sri Sadhu Om, Sri Ramana Kshetra, Tiruvannamalai, Ch.7, p.138, (6/ed., 2005). The term ‘Realization’ is used in the sense of ‘Self-abidance’, as explained in Part One of the present article.

14 “Think ‘I’ ‘I’ ‘I’ and hold to that one thought to the exclusion of all others.” *Talks*, §266 (p.222). See also *Who am I?* §9; *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entries of 8.5.1946, 28.6.1946, 24.11.1946.

15 *Talks*, §205 (p.174).

16 *Talks*, §518 (p.500); §314 (p.275); §510 (p.493).

17 *Talks*, §307 (p.267).

18 *Talks*, §518 (p.500).

19 *Talks*, §314 (p.275). The terms ‘undifferentiated’ and ‘particularised’ have been adapted from Bhagavan’s explanation in §510 (p.493).

20 This entire cycle of evolution is said to occur every day in the trice of a moment when we awake from sleep (*Talks*, §314, p.275; §323, p.288). We are, however, not to consider it as taking place in time, but in the planes of consciousness. So, it is not as if at a certain point of time when the world appears, the Self or its other modes cease to exist. Time itself is non-existent in certain planes of consciousness.
In Self-enquiry, we aim to precisely reverse this process of evolution, by taking the consciousness up the scale — from the ego to the Self. We call it ‘involution’. Two important stages in this ascent are the subject-I (in the I-feeling) and the undifferentiated-I.

When we wish to investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively try to look for our Self, but it being too ‘remote’, we reach only the subject-I. It involves shifting of our attention that is presently locked in the predicate part of the ego, to the subject-I. While doing so, we do not find it necessary to identify what that predicate part is, since it may consist of many identities, all lying in a jumble. It suffices if we merely fix our attention in the direction of the subject-I. The shifting then occurs by itself, as desired.

Our abidance in the subject-I is at first accompanied by some thoughts. This is what we have called ‘the impure I-feeling’. From now on, our practice consists in merely holding on to the abidance found in it. The abidance becomes more and more intense and steady, as the practice goes on. As for the thoughts, we do not have to specifically try to control them. If we remain keen with the abidance, the thoughts (and with them the breath) will subside in due course. The control of thoughts was once necessary to arrive at the I-thought for investigating its source, but that purpose is now served with the onset of the I-feeling, and we have no more concern with either the presence or absence of thoughts.

In due course, we attain a perfect, unwavering abidance in the subject-I. Since this is tantamount to holding it in isolation from its predicate, the subject-I transpires to be the ‘particularised-I’ itself.

Our continued abidance, now in this particularised-I, amounts to its isolation from idam; and so, it being unstable in this condition, resolves itself into its cause, the undifferentiated-I. We thus arrive at abidance in the undifferentiated-I. Bhagavan considers this as an indispensable stage before Realization. He terms it therefore as the ‘foresetate of Realisation’, and refers to it often as the ‘transitional-I’. At times, he refers to it as ‘pure-I’ too.

When the undifferentiated-I is held steady, it itself is realised to be the Self. It is somewhat like this. The Self is like a person resting in the interior of his house. The undifferentiated-I is like the person standing at the front door intending to go out. The sadhaka is like a passer-by who can strike conversation with the person standing at the front door, but not with the one in the interior. If, now, the passer-by engages the person at the door in conversation long enough, the latter’s intention to go out is frustrated, and he becomes as good as the person resting in the house. In the same way, the urge of the undifferentiated-I to evolve as aham and idam is defeated by our constant attention to (or abidance in) it, and in absence of that urge, it is no different from the Self.

It is clear from the above, that the I-feeling has nothing to do with the true Self. But in parts of spiritual literature, the I-feeling is

21 “This is the only way, to go back by the same way by which you came.” Day by Day with Bhagavan, Entry of 27.12.1946, p.301, (1989).
22 “You are hazily aware of the Self. Pursue it.” Talks, §240 (p.193).
23 This is due to the steady eradication of the vasanas, as explained later, and the strengthening of the positive vasana of sadhana.
24 This is what makes the practice of Self-enquiry possible concurrently with other activity as a second rung of sadhana. Our mind can be active in other ways, even as we keep to our abidance. Such a parallel activity is not possible with meditation. Talks, §17 (p.11), §310 (p.268).
25 Talks, §62 (p.68) read with §518 (p.500).
26 “If the transitional I’ be realised the substratum is found and that leads to the goal.” Talks, §314, (p.275). The ‘substratum’ means the Self, ‘finding it’ is Realization, and the ‘goal’ is Liberation (See Part One of this article for the difference between Realization and Liberation). Bhagavan points out “This is the only passage to the Realisation of the Self … ” Talks, §323 (p.288).
27 “… the pure ‘I’ of the transitional stage must be held …” Talks, §314 (p.276).
28 “If … one senses it (sphurana or undifferentiated-I) continuosly and automatically it is Realization.” Talks, §62 (p.68).
29 It is analogous to Isvara in classical Vedanta. Isvara may be looked upon as Brahman with intent to create. If the intent is frustrated, then he is Brahman.
30 In the cosmic scale of evolution, Brahman, Isvara, Hiranyagarbha and Virat (Cosmic Consciousness) come in that order. During involvution effected by sadhana, we may therefore expect to visit these states in the reverse order. The subject-I, particularised-I and undifferentiated-I may thus be identified with Cosmic Consciousness, Hiranyagarbha and Isvara respectively. Cf. Talks, §323 (p.288).
identified with abidance in the Self. We have to understand that such passages are only simplified presentations. Else, we will be confronted with the anomaly that the Self, known to be beyond the mind, is being cognized by the mind. The fact that we need to expend effort to maintain the I-feeling, also shows that it cannot be a state of abidance in the Self, which is known to be effortless. Besides, Bhagavan has ruled out any connection between ‘feeling’ and the Self. Hence, the I-feeling must be understood as merely abidance in subject-I, and not the Self.

In general, whenever we see references to the Self in literature in a dualistic context, we might do well to take them as referring to a manifestation of the Self, (known in common as ‘I’, aham, naan or ‘pure-I’) such as the subject-I or undifferentiated-I, and not the true Self (otherwise called ‘I—I’, atma, taan, or ‘true-I’). The statement of step two of Self-enquiry we saw earlier, may therefore be understood (inclusive of its reference to ‘spontaneity’) to refer to a manifested form of the Self as far as a beginner is concerned.

Subconscious Processes in Self-enquiry
When we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively shift our attention from the predicate part of the ego to the subject-I. When we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively shift our attention from the predicate part of the ego to the subject-I. When we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively shift our attention from the predicate part of the ego to the subject-I. When we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively shift our attention from the predicate part of the ego to the subject-I. When we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively shift our attention from the predicate part of the ego to the subject-I. When we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively shift our attention from the predicate part of the ego to the subject-I. When we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively shift our attention from the predicate part of the ego to the subject-I. When we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively shift our attention from the predicate part of the ego to the subject-I.

These two parts of the ego are joined together by a ‘knot’, called the chit-jada-granthi. It consists of age-old vasanas, and belongs to the causal sphere. So, shifting of our attention from the predicate to the subject involves crossing of this causal zone by our intellect, the agent of action. Since the intellect cannot discern causal objects, this passage of the intellect through causal zone has been compared to the groping of one’s way in a dark room past obstacles towards a ticking clock (see Part One). It is thus that the knot is transited (‘transcended’) subconsciously.

When we attain abidance in the subject-I, the light of the subject-I falls on the vasanas, causing their annihilation to an extent. Since it is only a reflected light, its intensity is less as compared to the light of the true Self. Hence only the grosser of the vasanas are eliminated at this stage. In the subsequent stage of abidance in undifferentiated-I, the less gross vasanas start to be eliminated. When, finally the Self is realised, its direct light shines on the vasanas, and hence even the subtlest of vasanas start to be eliminated. Continued practice at these different stages eliminates all vasnas and leads to Liberation.

Concept of Sphurana
Sphurana stands for abidance in a manifestation of the Self (in the Maya mode), such as the subject-I or the undifferentiated-I. Sphurana is short for aham-sphurana, which means ‘shining forth of I’. It is a figurative way of referring to the seeker’s glimpsing of the ‘I’ (aham) during the said states of abidance. Thus, when we enter the I-feeling, we are said to have sphurana of the subject-I. A characteristic of sphurana is that it is cognized by the mind. So, sphurana has a semblance of non-duality in the form of abidance, and duality in the form of knowledge of the mind.

The concept of sphurana allows us to discuss abidance in subject-I and undifferentiated-I in common. It is advantageous, since, for all practical purposes, we as sadhakas do not have to distinguish between them any time. All that we do is merely keep holding our abidance, and it changes from subject-I to undifferentiated-I on its own. The subsequent abidance in the Self too follows on its own, except that a brief discontinuity will be encountered before this ultimate step.

31 “Pratyaksha [the Self] is very being and it is not feeling, etc.” Talks, §500 (p.481). “Pratyaksha is another name for the Self.” Day by Day with Bhagavan, Entry of 22.3.1946 afternoon, p.157.
32 Alternatively, this may be viewed as separation of the subject-I, which is presently superimposed on the predicate, from the latter by undoing the superimposition. The Katha Upanishad (II.3.17) famously compares it to the separation of the pith from the reed of Munja grass. Bhagavan terms it “sifting of the pure ‘I’ from the contaminated ‘I’.” The Talks, §266 (p.222). Muruganar puts it as, “in the heart, renounce the relative”. The Garland of Guru’s Sayings, v.415. Bhagavan considers this step as so central to Self-enquiry, as to say, “Arnavichara … consists in sifting the Reality from unreality.” Talks, §298 (p.261).
33 The Path of Sri Ramana, Ch.8, p.161.
35 “Apprehending it (the Self) even vaguely helps the extinction of the ego.” Talks, §80 (p.82).
The fact that the intellect is able to cognize the higher manifestations of ‘I’ in sphurana may be understood from two viewpoints. Firstly, as Bhagavan said quoting from Kaivalya Navaneeta, “Maya cannot obscure Sat (being) but it does obscure Chit and Ananda.” Hence the ‘being’ aspect of the Self is transparent to the intellect, and is realised as sphurana. Secondly, the intellect becomes subtler and subtler, as sadhana progresses.

Bhagavan wants us not to think of sphurana as something too far out of the ordinary. He assures us, “Sphurana is felt on several occasions, such as fear, excitement, etc.” In its pure form, it is said to occur immediately upon our waking from sleep for a brief moment. Bhagavan suggests holding on to it as a viable way to Realization. Sphurana is also said to be experienced in the brief interval between two consecutive thoughts.

Sphurana stays with us from the time we attain the impure I-feeling till we are on the verge of realizing the Self. It ensures that we never lose track of our goal, just as a dog that is in possession of its master’s scent, or a mountaineer with a hazy view of the distant peak, do not.

**Incentive to Practice**

A sound understanding of Self-enquiry is itself the best incentive to its practice. The knowledge that the vasanas start getting depleted from as early a stage as abidance in subject-I (I-feeling), enthuses us to proceed with hope even if we do not presently measure up to sky-high levels of aspiration. We feel optimistic that both our aspiration and practice will pick up as time passes. It behoves us to keep persevering and translate this hope into reality.

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This is the third part of the three-part series on “Suffering as Spiritual Catalyst”. I have traced here the arduous spiritual journey of an everyday housewife, her astral meeting with Sri Ramana, and her metamorphosis into Ramana Kiran, a being saturated with Ramana consciousness. In this new-found persona, the ill-treated and socially isolated Jaishree radiated peace, non-hatred towards the victimizers, and a joy-permeated aura.

How did Jaishree become metamorphosed into Ramana Kiran?

I wish to begin Jaishree’s story in her own words. This is the concluding paragraph of her self-reflexive ‘prose-poem’ entitled

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37 Talks, §100 (p.97). See also Self-enquiry, §39.
38 Self Enquiry, §11, p.9 (1999); The Path of Sri Ramana, Ch.8, p.158.
39 Talks, §62 (p.68).
40 Talks, §196, (p.162); §314 (p.275); §311 (p.271); §323 (p.288); §609 (p.564); §623 (p.586).
41 Talks, §609 (p.564); §286 (p.245); §314 (p.276).
"Spiritual Hysteria", written on the 17th of March 1996, which begins in blank verse but concludes as prose:

“This narrative of a victim of this affliction can make a case study for further research. Enjoying the secret happiness unrelated to anything in the world and always in a magnanimous spirit of sharing and giving, this victim, by name Ramana Kiran, wishes to unfold the fact of completeness, in the merging of the infection, the infected, the non-infected, the cause and effect, the doctor, the treatment and the cure into one whole. ‘Spiritual hysteria’ is only a part of this whole which is complete and perfect.

“Om Tat Sat Om…”

All of Jaishree’s literary outpourings are signed not with her name but as Ramana Kiran.

Jaishree was born into a Tamil Brahmin family in riot-torn Delhi. Her parents with their two daughters lived in Daryaganj in the heart of Old Delhi. Here in the 1940’s, Hindu and Muslim families lived cheek-by-jowl in very old streets like Balli Maran that go back to the Mughal times. Jaishree’s father was a journalist and her mother a housewife. The situation in the area had become very tense by November 1946 following the pre-partition riots all over the country. People reported mass killings and migrations into what would be Pakistan. It was their Muslim milkman who warned the family that riots would break out that night and they should escape from the area. The mother was in an advanced state of pregnancy with her third child. The couple desperately searched for refuge and a place where the child could be safely delivered. Finally they found asylum with a compassionate government servant who stipulated that the couple should leave within a month of the delivery. It was under these circumstances that Jaishree was born on 2nd of December, 1946. She was named Jaishree meaning victorious and auspicious since she had come through the partition riots, one of the most harrowing experiences that India has faced.

The life of this child continued to take unexpected twists and turns. In her seventh year, she fell ill with high fever that was diagnosed as endocarditis, a rare type of heart disease. For the next twenty years, Jaishree fought her frail physical condition with her enormous mental strength. Her doctor, S. Padmavati, who now runs a well-known heart institute in Delhi, wrote about Jaishree’s illness in medical journals as a unique case. The one thing that sustained Jaishree through those difficult years, when she had to be carried to her classroom in her father’s arms, was her complete faith in God. The efficacy of penicillin in curing serious heart condition had just been discovered and the wonder drug was extremely expensive. For one whole year she was given a regular painful injection to save her heart. Jaishree’s grandmother taught the child not to cry out in pain by repeatedly telling her, “Ask yourself, ‘Who is feeling pain?’” Observe the manner in which the nurse injects the needle into your arm and mentally detach yourself from that arm.” The child learnt to come to terms with physical suffering very early in her life. She told me that in her sixteenth year while meditating, she had the unusual experience of effortless levitation without striving for it. She found herself sitting in a cross-legged posture at least a couple of feet off the ground.

As she grew up, Jaishree seemed to have gotten over her illness. Although frail, she began to lead a normal life. Her spiritual experiences continued, although on a lower key. In 1969, she finished her post-graduation studies and joined as lecturer in a leading women’s college in Delhi. She was good-looking, young and romantic, as any girl in her early twenties would be.

She was married into a fairly affluent family in April, 1970. Her husband, who was studying for his chartered accountancy, was tall, handsome and charming, and Jaishree was deeply in love with him. She was a working woman who was proud of her housekeeping skills. This year can be said to mark the first step in the development of her ‘Spiritual Hysteria’. Her married life turned out to be a prolonged nightmare. Her habitual cheerfulness was submerged by the daily melodramas which became a part and parcel of her existence. One day Jaishree removed her mangal sutra (the symbol of her status as a married woman) and stood on the parapet walls of her marital home, ready to end her life. Something held her back, and the return to the everyday misery was the beginning of her spiritual transformation.
After giving birth to two girls, Jaishree suddenly resigned her lucrative job in 1983, to the horror of her in-laws who felt the loss of her pay packet. She began to interact with spiritual practitioners instead of holding the tuition classes that could have supplemented the family income. The in-laws retaliated and snatched her infant from her arms, saying that she suffered from hysteria and would harm the child.

It is important to point out here how reminiscent Jaishree's spiritual journey was to that of other women saints who had led unhappy married lives. Meera danced with abandon “with anklets on her feet” in her passion for her God Giridhar Gopal, with the dire consequence of being poisoned by her sister-in-law, probably in connivance with her husband. The fourteenth century saint Lal Ded of Kashmir writes in her vak that her mother-in-law never forgot to mix pebbles in her food until she gave up her marital home and walked out naked. Her contemporary, Bahina Bai, writes in her abhang how her husband routinely beat her for keeping company with saints. Chakkubai, another saint from Maharashtra, was tied up with ropes by her in-laws to prevent her from joining the warkari pilgrimage to Pandarpur. Such examples are legion. In every case among these women, marital ill-treatment acted as a catalyst for spiritual emergence that usually took the form of hysteria or apparent madness.

In 1995, Jaishree's mother presented her with a small copy of Ramana Maharshi's Direct Path, an enquiry into the Self by the self, centered on the one question “Who Am I?”. Jaishree became oblivious to the world around her and delved into Ramana's philosophy. Her journey towards her own centre earned for her the epithet of ‘madness’ from her husband and in-laws. In a ravenous fit of hunger, she would gobble up stale food meant to be thrown away. She would not bathe for days and yet her body emitted fragrance. It was also in these days that she began to hear a particular voice which she believed was that of Sri Ramana.

One of her early poems after a vision of Ramana, entitled “Oh, Arunachala Ramana, You Speak to me Now”, describes her experience:

One day you called me,
You gave me a vision of you as the grey mountains
Against the backdrop of a bright sky.
You appeared to me black and white
As if to reveal the darkness i was
And the light you were to me.

Arunachala, Arunachala, Arunachala
It resounded, shaking me from my slumber.
It seemed to echo my name
And i called out, “What is this?”
You thundered back, “Your final abode.”
i came to you with my guru lighting my path
i lay bare before you, unclothed,
Body shattered beyond recognition
Soul alone preserved in you.

O, Arunachala Ramana, you told me things that made no sense
You know why? My consciousness was you
i was your child, i took it so, they were
Fairy tales for me of futuristic dimension
i enjoyed, puzzled and shuddered.

Oh! Arunachala Ramana, You speak to me now,
What happened then?
My consciousness was dissolved in yours
You shook me hard, brought my senses out
Sent me down head first
Into the womb of mother earth
To live this life, the life of a living corpse
Sans the soul.
Oh! Arunachala Ramana
i hear you now loud and clear
Enough to penetrate the dense hard core.
i live in you, you in me
What is the difference between you and me?
Then and now and forever.
Oh! Arunachala Ramana
i hear, i hear
Soham, Soham, Soham.

Suddenly, one day in 1995, Jaishree left her marital home. For a week no one knew about her whereabouts. Jaishree had just boarded a train and fled to Ramanasramam. Jaishree did not want to go back to Delhi to face the challenges of everyday misery, but she had to leave because ashram rules did not permit an indefinite stay, nor would her marital family allow it for fear of social calumny. One of her daughters came to Tiruvannamalai to take her back.

Jaishree developed the powers of clairvoyance, clairaudience and the power to heal. By 1996 she was living on her own with her two children, now past their teens. They failed to come to terms with this woman who had an all-embracing love for humanity but failed to fulfill her role as mother and housewife. Her intense physical suffering due to mental anguish and her asthma, a psychosomatic illness, resulted in a leap of faith. All this was incomprehensible to her growing daughters, and unknowingly her spiritual journey left them with mental scars.

Socially isolated, Jaishree led a very rich inner life. Poetry in four languages began to pour forth. She had but a rudimentary knowledge of Tamil, her mother tongue, since she was born and bred in Delhi, but now mystical poetry in Tamil emanated from her, imbued with great richness of meaning. She also wrote in Sanskrit, with which she was barely acquainted, and in English and Hindi, both of which she knew well. She was fully established in the Ramana Kiran identity and divorced from her name and social standing.

Marital abuse cleansed Jaishree of her worldly vasanas or tendencies and turned her into a spiritually ‘possessed’ person. Spiritual hysteria was the esoteric outward manifestation of the seeker of the ‘transpersonal’ and the ‘transcendent’. I would therefore like to wrap up this brief narration of her life by quoting from Jaishree’s poem “Spiritual Hysteria”:

There is a dangerous infection
For which there is no cure
The nature of the infection is so dangerous
That the afflicted refuses to be treated…
The afflicted exhibit a funny expression of
Some secret inner bliss.
This delirious ‘blissful” state is sometimes
Outwardly violent and sometimes
Suppressed and calm to the point of inertia…
The symptoms are completely confusing
Though they have many in common, enough to diagnose
It is more akin to insanity than sanity
But when one comes to deal with them out of pity
It may appear or emerge as a fact that
It is the doctor who needs the asylum.
They become oblivious to the things around them
They have a faraway look of communing
The maddening factor to it all, is that their
Communication is received by some.
The condition of the afflicted gets topsy-turvy
from the very base of their living
The dull, stupid ones become bold, articulate and
present a determined vision.
The lively, intelligent and bright ones become
dull, silent and dumb, lethargic morons.
The two of both types ignore hygiene and health rules
Regarding attire and food
Make a pitiable and sometimes spiteful exhibition of themselves
Long period of mental take-off or apparent sleep
Opaque blank look, blissful dancing and
An indifferent state that only the
Deeply ignorant and empty-headed can do.
When they are ignored, cruelly teased and ill-treated
They are full of mirth and laughter…

Others of this type are those normal and ordinary householders
Who turn abnormal and extraordinary.
They turn illogical, irrational, unreasonable
At a spin or overnight,
Enlightened about something
quite incomprehensible to others.
They transform into singers, poets or writers breaking
Away the strings attached to their surroundings.
They begin to relate to the world upside down…

In 1997, Jaishree went to her in-laws’ house for the annual sraadh
(offering of worship and prayers to a dead ancestor) ceremony. On
her return to her own home, she developed a sickness from which
she never recovered. She had visions of her own past births and the
curious bonds that had bound her to her in-laws in a karmic cycle.
She spoke to me at length about her life, her karmic knowledge, and
the visions of Ramana.

An essay titled ‘Meaning of Vedanta’ provides a window into the
workings of her mind in the final stages of her life:

“One must steal jnana [true knowledge] from the darkness of
ajnana [spiritual ignorance]. This must be done in the most secret
manner without being caught by the public eye. The outer appearance
of the jnani (realized soul) should hide the inner being.”

Jaishree was radiant and joyous in her last days, in the world and
yet out of it. She was held to Arunachala by the umbilical cord of
pure devotion. One of her Tamil poems describes this relationship. I
shall attempt a translation of it:

Revealing your beauty, attracting, destroying
You vanished into me, Arunachala!
Reminding me of you, ridding me of my inebriation,
to conjoin me to you, you conspired, Arunachala!
As per your wish, you initiated me into vipasana
making me stay still in the state of ‘soham’, Arunachala!
Moulding me as per your wish, entering, revealing
You rendered me naked, O Arunachala!
To make me yours, separating me from self, becoming me
Placing me far away, you became my will, Arunachala!
Your penetrating gaze, making me a mud-doll, lighting me
with your light,
You made me your shadow, Arunachala!
To keep up your divine play, changing my relatives,
Separating me, you placed me in empty space2 blessing me
With transcendence.
Learning me your arts, maturing me, as I begin my outward drama,
Do you stand by and enjoy, Arunachala?
In your story production, which is the stage, who the actors,
What the parts,
Will you remind me, Arunachala?
Merging in you, being in one’s state, in one’s place

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1 The Tamil term she uses is ‘verum veli veettil’ which is a Vedantic expression for
shunyata (emptiness) or ‘ether’ as ‘ether/empty house’.

2 The Tamil term she uses is ‘verum veli veettil’ which is a Vedantic expression for
shunyata (emptiness) or ‘ether/empty house’.
Sky and earth coming together  
In the moon of that silence, in merger  
I offer my salutations to that Arunachala Ramana Kirana chaitanya.

Much of Jaishree’s prolific spiritual poems, some two hundred, have not seen the light of day. The Faucauldian phrase ‘Administration of Silence’\(^3\) perhaps best describes what Tamil patriarchal society did to unbridled women’s writings that were autobiographical in content if not in form. Their families, ashamed of these personal outpourings, destroyed them or they were ill preserved by those who failed to realise their value. The fate of Jaishree’s writings reminds me of an autobiographical reminiscence by Nartaki Ammal, who has been living in the vicinity of Ramanasramam for some decades and later served in the ashram for many years. She said that her foster mother, Ranganayaki Ammal, spun the charkha every day, made fiery political speeches during the freedom struggle, and ran an orphanage. She was also given to divine visions, and when Ramana Maharshi passed away, she removed her tali, the auspicious symbol of marriage, and took to wearing saffron despite the fact that her husband was living. Her family and her in-laws destroyed her writings in both Tamil and Telugu that were on psychic and spiritual themes, the Indian freedom struggle, and the plight of Tamil women. The destruction of personal diaries such as Ranganayaki Ammal’s and of the literary writings of spiritual women is encountered time and again in Tamil patriarchal society.

Jaishree’s prolific writings met with a similar fate. Her spiritual outpourings were not taken seriously by the people around her. It is only in her natal home that her poems are preserved and read with reverence every 19th of January, on her death anniversary.

It is hoped that the publication of this article will serve in some measure to help understand the spiritual journey of the many women, both saints and housewives like Jaishree, for whom suffering has served as a spiritual catalyst.

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\(^3\) Silence for Foucault ranged “from an oppressive-dominant silence to a more positive enigmatic-aesthetic silence.”
A brief sketch of my early life is necessary to show how Sri Bhagavan dragged me to His holy presence.

I was born at Mayavaram and from my 14th year, I had a religious turn of mind. I was then performing puja, repeating mantras and reading almost all religious books on Advaita as well as the *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad Gita*. My ardent desire from my childhood was to become an advaitin and I used to sit before Swami Vivekananda's picture in tears praying that I might be blessed enough to have the darshan of a *jivanmukta* in this life itself.

My first guru was one Murugappa Desikar at Tiruchengodu, who initiated me into the meditation between the eyebrows in the year 1922. I practised it three times a day, each time for one hour, besides my usual pujas. After practising this for some time I developed a sort of a brain fag and a discomfort in the mind. At this time one Swayamprakasa Yogini Ammal, who had done penance for 12 years in the Himalayas, came to our house at my father's invitation. My father, the late K.Gopala Pillai, was a police-inspector and was very religious. My father and the yogini had some spiritual discussions in which I wanted to join but my father refused to allow me to take part on the grounds that I was too young. I became vexed and was greatly disappointed. When the Yogini Ammal was alone, I narrated to her my spiritual life and experiences and prayed for her guidance. She was immensely pleased with me and said that meditation between the eyebrows might sometimes lead to insanity. Meditation must be practised in the heart. She was good enough to initiate me into the practice of *rupa dhyana* of Sri Venkatachalapathi. Further she was kind enough to ask my father to help me in all my spiritual pursuits.

The third guru was one Mahanmiyamachi Swamiar, who lived in one of the caves on the slope of the hill at Tiruchengodu. I learnt about Sri Bhagavan from him. My father and I would visit the Swamiar once a week. When I went to his Ashram one day, I found he was absent, as it happened, for three weeks. After his return I asked him where he had been all these days. He said that he had been to Tiruvannamalai and had the great fortune to have the darshan of one great *jivanmukta* by name Sri Ramana Maharshi, who spoke a few words to him. Darshan of such a great soul will entitle a man to have no births hereafter. I was astonished, and from then on the desire to go to Tiruvannamalai became an obsession. I was then studying F.A. class in the Municipal College, Salem. Four months elapsed. To my great surprise my father was transferred from Tiruchengodu to Tiruvannamalai as inspector of police in the year 1926. I was perplexed, not knowing what to do. My desire to go to Tiruvannamalai was so great that I approached my father and requested him to permit me to discontinue my studies and go with him to Tiruvannamalai to have Sri Bhagavan's darshan on the pretext that I was weak in mathematics and told my father that next year I would join Sri Meenakshi College at Chidambaram taking history as my optional subject. I was expecting a refusal because no father would allow his son to waste one year of study. But wonder of wonders, Sri Bhagavan's grace was there. My father willingly granted my request and permitted me to accompany him to Tiruvannamalai.

With my father and other members of the family I left Tiruchengodu for Tiruvannamalai. At Katpadi we had to change from broad gauge to meter gauge. Soon after boarding the train, I felt half a sleep and half awake. In that state I had the following vision. “I travel to Tiruvannamalai enquiring the way and came to a place where there was a hut. Inside the hut I saw a tall gentleman lying on a bench and before him there was a *kummudi* (water pot). As soon as I entered the hut there was a blaze of *jyothi* (light) in the *kummudi*.” I woke up.

Soon after arriving in Tiruvannamalai, without informing anybody even my beloved father, I enquired the way to Ramanasramam and arrived there with some difficulty. When I entered the Ashram, to my astonishment I saw the same hut, the same tall gentleman, except that he was sitting on the bench and there was a *kummudi* in front of him as I saw in the vision. I prostrated before him and he immediately asked me, “When did you come?” and “How is your right hand?”. Wonder of wonders! There was absolutely no chance of Sri Bhagavan knowing about my fractured right hand. Further, the very first question put to me by Sri Bhagavan shows he knew of my coming. He nodded his head and...
by a gesture asked me to sit. I sat before His Holy Presence for one hour and then left after taking leave of him. He simply nodded with a smile. My first contact with him was during an hour’s stay in His Holy Presence which gave me a perfect calmness, peace of mind and coolness of nerves, while the body felt light as a straw.

From that day onwards my contact with Him from 1926 to 1950 was continuous and He has done me a lot of good for my spiritual progress and completely changed my outlook on this world and I became a pure advaitin. By His grace I was able to practise His method of *atma vichara*. He cleared all my doubts then and there by His profound silence and by quotations from various scriptures.

My whole family was devoted to Sri Bhagavan. We had a lot of experiences and miracles. It is sufficient to quote two instances only to show Sri Bhagavan’s greatness, omnipotence and His supreme pure consciousness (*sabaja samadhi state*) though He moved among us as an ordinary man for all outward appearances. I think it was somewhere in the year 1935 or 1936 I put a question to Sri Bhagavan in the early morning. “What is the nature and state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*?” He kept quiet. I wondered why I had put this question. In the evening I practised His method of self enquiry before His Presence very intensively. My mind slowly became thought-free by the incessant enquiry of “Who am I?” and slowly the mind began to meditate on the ‘I’ thought alone subjectively. The plunge started and the mind became introspective going deeper and deeper meditating on the ‘I’ thought. The heart is felt by a soft vibration and the breathing had become very shallow. The mind tried to drag me outward but at that moment suddenly some power pulled me inside completely and as a result of it the ego toppled down. At that very moment the body and world consciousness disappeared totally and in their place there was an expansiveness with the deep ‘I’ consciousness coupled with an indescribable bliss which cannot be expressed in words. I woke up from that supreme experience by the sound of Sri Bhagavan’s cough. There was no one in the hall except Sri Bhagavan massaging His knees. Bhagavan said “Come, we shall have our food”. I felt a supreme peace of mind. After the meal we returned to the hall and Bhagavan asked me “What is your experience?”. I narrated the whole of my experience. Then Sri Bhagavan said that this is the state to be attained by constant practise of *atma vichara* and after attaining that state one must go on practising it continuously till it becomes *sabaja*. He quoted from various scriptures about this supreme state.

Another instance was that of saving my sister who was slowly sinking to her death due to congestion of the brain. She had now become unconscious. Doctors tried their best and declared there was no chance of recovery and asked my father to inform all our relatives. My mother, who was very devoted to Sri Bhagavan, shouted amidst her crying, “O Bhagavan, we have just left your Holy Presence, what a calamity! Save my daughter!” Immediately my mother saw Sri Bhagavan passing by the side of my sister with His kamandalam (water pot). At once my sister woke up as if from sleep and asked for water.

Sri Bhagavan, who had no knowledge of any scriptures and had no guru to initiate him, attained self realisation by going through the fear of death in His 16th year. He is a born *jnani* and belonged to the highest type of *jivanmukta* known as *atyasrami*. Such *jnatis* appear rarely in the world to teach some forgotten truth. Bhagavan revealed the direct method of *atma vichara*, contrary to the traditional method of *sravana, manna and nididhyasana*. It requires no restrictions whatsoever and can be practised by all irrespective of caste or creed.

Sri Bhagavan even as an embodied soul moved with us as pure consciousness for 54 years and He is still living amongst us and His Presence is felt very much by all sincere devotees. This is a fact of experience. As Thirumular says that the *jnani*’s influence at the place of His samadhi lasts for a thousand years, so the present Ramanasramam is the real abode of Sri Bhagavan where He is potently present always as pure and absolute consciousness even though He is omnipresent and omniscient, shedding His Grace on all His devotees and visitors.

Devotees and visitors are requested to avail of this golden opportunity by visiting Bhagavan’s abode, the present Sri Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai and receive His abundant Grace. A visit will surely convince anybody.
The Hindu tradition which is often compared to a banyan tree links disparate gods, temples, traditions, philosophies, cosmology, causality, liberation, even geographic landscapes into a unified, syncretic whole through one concept: ‘law, action, karma.’ Despite, or perhaps because of, karma’s ubiquity, its capacity of being, or seeming to be, everywhere at the same time, the concept is not easily defined. Further, flowing from the idea of karma naturally emerge the concepts of samskara and vasana.

There are no English words with the exact connotation of the words ‘karma, samskara, and vasana’. They are the concept(s) which seek to explain and resolve the mystery of how all actions become potencies and how the individual perpetuates its seeming existence.

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and eventually, its liberation. Though in the physical universe it is the inexorable cosmic law that every cause produces an effect and in turn, each effect becomes a cause, the exact modus operandi of karma of individuals, mankind and the cosmos itself, is shrouded in darkness.

“Sri Bhagavan was uncompromising in his teaching that whatever is to happen will happen, while at the same time he taught that whatever happens is due to prarabdha, a man’s balance-sheet of destiny acting according to so rigorous a law of cause and effect that even the word ‘justice’ seems too sentimental to express it.”

It is by this concept, which Sri Ramana upheld at the empirical level, that the Advaita doctrine of the causal body (karana-sarira or bija-atman) contains all the potential, dynamic forces that constitute an individual’s personality and is responsible for all one’s actions and reactions. Further, samskaras and vasanas are thought of, not as static impressions like the impression of a stamp on paper, but dynamic forces.

According to Indian philosophy, the doctrine of karma (from the Sanskrit ‘kr’ meaning ‘to act, do, make’) implies the idea of cause and effect. As one sows, so shall one reap, or, to put it in modern language, ‘what goes around, comes around’. At the experiential level, there are no accidents, nothing chaotic or capricious. Further, karma includes both an action and its result. Not only does every action produce its appropriate consequence but it also forms and ‘perfumes’ one’s character. That is, it leaves behind perfumed traces which become embedded as seeds that act as a repository of past experiences. These karmic seeds come to fruition at a later time. The power which drives these seeds is called vasana.

Though they are often used as synonyms, the terms ‘samskara’ and ‘vasana’ have subtle different meanings. Samskara, from the Sanskrit ‘sam’ + (s)kr meaning ‘put together’ or ‘accumulated’, are pre-natal or innate tendencies, predispositions, impressions of which vasanas, from the Sanskrit ‘vas’ meaning ‘to dwell’, ‘to stay’, ‘to perfume’, are the latent, subtle manifestation of these past tendencies and impressions, potential and habitual, in this life. Actions (karma) are said to produce samskaras (latent impressions) that lead to vasanas (tendencies). These produce thoughts (vrtti) that lead to actions. Entrained habits are formed. Thus, the wheel of samsara revolves.

Samskaras are subtle imprints that are made in the mind-stuff (citta) whenever one does an action. Impressions are not memories. Memories are formed from impressions just as a photograph is developed from a negative. Generally, a person only retains memories from recent impressions. Yet, we have countless impressions (samskaras) from many, many lives. Most of these impressions no longer have memories associated with them. In other words, the impressions (samskaras) from many lifetimes affect us but we do not generally know how or why they do because we have no recollection of the actions that caused the impressions. The effect of a samskara is called a vasana. Vasanas are tendencies. In other words, vasanas are the inclinations formed from our impressions (samskaras). They are mental urges, desires, and feelings. Further, unlike samskaras, vasanas (tendencies) are readily identifiable. As well, ponder deeply the fact that vasanaksaya (destruction of one’s tendencies) is a well-known, oft-quoted description of liberation (moksa), but the phrase ‘samsanaksaya’ is never used.

If the mind becomes introverted through enquiry into the source of aham-vrtti, the vasanas become extinct. The light of the Self falls on the vasanas and produces the phenomenon of reflection we call the mind. Thus, when the vasanas become extinct the mind also disappears, being absorbed into the light of the one reality, the Heart.

Thoughts are only vasanas (predispositions), accumulated in innumerable births before. Their annihilation is the aim. The state free from vasanas is the primal state and eternal state of purity.

The sight of an object, the thinking of a thought, the performance of an act, the saying of a single word, leave a trace in an individual that lasts beyond the present time, leaving an imprint in the subconscious mind, which then colour all of life, one’s nature, responses, states of mind and attitudes. This subconscious imprint is called a samskara. The character of

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a person, one’s attitudes, moral or mental status, talents, likes and dislikes, desires, thoughts, all are determined by one’s samskaras, which are the product of one’s past actions. Actions done with good intent lead to a propitious rebirth in favourable conditions whereas those done with evil intent lead to a rebirth under unfavourable conditions. Every act must have its consequences; this is a universal law. The samskaras and vasanas transmigrate from birth to birth, being never lost, and as driving forces, colour and motivate one’s attitudes and future actions. Bhagavan Ramana said there are two kinds of vasanas or mental habits: (1) bandha hetuh, causing bondage for the ignorant, and (2) bhoga hetuh, giving enjoyment for the wise. The latter do not obstruct self-realisation.5

Another way to describe these two vital concepts is that a samskara is an impression or groove created in the mind from a fluctuation or thought (vrtti). A vasana is a strong groove (habit pattern) created in the mind by repeated and strengthened samskaras. One’s samskaras and vasanas are said to be stored in the causal body. This is the seed that has the momentum to be reincarnated again and again. One changes the momentum of one’s karma by changing one’s desires, thoughts, and actions, that then sow new seeds or samskaras and vasanas. The impressions stored in the causal body then lead one in new directions, giving new direction to one’s desires, thoughts and actions.

“Bhagavan: Effortless and choiceless awareness is our real nature. If we can attain it or be in that state, it is all right. But one cannot reach it without effort, the effort of deliberate meditation. All the age-long vasanas carry the mind outward and turn it to external objects. All such thoughts have to be given up and the mind turned inward. For that, effort is necessary for most people.”6

Small desires such as the desire to eat, drink and sleep and attend to calls of nature, though these may also be classed among desires, can be safely satisfied. They will not implant vasanas in your mind, necessitating further birth. Those activities are necessary to carry on life and are not likely to develop or leave behind vasanas or tendencies. As a general rule, there is no harm in satisfying a desire where the satisfaction will not lead to further desires by creating vasanas in the mind.

In summary: every action that one does, leaves an impression within oneself, and is called a samskara. These samskaras accumulate to form vasanas, attributes, which are carried forward from one life to another. For example, you might have a natural inclination for arts, an inborn interest for which you cannot find a reason. You might even be born into a family that encourages art. All these are effects of your vasanas, from previous life. Understanding these natural inclinations (vasanas), is a requisite to eliminate them. Because, only when these vasanas are uprooted, can bliss descend. Vasanas are very deep rooted and subtle. The key to elimination of vasanas, is detachment. ▲

Grace

Ana Callan

For years, Ramana sat yielding to the flow of God, unyielding to the forces of the world that come and go so when his family arrived to take him home, He said, I am already home not in words or action but by sitting like his mountain Lord, immovable and strong until his family let go of holding on and they sat together glorying in the forgotten and true familiar face of God.

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5 Ibid., §515. 17th September, 1938.
Verse 28

As one dives into water to recover something fallen into it, so should the sadhaka (spiritual aspirant), dive into himself, controlling speech and breath, with a keen mind, and find the source from which ego arises and thereby know That (the Self)

Commentary

The sadhaka is here described as ‘diving inside’, with the one-pointed mind directed inward in quest of the origin of the ego-sense. The simile is at once striking and self-explanatory. Imagine a deep well into which a valuable ornament has fallen. First, you go to the well and look intently in with wide-open eyes and the whole mind completely engaged. Other than the eyes, the other sense organs do not

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine Ramanodhayam, dedicated to Bhagavan.
function here; in fact, all of them have merged with the eye. Sekkizhar’s *Periyapuranam* describes the state of Sundaramurthy Nayanar in the sanctum sanctorum of the Lord Nataraja temple. Sekkizhar says that the faculties of all the five senses themselves have been taken up by the eyes. They have been drinking the nectar of Siva’s magnificent dance. The saint experiences total bliss (*ananda*). Likewise, in the intense search for the fallen object, sounds are not heard; breathing automatically slows down; the mind is gripped by the simple thought of locating the ornament. The surface of the water also has to be still if we are to locate the fallen object with our eyes. In a similar manner, the energetic quest for the lost Self takes place. The jewel is hidden deep in the well of consciousness. The outward consciousness is like the upper surface of a water reservoir that is not still but disturbed by the ripples of the mind (*manas*) and intellect (*buddhi*). To reach a ripple-free place that smooths the progress of our quest, we have to dive deep within.

Diving inside is a difficult technique. You can neither indulge in speaking while diving into deep waters; nor can you have a normal inhalation and exhalation of breathing. The term ‘diving inside’ refers to the place identified as the spiritual Heart from where the ego arises. The purpose of mentioning the Heart is only to indicate that the mind must be turned away from the external world towards the Self, resident in the Heart. Turning the mind inward means the engaging the whole mind in the quest, without being diverted by thoughts of the world. It is only for convenience that we mention that the place of the Self is the Heart. In truth, the Self itself is the Heart.

This quest, turning the mind inward means the outright rejection of the entire external world and its objects. When you persist in the quest, the thoughts stop and the breath automatically stops too. Forced *pranayama* is unnecessary as it develops naturally during the quest. When the myriad thoughts become telescoped into one-pointedness, almost imperceptibly, the breath slows down and becomes almost imperceptible. Elaborating further on the analogy of the search for the jewel in the well — after clearly locating it, you close those very eyes which were originally kept open in the search. Then you hold your breath and dive directly to the bottom, recover the lost jewel and return to the surface. Similarly, in the search for the Self, you first locate the state where thoughts have died away, knowing that this is not the final state. It is Consciousness expressing itself without thought. By enquiring intently ‘Who am I’ we trace the origin of the ego, sink into stillness and become one with It. We realise the truth of Existence, our natural state. This is *atma vichara* as taught by Bhagavan.

Turning the mind inward is the means that leads to the destruction of the mind. For this, *prana*, (vital force) should be withdrawn from the body and incorporated in its source the mind, so that the later will have the necessary power (*sakti*) to dive within. In fact, the *sadhana* requires the temporary reduction of the body to a corpse-like state. This has been emphatically stated by Bhagavan, with the word purposely added by him at the end of the stanza. Here Bhagavan mentions the suspension of the breath, as an aid to the diving into the Heart; without the breath’s suspension, the mind will not leave the identification and therefore bondage to the body, and the ‘diving within’ may not take place.

Bhagavan taught that it is not necessary to resort to active breath-control (*pranayama*) for the purpose of diving within. What he said was that if the mind is deeply imbued with the resolve to know the Self, the breath will subside of its own accord, without any specific effort. There is a special expedient mentioned by Bhagavan for the suspension of mind and that is as a witness to observe the breathing process without trying to interfere and the breath will slow down or stop effortlessly.

Aside from the jewel in the well-bottom, Bhagavan has also given the analogy of the pearl diver who, to facilitate reaching the very depths of the sea, ties a heavy stone to his waist that helps in the dive to the greatest depth. That ballast which helps the aspirant sink to the ultimate depth within himself is *vairagya* (renunciation or dispassion). One-pointedness and *vairagya* are powerful instruments for strengthening the mind, which otherwise cannot reach the Heart. Actually the two are not separate, but one and the same. Due to myriad thoughts continuously arising and passing across the mind, it loses its moorings and is unable to reach the Self and abide in It. We need to strengthen the mind with *vairagya*. A person who has made
a firm resolve to experience the Self, to the exclusion of phenomenal pleasures, is styled as dheera or ‘valorous one’. Bhagavan himself has explained that valour consists of the syllables dbi meaning this intellect and r meaning the power of controlling the thoughts. We should keep the intellect firmly focused on the goal, so that the mind is not diverted.

Bhagavan has also stated that if the mind remains sufficiently fixed on the goal, then a greater divine power emerges from within. It takes possession of the questing mind and directs it into the Heart. Those with a purified mind and who readily surrender without reservation to this power will thereby be given the experience of the Self. The unripe ones will generally resist this power and turn outward. Therefore, it is necessary to ripen the mind and prepare it for the quest, by means of devotion of God or better still, to the Self by discrimination through the exercise of vairagya.

Bhagavan elsewhere has given another analogy for the quest: the dog that has been separated from its master. The dog, intent on rejoining its master, follows his footsteps by tracing him through his specific scent and thus finally is reunited with its master. In sadhana the ego-sense is itself the scent or clue to the location of the Self; the sadhaka is the dog, the God is the master and atma vichara is the faculty of scent-tracing.

The resolve to find the end-experience (the Self) is devotion, which is the very essence of sadhana. The intense devotion culminating as love, will itself confer the experience of the Self; this has been shown in a simple verse in Tamil, referred by Bhagavan in answer to a query by a devotee as to who or what is the real Ramana. In that verse, after clarifying that the real Ramana is not a person but Arunachala Ramana, Bhagavan states in the latter portion of the verse that by intense love, the mind melts and unites with the Heart and there the Sri Arunachala Ramana will shine as the Self.1


FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Quest

Chapter Five

Lucia Osborne

Swami Ramdas and Incantation

Swami Ramdas followed the path of devotion. He was a bhakta who throughout his life adopted the invocation of ‘Sri Ram, jay Ram, jay jaya Ram OM, Sri Rama jaya Ram jay jaya Ram OM.”

A French journalist and writer, Arnaud Desjardin, came to Tiruvannamalai with his wife and child. They stayed with us. After a week or so they were proceeding to Anandashram, the abode of Swami Ramdas and Mother Krishnabai. Arthur thought I needed a holiday from the samsara of housekeeping, including the many visitors who came and feeding some who could not eat food hot with chillies which was all the ashram provided at the time. It would be a good idea if I went with the Desjardins in their caravan-car which was like a little house on wheels. Swami Ramdas had written a foreword to Arthur’s book The Incredible Sai Baba of Shirdi and invited us to visit him. On the way Arnaud asked several people the directions because

Lucia Osborne was married to Arthur Osborne, the founder of The Mountain Path. She was editor of the magazine from 1970 to 1973.
if two agreed then it would be wise to follow. “To oblige they might tell you anything” he said.

A beaming Swami Ramdas greeted us and put us immediately at our ease. He seemed completely without guile, a squat figure past middle age, full of joy. A devotee from Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry sent a desperate letter to Swami Ramdas asking for secrecy. He read it out to all present. To Mother Krishnabai he was literally all in all. A raconteur *par excellence* he told two of us sitting in his room some story which made us burst out laughing. At this moment Mother Krishnabai came into the room and told him reproachfully: “Again you are making them laugh.” “If not they will be meditating all day,” was his retort. She epitomized love through service. Swami Ramdas told us a characteristic story about her. A poor man came to her complaining of his abject poverty. She gave him a cow from the Ashram. A few days later he came back complaining that now he had a cow but no shed for her. So she gave him the materials to build one. A few days later he came back complaining that he had no fodder for the cow. So she offered him daily fodder. A few days later he came again and said: “Mataji, now I have a cow, a shed for her and daily fodder but nobody to buy the milk,” so it ended up by the Ashram buying his milk. “We can always use a little more,” she assured him.

The invocation ‘Sri Ram jay Ram jay jaya Ram Om...’ was being chanted at the Ashram from morning till night by devotees in relays. They were also asked by Krishnabai to write it out up to one hundred thousand times or more.

Swami Ramdas, who always spoke about himself in the third person, describes how he came to Sri Ramana Maharshi.

“One day the kind *sadhus* took Ramdas for the *darshan* of a famous saint of the place Arunachala Hill, Tiruvannamalai, by name Sri Ramana Maharshi. His ashram was at the foot of Arunachala. It was a thatched shed. Both of us entered the ashram and prostrated at the holy feet of the saint. He was young but there was on his face a calmness and in his large eyes a passionless look of tenderness which cast a spell of peace and joy on all those who came to him. Ramdas was informed that the saint knew English so he addressed him thus:
Maharaj, there stands before you a humble slave. Have pity on him. His only prayer to you is to give him your blessing.”

The Maharshi turned his beautiful eyes towards Ramdas and looked intensely for a few minutes into his eyes as though he was pouring into Ramdas his blessing, then nodded his head to say he had blessed. A thrill of inexpressible joy coursed through the frame of Ramdas, his whole body quivering like a leaf in the breeze. The Maharshi did not speak a word.

Now Ramdas desired to remain in solitude. From there Ramdas went straight to the Arunachala Hill, selected a small cave and remained there for twenty days, living on a meal of rice boiled without salt. Day and night he was repeating the Ram Mantra without a break. After twenty days when Ramdas came out of the cave one morning he saw the light of God-Ram everywhere. The entire landscape changed; all was Ram, nothing but Rama wherever Ramdas looked. Everything was Rama — vivid, rapturous, marvelous — the trees, the shrubs, the ants, the cows, the cats, the dogs, even inanimate things pulsed with the marvellous presence of the one Rama. And Ramdas danced in joy....he rushed at a tree in front of him which he embraced because it was not a tree but Rama Himself. A man was passing by. Ramdas ran towards him and embraced him, calling out: “Rama, O Rama.” The man got scared and bolted but Ramdas gave chase and dragged him back to his cave. The man noted that Ramdas had not a tooth in his head and so felt a little reassured; at least the looney would not be able to bite him, Ramdas said laughing.

The bliss and joy became permanent. This experience is called sahaja samadhi in which you are one with all because you have perceived that all is He, the One-without-a-second.

About forty years later Ramdas commented: “Ramdas went to Ramana Maharshi in a state of complete detachment from the world. How intense was his longing.” He felt thrills of ecstasy in his presence. The Maharshi made the awakening permanent in Ramdas.

Swami Ramdas and the devotees used to sit in the front hall for an hour or so after the evening meal asking questions or listening to his lively discourses and reminiscences. When he was silent for a time it was enough to put some question to set him off again, like pressing a button. Once he said that after giving up the body he will come back to earth for the sake of his devotees. “Papa,” I asked him, “did you or did you not say that those who see you or come to you will not be reborn?” “Ram made me say it,” he replied. “Then for whom will you come back?” “How they catch us,” he exclaimed after a momentary silence, completely unruffled and added: “Saints like to be caught like that.” He also said in reply to a question on kundalini that if kundalini reaches the sahasrara (the highest chakra or point in the head) the person is realised. This reminded me of my own experience of kundalini.

I was in the midst of packing to return to Tiruvannamalai from Kodaikanal with the children. It was a terrific rush and had to be done with very little help. All the household things also had to be packed properly so as not to be broken on our way down to Kodai Road railway station. One had to be ready for the bus.

It was in the thick of this that it happened. A sort of lassitude came over me, but a most pleasant lassitude. From the base of my spine a tingling feeling arose as if a thousand ants were creeping up. I must have fever, I thought, but a most delightful fever, so let it be. All thoughts of packing or leaving or any urgent work just vanished. I simply rested, whether sitting or lying down I do not remember. The ascent of the ants or tingling continued, stopping at various points along my spine. I particularly remember some difficulty at the base of my neck. Then it burst through the crown of the head with the blaze of a million suns — the splendour of it. Ecstasy which no words could describe. Only this indescribable feeling of blissful well-being; radiant all-embracing flaming Consciousness - I - Am - ness and nothing else. ‘So that’s it.’ How long did it last? A second, an eternity? Then I returned to normal body-consciousness and the world emerged again. It felt like being thrust back into a cage. At that time I knew nothing of kundalini; I had never read about it or practised it.

On my return to Tiruvannamalai I came across Sir John Woodroffe’s The Serpent Power and there read about the chakras and verified my astounding experience. I did not mention it to the
Maharshi until sometime later when He asked me to go through Heinrich Zimmer’s German work *Der Weg zum Selbst* (The Way to the Self) in which he speaks also about kundalini from what seemed to me an intellectual standpoint. In this connection I told the Maharshi that my experience was different and wrote out an account of it. He perused it very attentively and did not return it to me but gave it to the attendant to file.

Remembering my experience of the merging of Arunachala with Perumal, the sacred hill at Kodaikanal, I asked the Maharshi whether there was any connection between them. The reply was in the affirmative; Arunachala was once worshipped as the Hill of Mahavishnu. They were one; Arunachala-Siva withdrawn, Perumal a majestic outer manifestation.

When I heard Swami Ramdas tell his disciples that when kundalini bursts through the *sahasrara* in the crown of the head the person is realised, I spoke with him privately about it afterwards. I told him about my experience and said that with me it was only temporary and not a permanent change of state, as my mind not being still enough re-asserted itself. He asked me about it in great detail and was surprised but obviously convinced and said it was a sign of grace. Bhagavan said that we are never out of the operation of grace, only we have to come out of the shade. My experience was probably a culmination of such practice in a previous incarnation. With some it would be final if their minds were steady in stillness. Once or twice this experience tried to repeat itself after returning to Tiruvannamalai but it never went beyond the throat *chakra*. Obviously I was not detached or passive enough, anticipating a repetition eagerly.

After our return I was confronted in the Ashram with a powerful looking dog who seemed to know me. I could not place him till a slight tremor of his hind leg disclosed that it was my formerly decrepit dog so metamorphosed. Now he could easily hold his own among the other dogs.

Following a spiritual path with absolute faith in the Guru renders life simple if we do all that life demands of us, that is perform whatever duties fall to our lot as best we can with detachment as to results. Outer circumstances conform to our needs for spiritual development. Some people need troubles to turn them inwards or make them concentrated; and so they get them. Others turn away from the pleasures and trivialities of life, even from a life of luxury, like the Buddha and some saints to seek a meaning to life, to seek the truth behind appearances. Progressively as thoughts become more concentrated they gain more power. Bhagavan said that no thought form is ever lost. Each desire gets fulfilled in due course; in this life or a future one; that’s how the world revolves as per the Tibetan Wheel of Life. Fulfillment of desires is not a criterion for happiness.

A modern writer-painter Beh Shahn understood that the Wheel of Life is the objectivisation of all the *vasanas* (predispositions) and delusions in the mind of man, more clearly than some scholars in Buddhism.

“In a monastery near the border of Tibet I found a portrait of myself. Someone in saffron told me that it was called The Wheel of Life, the Round of Existence, but it was myself, exact and representational. There were all the many aspects of myself painted crude and clear: the pig, the lion, the snake, the cock, all animals, angels, demons, titans, gods and men, all heaven and hell, all pleasures and pains, all that went to make me and all as it were within the round of myself, within the wall exactly as I had found it. All that I could be was within the enclosure of myself; all that I could do would only turn the wheel around and around. There was no way out. I would go on and on, now up, now down, never ceasing, never changing. The mechanism was perfect.”

The world would be a better place to live in if human beings were taught to concentrate their destructive energy to subdue their egocentricity, the root of all trouble. The aim of spiritual striving (*sadhana*) is just that. It is the ego which hides our divine primordial state. Dr. Bucke experienced it as a sense of exaltation, an immense joyousness, bliss which was accompanied by an intellectual illumination the splendour of which he finds impossible to describe. He comes to the conclusion that the moments of illumination experienced by all of the great religious leaders (also mystics and seekers) have much in
common. It is a case of cosmic Consciousness, illumination with a sense of immortality. The soul of man is immortal. The cosmos is not dead matter but a living Presence.

There is a state so happy, so glorious that all the rest of life is worthless compared to it, a pearl of great price to buy which a wise man willingly sells all that he has; this state can be achieved. Stilling the mind means the same. ‘Be still and know that I AM God’ or rather that God is I AM. When Christ said ‘I am the way...’ perhaps the original in Aramaic was I AM is the way.

Stilling the mind, Bhagavan said, simply means that the mind gets clear of impurities and becomes pure enough to reflect the Truth, the real Self, the I Am. This is impossible when the ego is assertive....

“Where I am there is God; this is the naked truth
Man is in truth God and God is in truth man
In this break-through I experience that I and God are One.”

Meister Eckhart.

In the language of physics Schrödinger defines consciousness as a singular that means the same in all with an illusory plural. We function only through the divine Light of the Self, Bhagavan says. It enlivens the inert body like a current passing through inert electric bulbs and makes them glow. But this Light is clouded by our predispositions, thoughts, and desires and so on, so it is a mixed light.

God forgets Himself in man and man remembers himself in God. The Koran: ‘There is no God save Him. Unto Allah is the journeying.’ ‘In the beginning was Allah and nothingness beside Him and now He is as He was.’ It struck me like a flash of lightning. Nobody doubts that he exists. His existence is beyond a shadow of doubt then

Who am I?

With the greatest patience Bhagavan would explain and reply to questions of sincere seekers. He knew who sincerely wanted to have a doubt cleared and who wanted to engage him in a discussion for the sake of discussion. The first year I was in Tiruvannamalai there was also an author of travel books there who liked discussions. She had prepared a long list of questions which were handed over to Bhagavan. After one look he put them aside without replying. Then he asked the attendant to bring him a book from the revolving bookcase, opened it and sent it to me. I had not asked any question but I had been wondering for several days whether it was right to combine the atma vichara with invocation and hesitated to ask in public. The book opened on a page which positively fully answered my unasked question. It started with Saint Namdev saying: “The Name permeates the whole universe...” and ended with extolling the invocation. It was very helpful at the time.

Bhagavan said that in the sphere of speech the mystic sound AUM represents the transcendental aspect. When invoking the Name one-pointedly a feeling of devotion arises after a while till one may dissolve in tears. When the invocation becomes mental it is contemplation; that is, when one thought persists to the exclusion of all others. This is its object confining oneself to one thought only, then that one thought too vanishes into its source which is pure consciousness. Consciousness is always in the first person. It is I-am-ness on the substratum of which ‘you’, ‘he’ and all otherness arises.

In Swetasvatara Upanishad it is said: “Fire is not perceived though present until one stick is rubbed against another. The Self is like that fire.” It is realised in the body by meditation and whatever spiritual practices help one to be one-pointed and to still the mind, whether by invocation, self-enquiry, dhyana and so on. With dervishes it is sacred dancing. Dilip Kumar Roy, a famous singer who used to pour out his heart in songs of devotion, asked Bhagavan whether this way was right for him. Bhagavan assented.

It is said also that continuous chanting of the Name or mantra which has intrinsic power in it creates harmonious vibrations and makes the mind serene. Sometimes diseases get eradicated in this way.

After a while meditation and stilling the mind through the atma vichara or letting thoughts pass over one like waves unmoved by their influence is sufficient.

“The truth is,” Bhagavan reminds us, “that you are always united with the Lord (you are invoking) but you must know this.”

True bhakti (devotion) leads to jnana (wisdom), jnana embraces bhakti. Perseverance and steadfastness in either reveals it. Even if there
is only a spark in the ashes of the heart to start with, slowly, one-pointedly, invocation will fan it into flame. The heart melts. Some say the very bones melt.

What counts in sadhana is perseverance and steadfastness. After a time meditation recalls itself spontaneously. “Whether or not results of meditation are obtained is of no importance,” Bhagavan states. “The essential is to arrive at stability; It is the most precious thing that one can gain. In any case one must trust with confidence in the Divinity, the Guru, and await His Grace without impatience...” The same rule applies to all spiritual practices. They are cumulative and the result will come at the right time when the heart is empty enough to be flooded with Grace.

One night I had a vision of waiting in an enchanting dream-garden, so peaceful that not a leaf stirred. I was waiting for someone, Arthur? (I had been several years without any news from him, kept in a concentration camp in Bangkok by the Japanese during the war). On the horizon a figure was slowly emerging, a majestic, radiant figure. Like a bride I was waiting, my heart astir, rooted to the spot for him to come. He was not only Arthur but all mankind condensed in this one wonderful, radiantly serene figure ruling me with his gracious glance more gentle, more loving than words could say.

Arunachala -Siva -Ramana formless, all-pervading, able to take any shape to lead one back to Itself abiding in all hearts.

One day on the Hill after a lengthy absence:
‘Softly, gently caressingly
The Mountain breeze surrounds me
In an embrace of greeting
Touches my head, my face
Long have you been in coming
The heart stirs
Oh, My Beloved.’

In a letter dated 21st July 1948, written three days after Bhagavan had certified that the cow Lakshmi had attained liberation, Suri Nagamma recorded an interesting story that arose out of this declaration of enlightenment by Bhagavan. She wrote:

One of the devotees who yesterday heard of the verse written by Bhagavan about the deliverance of Lakshmi approached him this morning and said, ‘Swami, we ourselves see that animals and birds are getting deliverance [moksha] in your presence; but is it not true that only human beings can get moksha?’

‘Why? It is stated that a mahapurusha [great saint] gave moksha to a thorn bush,’ said Bhagavan with a smile. The devotee

T. V. Venkatasubramanian has edited and translated several books on Bhagavan’s teachings. He is currently working on an English edition of Guhai Namasivaya’s Arunachala venbas.
eagerly asked who that great saint was and what was the story about the thorn bush, and Bhagavan then related [the] story.1

The version Bhagavan narrated was a concise summary of the basic facts about the thorn bush, but it left out many interesting elements of the story, in particular those relating to Umapati Sivam, the key figure in the drama. There are several variations on the basic story. The one presented here has taken elements from several different sources and consolidated them into a single narrative.2

*       *      *

Jnanasambandhar, Appar, Sundaramurthi and Manikkavachagar are regarded as the acharyas of the Saiva faith (samaya-acharyas). Collectively known as the ‘nalsar’ (the four), they each composed and sang devotional hymns in Tamil in praise of Siva. The songs of the first three are known collectively as ‘Tevaram’, whereas Manikkavachagar’s outpourings are contained in works entitled Tiruvachakam and Tirukkovaiyar. Several centuries later these primary texts (now part of the Saiva canon) were interpreted in a philosophical way, and the resulting philosophy became known as Saiva Siddhanta. Four teachers, known as the santana-acharyas, were primarily responsible for this later codification of the fundamental tenets of philosophical Saivism in South India. All of them belonged to one Guru-disciple lineage, the head and founder of which was Meykanda Sivam. He was followed by Arulnandi Sivam and Maraijnana Sambandha Sivam, who in turn became the Guru of Umapati Sivam, the last of these four acharyas.

UMAPATI SIVAM AND THE ENLIGHTENED THORN BUSH

Umapati Sivam was born into a brahmin family that belonged to the Tillai Munivar or the group of three thousand brahmins who traditionally have the exclusive privilege of undertaking the priestly duties in the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple. They all come from the diksbitar community.

Umapati was a precocious child who soon mastered all the Tamil and Sanskrit texts, including the Vedas and Agamas. Following the family tradition, he eventually became one of the Sivacharyas who performed all the acts of worship in the Chidambaram shrine. In recognition of his outstanding accomplishments the Chola king of the day bestowed on him special honours such as a pearl palanquin in which he was carried around. The honours also included a drum accompaniment as he went about his business, and a torch that was lit even during daylight hours. He was clearly a major figure in his city.

One hot summer day, after performing his duties at the Chidambaram Temple, Umapati Sivam was being carried through the streets of the town. His procession passed a veranda where Maraijnana Sambandhar, the third santana-acharya, was teaching his disciples. This was before Umapati Sivam became his disciple.

Seeing Umapati Sivam proceed in such pomp down the street, Maraijnana Sambandhar declared loudly, ‘Look! There is a person who is blind during the day, riding around in dead wood.’

The ‘blind during the day’ remark was a reference to the lit torch which was always part of his entourage.

Umapati Sivam was a highly mature soul who was in search of a jnana Guru. Instead of being offended by the criticism, he heard these words and took them to be jnana upadesa. When he looked through the window of his palanquin at the person who had uttered this stinging critique, he saw, in the place of Maraijnana Sambandhar, Lord Nataraja Himself. Umapati immediately alighted from the palanquin, ran up to Maraijnana Sambandhar, and fell at his feet. While Umapati Sivam was still lying on the ground, Maraijnana Sambandhar ran away at a great speed. Umapati Sivam took up the chase, following him like a shadow, but since it was the height of summer, both of them soon became exhausted. They stopped and collapsed onto the

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1 Prior to the consolidation of Letters from Sri Ramanasramam and Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam, this story only appeared in the latter book. All the letters from this volume now appear in an enlarged version of Letters from Sri Ramanasramam.

2 In addition to Bhagavan’s account in Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, accounts from the Pulavar Paranam (a 19th century anthology of biographies of Tamil poet-saints) and Arulmigu Umapati Sivacharya Swamigalin Varalaru (a Tamil account of Umapati Sivam’s life published by Kumara Devar Madam) and Saiva Siddhanta with special reference to Sivaprakasam, by S. Gangadharan have also been utilised. The story also appears in the Chidambaram Mahatmyam (The Greatness of Chidambaram), the sthala puranam of Chidambaram and Saiva Santanacharya Puranam.
veranda of a house in a street where all the inhabitants belonged to the *senkundar* (weaving) community. Maraijnana Sambandhar begged for food there, but all the owner of the house could offer was a bowl of the starchy liquid that was used to size the threads that were woven there. Maraijnana Sambandhar nevertheless accepted the offering and began to drink it. Some of the mixture flowed down his forearm and dripped off his elbow. Umapati Sivam happily consumed these drops as Guru *ucchistam* (food left over after the Guru has finished eating).

When the brahmins of the Chidambararam Temple came to know that a member of their exclusive group had taken food dripping from the body of Maraijnana Sambandhar, they excommunicated Umapati Sivam and banned him from entering the temple. The caste of Maraijnana Sambandhar is not known, but since the initial offering had come from a low-caste weaver, that in itself was sufficient grounds for excluding Umapati Sivam from his priestly duties in the temple.

Umapati Sivam was unconcerned. He continued to be a disciple of Maraijnana Sambandhar, and eventually attained *jnana*. Later on, he established his own *math* on the outskirts of Chidambaram in a place called Kotravan Kudi.

The ban proved to be a temporary one. At the beginning of the annual festival in the town, the temple priests attempted to raise a flag to mark the commencement of the festivities. However, when they attempted to do so, they could not get the flag to move up the pole.

After attempting unsuccessfully many times to hoist the flag properly, a disembodied voice was heard which said, ‘If you bring Umapati Sivam here, he will be able to raise the flag for you’.

The priests went to Umapati Sivam and requested him to come and raise the flag for them. He agreed, but when he arrived at the temple, instead of attempting to raise the flag manually, he stood beside the flag pole and sang four verses. As soon as he began to sing, the flag spontaneously began to move up the pole. By the time he had finished the fourth verse, the flag had reached the top of the flagpole. These four verses, known as *Kodikkavi (The Flag Verses)* now form part of the Saiva Siddhanta canon.

At the end of the ceremony Umapati Sivam called all the *senkundars* (the weavers) and told them, ‘You are the ones who gave food to my Guru and assuaged both his thirst and his hunger. By this act you also enabled me to consume the Guru’s *ucchistam*. Therefore, out of gratitude, I am going to honour your community by issuing a proclamation that from now on your community will have the exclusive privilege of offering the cloth that is used in the flag-hoisting ceremony.’

It is interesting to note that this tradition is followed not only in the Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram, but in most other Siva temples, including the Arunachaleswarar Temple in Tiruvannamalai.

There is no accepted biography of Umapati Sivam. Though he himself wrote about the lives of many Saiva saints, no one took the trouble to record systematically the events of his own remarkable life. This resulted in there being different and contradictory versions of several key events. One such discrepancy concerns the circumstances under which he was allowed to return to the Chidambaram Temple. S. Gangadharan, a writer and lecturer on Saiva Siddhanta, has recorded an interesting and possibly alternative version of events in his introduction to *Saiva Siddhanta with Special Reference to Sivaprakasam*.

When Umapati Sivam had been prevented from entering the temple and performing *puja*, he decided to do *puja* mentally in his own *math*. That day, when a priest went to do *puja* to one of the temple *lingams*, he discovered that it was no longer there. Siva then manifested as a disembodied voice and instructed the priests to allow Umapati Sivam back into the temple to perform rituals.

Both stories could be true. If so, it would seem that the story of the disappearing *lingam* came first. There is no specific indication in the flag-hoisting story that this is the first time he was allowed to return to the temple.

It is not known whether Umapati Sivam resumed his career as a temple priest since there are no further stories about his performing service in the temple. What is known, though, is that, based in his own *math* on the outskirts of the town, he became a prolific author, writing many works on Saiva Siddhanta, Saiva saints, and the history of Saivism.
There are fourteen works that comprise the *Meykanda Sastras*, the canonical texts of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. Eight of them were written by Umapati Sivam.3 He also composed many other works in both Tamil and Sanskrit. Many of his non-canonical works in Tamil focus on the lives of the *Periyapuranam* saints, the muvar – Jnanasambandhar, Appar and Sundaramurthi – and the *Tevaram* verses that were sung by them. He also composed *Koyil Puranam*, a Tamil history of the Chidambaram temple.

The following partial list of five of his Tamil works indicates just how much interest he had in the lives and songs of the old Tamil saints:

*Sivakshetra Sivanamak Kalivenba*: 300 couplets on the 274 pilgrimage sites visited by the muvar.

*Tirrtordonpuranasaram*: an abbreviated and highly distilled version of the *Periyapuranam*.

*Tevara Arulmuraittirattu*: an anthology of ninety-nine *Tevaram* verses – sixty-three from Appar, twenty-six from Jnanasambandhar and ten from Sundaramurthi – with a commentary by Umapati Sivam that interprets these verses as primary texts of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

*Sekkizhar Puranam*: a biography of Sekkizhar, the author of the *Periyapuranam*. In this version, the *Periyapuranam* is composed in the courtyard of the Chidambaram Temple before being paraded through the streets of the town on the back of an elephant. At the conclusion of the parade, the whole work was read out, to great acclamation, before an assembly that included the king and the temple priests.4

*Tirumuraikanta Puranam*: the story, in forty-five verses, of how the majority of the *Tevaram* poems, lost for centuries, were rediscovered in the Chidambaram Temple.

Two key elements permeate Umapati Sivam’s writings and philosophical world view – the importance of personal devotion to Siva, and the necessity of an enlightened Guru. Both of these appear in the story of Pettan Samban, a pulaiyan (outcaste) who lived in Chidambaram at the same time as Umapati Sivam. As an outcaste, Samban was unable to visit the Chidambaram Temple. This, however, did not prevent him in any way from having great devotion to Lord Siva. Wherever he was, and whatever he was doing, his thoughts were always on Him.

As a reward for his devotion Lord Siva manifested before him in His full traditional form: bearing the trident, the battleaxe, carrying a deer, and so on.

Samban went into ecstasy. Siva then asked him ‘What do you want?’ to which Samban replied, ‘My Lord, I crave only liberation. I want nothing else.’

On hearing these words, Lord Siva wrote a verse on a palm leaf and gave it to Samban. It said:

This is a note given to the person at Kotravan Kudi [Math, i.e. Umapati Sivam] by the One dwelling at Chitrambalam,5 He who is easily accessible to devotees. It is My command in this world that you give diksha to Pettan Samban in such a way that the sense of difference is eliminated in him; bestow liberation on him.

After passing the note to Samban, Lord Siva asked him to hand it over to Umapati Sivam at the Kotravan Kudi Math. Samban, though, hesitated to approach Umapati Sivam directly because he was of such a low caste. He decided instead on a more indirect approach, one which he hoped would eventually bring him to Umapati Sivam’s attention.

Each day he secretly took a bundle of firewood and placed it in the acharya’s math, taking care to ensure that no one noticed him doing it. Samban was already delivering a bundle of firewood to the Chidambaram Temple each day. After he had made his first delivery

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3 The works are *Sivaprakasam*, *Tiruvarutpayan*, *Vinavenba*, *Potripahrotai*, *Kodikkavi*, *Nencvitututu*, *Ummaineri Vilakkam* and *Sankarpa Nirakatanam*. Collectively, they are known as *Siddhanta Ashtakam*, the ‘Eight Works of Saiva Siddhanta’.

4 It was customary for new works to be read before assemblies of learned people. One of Umapati Sivam’s works, *Sankarpa Nirakaranam*, was read before an assembly on a particular date (1235 A.D.) that was mentioned in the text. This has enabled scholars to fix Umapati Sivam’s life span in the fifty years between 1190 and 1240 A.D.

5 Chitrambalam, the space of consciousness, is one of the names associated with the temple of Chidambaram.
as an offering for the cooking that went on there, Samban did a pradakshina of the outside of the temple since he was not allowed to enter. As he was passing the southern gopuram, he saw two gold coins lying on the ground. Initially, he didn’t want to pick them up since he thought they must belong to someone else.

However, as he was looking at them, he heard a disembodied voice saying, ‘Take them. These are for your service.’

Siva Himself had manifested the money and left it in a place where Samban could find it. From that day on, each time that Samban delivered firewood to the temple, he found two gold coins in the same place.

The disciples of Umapati Sivam collected and used Samban’s firewood offering without ever finding out who the donor was. No one ever made enquiries about where the wood was coming from.

Since this roundabout way of gaining Umapati Sivam’s attention had not produced any results, Siva Himself decided to intervene because He wanted His note to be delivered. One day He made it rain so heavily, there was flooding, as a result of which it was not possible for Samban to make his daily delivery of firewood. That day there was no firewood available in the math, and this caused the cooking to be greatly delayed. When Umapati Sivam asked why the cooking had been so delayed, he was told that the mysterious firewood delivery had not appeared that day. This was the first time that he came to hear that his math had been using firewood secretly delivered each day by an anonymous donor. Curious about the person who was anonymously giving wood, he asked his devotees to intercept the next delivery and bring the donor to him.

This order gave Samban the opportunity he had been waiting for. When he was taken the next day into Umapati Sivam’s presence, after making his usual delivery, he fell at his feet and handed over the note that had been written by Lord Siva. As soon as Umapati Sivam started reading the note, he went into an ecstasy. He followed Siva’s instructions to him and gave Samban nayana diksha, initiation through the eyes. Samban was such an advanced devotee, as soon as he was caught in the gaze of Umapati Sivam, he turned into light, merged in chidakasa and physically disappeared. On seeing this, Umapati Sivam and his devotees were wonderstruck both by the event and by the maturity of Samban.

When Samban did not return home, his wife came to the math to make enquiries about his whereabouts. When she was told that he had attained liberation and physically vanished, she refused to believe it. She went to the king and complained that Umapati Sivam had killed her husband for failing to supply the math with firewood the previous day. The king responded by sending a deputation to ascertain the facts of the case. They returned to the king with the story that Umapati Sivam had told them: of the firewood donor bringing the note from Siva, getting nayana diksha, vanishing, and merging with the chidakasa. The king was astonished by this narrative, so much so that he decided to visit the math himself to get the story first-hand. He arrived shortly afterwards with a large entourage, including Samban’s wife, and asked Umapati Sivam to tell him directly what had happened.

When the king heard the story again, he refused to believe that the events described had actually occurred. However, he gave a chance to Umapati Sivam to prove his assertions by challenging him to grant liberation to someone else while he was present as a witness.

Umapati Sivam responded by saying, ‘This state can only be bestowed on a mature devotee’.

He looked around to see if anyone present was in a sufficiently advanced state, but none of them had the qualifications he was looking for. However, as he was scanning the area for a suitable candidate, he noticed a large, thorny, wild eggplant (mulli) that had grown by consuming the abhisheka tirtha, the water that had drained from the lingam that Umapati Sivam had been worshipping every day. Seeing its mature state, he bestowed nayana disksha on it in the same way that he had with Samban. The result was the same. The bush turned to light, merged in the chidakasa, and physically disappeared.

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6 This Siva lingam that was worshipped by Umapati Sivam is at present being maintained and worshipped at the Kumara Devar Madam in Vriddachalam.
Though he was astounded by the event he had witnessed, the king was still not convinced. He felt that he had witnessed some sort of black magic, rather than an act of liberation.

The king announced, ‘You claim that Lord Nataraja gave you a palm-leaf note. Let us go and seek clarification on this matter from Lord Nataraja Himself.’

Everyone then adjourned to the temple to see what Lord Nataraja had to say on the matter.

A puja was offered, and as the lighted camphor was being waved before Lord Nataraja, both Samban and the wild eggplant were seen to manifest on either side of Him. On seeing this confirmation of the story in the temple itself, all those present realised the greatness of Umapati Sivam and sought his forgiveness. The king even granted some land to Samban’s widow so that she could live out her days in comfort.

The story of the thorny plant (mulli) and Samban manifesting on either side of Siva comes from Bhagavan’s account in Letters from Sri Ramanasramam. There is an alternative version of the ending in which a rishi appears out of the thorny bush, just before it disappeared, to say that he had been cursed to be born as a mulli because of misdemeanours in a previous life. In both versions the thorn bush is liberated.7

The liberation of Samban by Umapati Sivam illustrates an important tenet of Saiva Siddhanta, one that Umapati Sivam himself most definitely agreed with. Samban asked Siva for liberation. Instead of giving it to him, Siva sent him to Umapati Sivam. Saiva Siddhanta teaches that the human Guru is essential for liberation in most cases, even going so far as to say that the Guru can liberate certain categories of devotees that Siva Himself cannot.

In the Saiva Siddhanta tradition there are three impurities – anava (ego), karma and maya (illusion) – that prevent devotees from attaining the ultimate goal, oneness with the consciousness of Siva. Those who

7 Bhagavan did accept that plants could realise the Self. In Sri Ramana Reminiscences, p. 61, G. V. Subbaramayya records Bhagavan as saying that there might be exceptional cases of even animals and plants attaining Self-realisation. This was recorded before Lakshmi’s liberation.

8 Natanananda, Sadhu, Sri Ramana Darsanam, p. 118.
Cold Feet

Part Two

The possible influence of Paul Brunton on Carl Jung. The writings of Jung and their importance today in removing obstacles and doubts about the spiritual path.

Wasyl Nimenko

Although Paul Brunton extolled Sri Ramana in his 1934 book *A Search in Secret India,* which had major impact on many readers, I will argue that Brunton may well have had also a strong influence in ensuring that Jung did not visit Sri Ramana. In the interim between 1934 and 1937 when Jung visited India, Brunton had fallen out with Sri Ramanasramam, due most likely to a serious disagreement with Swami Niranjanananda, the younger brother of Sri Ramana and administrator of the ashram. In *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi,* Sri Ramana was asked about someone who had clearly made unfavourable comments about either himself or the ashram. Brunton had been at Sri Ramanasramam earlier in 1936.


Wasyl Nimenko is a psychotherapist specialising in psychological trauma and has worked with the homeless, the armed forces and asylum seekers who were victims of torture.
“27th September 1936. A certain devotee asked about some disagreeable statements made by a certain man well known to Maharshi. He said, ‘I permit him to do so. I have permitted him already. Let him do so even more. Let others follow suit. Only let them leave me alone. If because of these reports no one comes to me, I shall consider it a great service done to me. Moreover, if he cares to publish books containing scandals of me, and if he makes money by their sale, it is really good. Such books will sell even more quickly and in larger numbers than the others. Look at Miss Mayo’s book. Why should he not also do it? He is doing me a very good turn.’ Saying so, he laughed.”

Sri Ramana was unaffected by the negative publicity. In another of his books *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, published in 1941, Brunton complains that he didn’t get the guidance he wanted from Sri Ramana. He also seemed very disgruntled with everything to do with Sri Ramana and Sri Ramanasramam.

“But during my last two visits to India it had become painfully evident that the institution known as the Ashram which had grown around him during the past few years, and over which his ascetic indifference to the world rendered him temperamentally disinclined to exercise the slightest control, could only greatly hinder and not help my own struggles to attain the highest goal, so I had no alternative but to bid it an abrupt and final farewell.”

However there was a major shift in his perceptions in 1936, when he returned to the ashram and it is very likely that he made the disagreeable statements which Sri Ramana found so amusing. Jeffery Masson describes how Brunton spoke with Indian journalists about Sri Ramana.

“What exactly happened between P.B., the Maharshi and the Maharshi’s brother is not known. But whatever it was evidently P.B. gave interviews in the Indian papers that the brother did not find satisfactory and it soured the relationship between all three men.”

If Brunton made the disagreeable statements in 1936 it appears he had terminated his relationship with Sri Ramana, and it could be argued that this may have discouraged Jung from visiting him. Jung met Brunton in early 1937 along with Brunton’s new guru V. Subrahmanya Iyer. But instead of Jung meeting Ramana when he visited India the following year, as he was encouraged to do by Heinrich Zimmer, Jung visited Brunton’s new guru, Iyer who was the guru of the Maharajah of Mysore. After returning from India, Jung continued to write to Iyer who had a similar intellectual approach which Jung probably favoured over the apparently simple but subtle, direct approach of Sri Ramana. It is perhaps with a wry smile we read that Jung in his autobiography *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* made an observation that given the choice between going to heaven and talking about it, mostly people would prefer to talk about it.

Paul Brunton is another guru whom Anthony Storr describes. If Brunton’s predicament with Sri Ramana was the main cause of Jung not meeting Sri Ramana then his mental state is also worth looking at to see how he might have influenced Jung. Brunton’s real name was Raphael Hurst and Storr describes him as follows.

“Brunton exhibited many of the traits and forms of behaviour characteristic of gurus. He was secretive about his origins and revealed nothing of his personal life in any of his books. If one claims, as he did to have had many previous lives and to have come to earth from another planet, the less that is known about the actual circumstances of one’s birth and childhood the better. Brunton’s claim to wisdom largely rested upon memories derived from his previous incarnations and upon his assertion that higher beings residing in other parts of the universe had passed on their esoteric knowledge to him.”

Uncharacteristically for a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, Storr shows an astonishing deliberate lack of interest in the circumstances of Brunton’s birth and also his childhood, which he doesn’t need to explain. Essentially, Storr was rather bluntly saying that there are some things best left unsaid. He is characteristically perceptive about Brunton’s thinking.

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“Although Brunton narcissistically claimed that he was particularly spiritually advanced, and that he possessed an aura of such strength that it protected him against evil assaults, he was also frightened of insanity. However, his paranoid delusions of persecution served to explain how it was that such a gifted and important person had not been even more successful, and thus preserved his self esteem.”

Masson was much more critical about Brunton’s claim to know Sanskrit because Masson not only had a PhD in Sanskrit from Harvard but he was also professor of Sanskrit at the University of Toronto. Brunton lived in his parent’s household for some considerable time.

“The more I learned about India, the more I realised how little P.B actually knew. This began to enrage me. I felt I had been taken in, duped. It was all a trick. PB knew no Sanskrit, knew no texts, invented things, lied, cheated and stole, intellectually speaking. How could I have been so stupid? In spirit, PB might have been like the Indian sages he idolised. His ideas may have been similar to theirs. But he did not really represent any tradition, any body of knowledge, any other person, in fact anything at all. He was just a hodgepodge of misread and misunderstood ideas from an ancient culture he did not know or understand. In this sense he was a phony, a charlatan, a mountebank, an imposter, a quack. I couldn’t find enough words to describe my disappointment.”

I would temper the above observations of an author who has coloured his memoir with the bitter animus of one whose childhood dreams were shattered when he realised his mentor had feet of clay. We need to view this disillusionment with some degree of equability. Brunton was primarily interested in the ability of yoga and other traditional disciplines in the transformation of consciousness and whether he knew Sanskrit and understood the intricacy of Hindu dharma is, in the end, beside the point. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding and one can observe in the later photographs of Brunton and in his later jottings, an uncommon degree of sensitivity and sagacity.

Storr once again shows humane insight into Brunton in the closing words of his chapter on Brunton’s mental state.

“The diagnosis of mental illness should not be made on the evidence of beliefs alone, however eccentric they may appear. I have tried to demonstrate that a new belief system whether it is considered delusional or not, is an attempt at solving problems. Striving to make sense of strange mental experiences is only one example of the universal human desire to bring order to chaos.”

In the 1930s Brunton had a major influence in the West about Eastern spirituality and his A Search in Secret India inspired many to visit Sri Ramana. Among them was Alan Chadwick who became a stalwart in the ashram from the mid 1930s. Today, his books continue to inspire many on the spiritual path. It would indeed be ironic if this very same author had in some way helped dissuade Jung from seeing Sri Ramana.

A curious fact in respect to Brunton which has never been properly explained is the extensive use he made of Bhagavan’s teachings without specific acknowledgment. We also have yet to read a comprehensive biography of Brunton. His son Kenneth Hurst did write a hagiography a few years after his demise but the facts were highly selective and raised more questions in a reader’s mind than it answered.

Returning to the question of Jung we should be aware that what Jung wrote about Sri Ramana in his chapter The Holy Men of India was originally used as an introduction to Zimmer’s book The Way to ‘The Self’ and this was heavily edited before it was used as the introduction to The Spiritual Teachings of Ramana Maharshi. This was almost certainly edited because certain people who were really aware of Sri Ramana’s authenticity could obviously see that what Jung wrote about Sri Ramana was unacceptable because Jung’s hesitancy seemed uncharacteristically ambivalent.

9 Chadwick, A.W., A Sadhu’s Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi, 1994, p.16. See also the website http://www.members.shaw.ca/jgfriesen/index.html
There is compelling evidence shown in Part One, which shows there were several powerful forces influencing Jung at that time of his visit to India which discouraged him from visiting Sri Ramana and explained his apparent ambivalence in *The Holy Men of India*.

Jung’s understanding of the Self was only from an intellectual stance not from one of experiencing the *atman* ‘the Self’ through existence-consciousness-bliss, (*Sat Chit Ananda*). Jung borrowed ideas from the East about the *atman* ‘the Self’ but when he was faced with the task of meeting Sri Ramana, the person known and honoured as an authentic guru, he studiously avoided meeting him.

He describes Sri Ramana being absorbed in ‘the Self’ but admits to not understanding Sri Ramana’s Self-realisation or what he actually did do. He also admits that his field of psychology is not competent in understanding the Eastern insight of the *atman* ‘the self’. This begs the question, ‘Why exactly is Jung who is a psychologist being so critical?’ When we look at his later correspondence, it proves that Jung concealed the truth about why he didn’t meet Sri Ramana and why his description of Ramana vacillated in the *Holy Men of India*.

In later correspondence, Jung is for the first time, actually honest and confesses that he was clearly aware of the profound danger he would be in if he delved further into the East. It is only logical to extrapolate on this that the person who represented the gravest risk to Jung of losing his roots again, was the person he wrote the most about in the East and that was Sri Ramana.

“Eastern philosophy fills a psychic lacuna in us but without answering the problems posed by Christianity. Since I am neither an Indian nor a Chinese, I shall probably have to rest content with my European presuppositions, otherwise I would be in danger of losing my roots for a second time. This is something I would rather not risk, for I know the price one has to pay to restore continuity that has been lost.”

Many of Jung’s comments about why he didn’t visit Sri Ramana seem so uncharacteristically overcritical and unbalanced that they leave you wondering if Shakespeare’s perception of people might be appropriate here, “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.” This means that one can insist so passionately about something being true that people suspect the opposite of what you are saying. That has always been my suspicion about Jung. My conclusion is that Jung regretfully got cold feet, which might have been appropriate, but which sadly resulted in him missing a golden opportunity.

Jung never doubted Sri Ramana’s authenticity but he did question his uniqueness. Time has shown Jung to be quite wrong in this. The truth is that they were both important. Each served a purpose in the spiritual development of humanity. Jung was a psychiatrist who behaved like a prophet and a guru. He made advantageous use of his bouts of psychotic illness to deepen his experience and make valuable contributions to psychology. Whatever the defects of his essay, he did bring attention to Sri Ramana, which may turn out to be much more important than we realise.

Lastly, in comparing the two the final proof lies in simply looking at how the two men were when their lives ended. Did they die happy? Despite the excruciating pain of the sarcoma Sri Ramana left this world serene. There were tears in his eyes of joy and appreciation as his devotees chanted ‘Arunachala Siva’. But it seems rather tragic that Jung did not appear to have found that elixir, the permanent transformative happiness. This is most clearly seen in Claire Dunne’s compassionate account of Jung’s life. In his last few days, Marie-Louise von Franz visited Jung and confirmed that he was still having visions.

“When I last saw him he had a vision. ‘I see enormous stretches devastated, enormous stretches of the earth. But thank God it’s not the whole planet.’”

His final mental state and the path he died travelling on are also penetratingly described by someone else who knew him at that time. Miguel Serrano, a Chilean writer who formed a friendship late in Jung’s life, commented:

“Up until the last moment Jung still seemed to be searching. Perhaps his was the road of the magician who, unlike the saint, did

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not yearn for fusion or for peace of God, but preferred the eternal highway with all its unhappiness.”

Both Jung and Sri Ramana were pioneers who revivified ancient teachings that had been either lost or corrupted. Both rediscovered in their own inimitable ways treasures which could heal and guide us.

Fundamental to Jung’s Analytical Psychology is the paradigm of the four functions. Jung exposed the significance of the four elements in the oldest form of psychology, namely astrology: air, earth, fire and water. He reinvigorated this typological with the four associative functions of thinking, feeling, sensing intuition, as well as extroversion and introversion. He coined many expressions such as ‘a complex’ and ‘the shadow’. He fathered a new science which has opened, through dream psychology and research into astrology and alchemy, new avenues in the eternal quest for self-knowledge. Jung arrived on the scene when the myths of the gods were no longer given credence and the Western soul was dying from the insidious power of disbelief and cynicism. One could say he was a new Parsifal in search of the Holy Grail. The final success was not in his hands but he did not die wondering for he was a magus who dedicated his heart and mind to the eternal search.

Sri Ramana on the other hand, through fearless discrimination and detachment faced and overcame death. He recharged the noble tradition of Advaita Vedanta with a razor-sharp intellect free of all preconceptions and a single-pointed devotion. It is more than likely that in the future Sri Ramana’s legacy will yield a far greater understanding of the nature of the ‘Self’ than we have at this time. Meanwhile many benefit from absorbing his teaching and practising his method of Self-enquiry. Many also benefit from visiting his shrine.

What would have transpired if Sri Ramana and Carl Jung had met remains in the realm of speculation but this we do know that even though their paths did not cross, the impact of India and the invisible threads of thought which permeate India profoundly influenced Jung and the development of his insights into human consciousness.

The Antipode of Arunachala

Mithin Aachi

What is wanted is not the will to believe, but the wish to find out, which is its exact opposite. — Bertrand Russell

Antipode is a fascinating word. It is derived from the Greek word antipodes which means ‘opposite the feet’. It was used by many Greek historians including Plato and Aristotle. Ancient legends tell us how the primitive civilizations used to talk about Antipodal civilizations as those which were filled with people who had their ‘feet against our feet’. Though the knowledge of the Earth being a sphere was far from known, ancient legends and the word antipode persisted through time. Modern mathematics talks to us about the ‘Antipodal Point’. It means a point on a sphere which is exactly opposite to the reference point and a line drawn through both these points forms the true diameter. Geographically antipode means a piece of Earth’s surface terrestrial/under the ocean, which is directly on the opposite

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point of the Earth. We see by such definitions that Spain and New Zealand islands are correct antipodes to each other and so are parts of China and parts of South America.

A point on Earth has an exact antipode. The same can be said of Arunachala Hill.

Every devotee knowledgeable about literature dealing with Bhagavan Ramana knows about the fact that Ramana was sure that Arunachala was the North Pole of the spiritual axis of the Earth and a corresponding Hill should be present on the other side of the Earth which symbolized the South Pole. This hill too, like Arunachala carried the same spiritual power. We come to know of this through Major Chadwick's chronicles *A Sadhu's Reminiscences*. In other words Bhagavan referred to the antipode of Arunachala and was quite sure about its existence.

This following extract from Major Chadwick's chronicles illustrates this conviction of Bhagavan.

“He used to say that Arunachala was the top of the spiritual axis of the earth. ‘There must,’ he said, ‘be another mountain corresponding to Arunachala at exactly the opposite side of the globe, the corresponding pole of the axis.’ So certain was he of this that one evening he made me fetch an atlas and see if this was not correct. I found, according to the atlas, the exact opposite point came in the sea about a hundred miles off the coast of Peru. He seemed doubtful about this. I pointed out that there might be some island at this spot or a mountain under the sea. It was not until some years after Bhagavan’s passing that a visiting Englishman had a tale of a spot, supposed to be a great secret-power centre, in the Andes somewhere in this latitude. Later I found that though a centre had certainly been started, it had failed. Since then I have been told of another person who is practising meditation in solitude in the region of the Andes in Ecuador. So it does appear as though there might be a mountain under the sea. It was not until some years after Bhagavan’s passing that a visiting Englishman had a tale of a spot, supposed to be a great secret-power centre, in the Andes somewhere in this latitude. Later I found that though a centre had certainly been started, it had failed. Since then I have been told of another person who is practising meditation in solitude in the region of the Andes in Ecuador. So it does appear as though there might be some island at this spot or a mountain under the sea. It was not until some years after Bhagavan’s passing that a visiting Englishman had a tale of a spot, supposed to be a great secret-power centre, in the Andes somewhere in this latitude. Later I found that though a centre had certainly been started, it had failed. Since then I have been told of another person who is practising meditation in solitude in the region of the Andes in Ecuador. So it appears as though there might be some island at this spot or a mountain under the sea. It was not until some years after Bhagavan’s passing that a visiting Englishman had a tale of a spot, supposed to be a great secret-power centre, in the Andes somewhere in this latitude. Later I found that though a centre had certainly been started, it had failed. Since then I have been told of another person who is practising meditation in solitude in the region of the Andes in Ecuador. So it does appear as though there might be some island at this spot or a mountain under the sea.”

Though Major Chadwick never got a chance to verify the true location of the Antipode of Arunachala, there was a renewed interest in Ramana devotees about this matter in the coming years and the interest centered around the Machu Picchu area in Peru taking into account its history of Goddess worship.

It was argued that Arunachala is Shiva, the antipode should represent the Mother Goddess. Calculations by proponents of this theory took into account that the Earth is not a perfect sphere and hence the true antipodal point is difficult to determine and indication of a centre’s spiritual power was enough to reasonably point out that Machu Picchu is the antipode of Arunachala. It was also argued that Bhagavan was skeptical when the correct antipode was shown to be under the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Peru and that he believed that a land based Hill was in existence somewhere.

Taking the second objection into account first, nowhere has Chadwick said that Bhagavan has opposed the idea that the Antipode could be a Hill under the ocean surface.

“I pointed out that there might be some island at this spot or a mountain under the sea”2

The first assertion that Machu Picchu could be the antipode is refuted by the fact that it is nearly 1500 kilometers away from the true calculated antipodal point of Arunachala which falls under the ocean floor and hence cannot be the true antipode.

Doing further research into this I found out that the Arunachala Hill peak has the coordinates of 12° 142 333 N, 79° 032 293 E.

If the coordinates (longitude and latitude) of a point on the Earth's surface are (è, ö), then the coordinates of the antipodal point are

2 Ibid., p.28.
(ε ± 180°, "ö). This relation holds true whether the Earth is approximated as a perfect sphere or as a reference ellipsoid.

By calculations the Antipode of Arunachala showed the coordinates of 12° 132 123 S, 100° 552 483 W.

Any map will show that this point actually falls off the coast of Peru into the Pacific Ocean.

By using modern technology like Google Earth, Global Multi Resolution Topography (GMRT) and Marine Geoscience Data System (MGDS) I was able to see a Hill/Mountain which corresponded exactly to the antipodal coordinates on the ocean floor of the Pacific thousands of meters below!

It showed the Hill to be located near the Bauer Basin in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Peru.

With the help of the same technology I was able to study the Hill further.

The Hill seems to be almost identical to Arunachala in the terrain scans. Bathymetry shows that the Hill rises 800 to 1000 meters above the ocean floor. It seems to have five peaks with the second peak from the west being the tallest. There is a huge ridge between the third and the fourth peak. The southern face of the Mountain had two deep valleys and a slanting fall. The North face slides down into even ground which resembles the parikrama path of Mt Kailash. Surprisingly the Northern face has a great Northern Bump like the Great Northern spur of Arunachala. The West face is wider and slants down evenly into the north and south and the East face is ill defined. Mountains of various heights surround this great hill unlike Arunachala which seems to spring into a huge height all by itself.

The ocean floor around the Hill is made of mostly basalt with traces of glass and other minerals. The Hill does not seem to be associated with any major volcanic activity but I could not confirm this in my research.

The Hill seems to occupy a land within a circuit of sixty kilometers. I am pretty sure that if a marine diving expedition to photograph this Hill is sent it will definitely have a great resemblance to Arunachala. The base circumference or girivalam appears to be about 60 km.

My description of the Hill is from the scans of the MGDS and it can vary in actuality. But I feel I have got most of the points right taking the help of the scale on the side bar. It would be wonderful if some marine geologist can do more research in this aspect.

Bhagavan was right. There is a mountain. Exactly on the opposite pole of the Earth. This mountain lies near the Bauer Basin of the Pacific Ocean thousands of meters below on the sea floor. It is very huge and has five peaks. It represents the Mother Goddess.

Though it might be documented in Marine Geology, I do not know if anyone has done a detailed study of this Mountain previously.

I propose to call it Karunachala ( The Hill of Grace )

The South Pole of the spiritual axis of the Earth...the Mountain Ramana said does exist... the Antipode of Arunachala...

As Arunachala represents the Infinite Pillar of Light which manifested before Vishnu and Brahma, it is easy for us to imagine this pillar running through the bowels of the Earth exiting in two locations...Arunachala and Karunachala.

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To fully understand the philosophy and traditional teaching of nonduality (*Advaita Vedanta*), the sincere spiritual aspirant needs to recognize the two points-of-view from which the truth can be observed. One standpoint is the relative; the other is the Absolute (*Brahman*). From the relative point-of-view, time, space, causation and the field of multiplicity are real. This is the relative truth of an illusory superimposition (*adhyaropa*) under the influence of the mysterious and paradoxical principle called ‘*maya*’. The fact that the non-dual (*advaita*) universe appears as the many with names and forms, the Absolute as the relative and the Infinite as the finite, is *maya*. If the spiritual aspirant is under the influence of *maya* and sees multiplicity everywhere, the Vedic seers out of compassion have

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pointed the way out of this dilemma. Depending upon the spiritual aspirant’s maturity, one way out begins by practising appropriate actions (karma) that can disentangle the spiritual aspirant from the illusoriness of the apparent world. Through these appropriate ethical actions, the spiritual aspirant can begin to find harmony in the world and gradually quiet his or her mind.

The ancient Vedic teachings speak of four goals, purposes or ideals (purushartha) for success and harmony in the world and gradually quieting the mind. In the Sanskrit language, these four ideals are called dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. Although these four ideals are integrated into one supreme goal, for the purposes of spiritual practice it is useful to approach the four ideals as independent and sequential. In other words, to fully realize the second ideal (artha), it must be built upon the wisdom gained from the first ideal (dharma) having become functionally stable in one’s daily life. To fully realize the third ideal (kama), the second ideal must also be realized and functionally stable. To fully realize the fourth ideal (moksha), the third ideal must be realized and functionally stable. And lastly, the fourth and final ideal is ultimately the supreme ideal, or goal (moksha). The supreme goal is the end fulfillment of life as true Life and the eternal Truth (sanatana dharma) of the true Self (atma nishta) as the primal Existence (sat). The supreme goal is the inner Freedom from all mental and emotional bondage and suffering. Upon its fulfillment, perfect inner stability and a profound quiet inner Peace and Freedom will reign supreme. This supreme ideal or goal of Self-Realization and God-Realization is the ultimate purpose of a true Life and the paradoxical Mystery of our primal Existence.

The first ideal (dharma) relates to the spiritual Law or “cosmic blueprint” of our particular births that have arisen from our prior circumstances. It is somewhat likened to the DNA within each cell of our physical bodies. This Law of our specific births is the Law of right and appropriate functional action (karma) in the context or the given circumstances of our particular life spans (prarabdha karma). It is the Law of our human births. Our human births include our biological, emotional, mental and inner subtle spiritual unfoldment. The Law of our births is like a rose being born as a rose instead of a tulip. No matter what actions we take to convert a rose into a tulip, it will still grow up as a rose. Creation has already made its choice. It may be a healthy or distorted rose – but for this lifetime, a rose is always a rose!

As a further illustration, if the spiritual aspirant is not knowledgeable about various flower characteristics, he or she may be mistaken and treat the rose as if it were a tulip. But, it will still grow up as a rose! When he or she mistreats the rose as a tulip, the rose will grow up as an aberration and out of harmony with its innate nature (swarupa). In the same way, each of us has a basic nature within us at birth – just like the DNA of a rose in seed form. When we discover our true nature and act accordingly, we can grow up in harmony with this nature. This is the truth of a flower or of our birthrights whether we are humans, roses, tulips, orchids, or oak trees.

When we are in harmony with our basic nature, a feeling of fulfillment, integrity, personal honesty, independence, completeness and unity will be felt within each of our physical body, emotions, mind and spirit. When we honour the “cosmic blueprint” of our own births, a sense of self-esteem and respect for life will permeate all our actions. The garden of life is created with a unity although it appears to contain various plants whether they are called roses, tulips, gardenias, orchids, plumeria or oak trees. What we call planet Earth, the cultures of the East and West, the societies that make up our nations and our individual family groups are all like interconnected and integrated “gardens.” As human life creations, we are made of a variety of birth opportunities, patterns of growth and displays of both aberrant development and of infinite beauty and harmony.

This fundamental Law (dharma) of our inner birth and growth is the basis for all our actions (karma). If we follow this Law, we will experience a feeling of success and fulfillment within our daily lives. Disobey this Law and our actions will bring confusion and a feeling of non-fulfillment in life. Finding, abiding, and acting within the Law of our birth sets the stage for our personal harmony and inner Peace and Happiness. This Law is necessary to quiet our minds for meditation and the considerations of the paradoxical teaching of the eternal Truth. This Law and our actions set the stage for our intelligent
enquiry (vichara) and the realization of the eternal Truth of the true Self. Remember, discovering and realizing each of our special dharma is the first stage on the path to Self-Realization and God-Realization.

The second ideal (artha) in life is to experience the feeling of personal wealth, fullness and peaceful abundance. This is accomplished through the development of a harmonious connection with life’s creative energy. This ideal brings the energy and functional power of money into our lives. It is the glue that holds secular society together to maintain family and culture. It is important to note that money and power must be acquired within the context of the Law of our particular births. If not acquired according to this Law, those seeking wealth may become greedy and develop an unhealthy lust for money and personal power. Maturing in this second ideal of life brings harmonious self-expression and personal creative power to all our personal, family, community and cultural activities. For centuries, the great sages (rishis) have taught that, of all the kinds of wealth in life, there is none greater than the realization of spiritual Wealth, that is, the direct realization of the true Self.

The third ideal (kama), goal or purpose in life is to discover within us the feeling of aesthetic desires associated with beauty, harmony and graciousness. The fulfillment of our aesthetic desires are awakened when we are in harmony with our passionate and sensual cycles of growth and creative expression. This feeling of fulfillment is itself the feeling of wealth for sensitive and artistic types of spiritual aspirants. In the personal actions of a sensitive spiritual aspirant, the feeling of wealth manifests as a calling to unselfish service among all living beings. Once again, our actions to achieve this ideal of life must be guided by the Law of our births. It also must be built upon a foundation of functional wealth in society by being in harmony with our society’s economic rules for acquiring and managing money, wealth and other material things needed to function in the world. If not so guided, actions will lead to physical, sensual, and emotional degeneration and dysfunction. Once again, the wise sages throughout history have taught us that of all the kinds of desires in life, there is none greater than Self-Realization as the supreme ideal.

The fourth ideal (moksha), goal or purpose in life fulfills the hunger of our souls. This hunger is a whole body, emotional, mental and spiritual yearning for the integration, completion and ultimate transcendence of our illusory separate personalities or egos (ahamkara). Through this transcendence of our illusory ego, we will naturally come into communion, harmony and understanding with the Creating (Brahma), Sustaining (Vishnu) and Transforming (Shiva) aspects of true Life. The third aspect, or the principle of Transformation, destroys our sense of separation from our Self. Therefore, this principle is frequently personified and referred to as “God” the “Destroyer” or “Transformer” (Shiva). This ultimate destruction and spiritual transformation of our illusory ego is the direct experience (anubhava) of inner Freedom (moksha) from all our notions of multiplicity, limitations (upadhis) and separateness. The other three ideals (dharma, artha, and kama) all lead to this fourth supreme ideal as the realization of the true Self (atma sakshatkar).

Mature spiritual aspirants intuitively know that the first three ideals are temporary and ultimately illusory. The realization of the fourth ideal is permanent, absolute and transcendental. It is beyond all notions and concepts of our mind no matter how subtle or profound. Remember, in truth, all ideals goals and purposes are for our limited mind only—that is, for the purpose of intelligent, appropriate and practical spiritual practice (sadhana). If we don’t use practical spiritual principles, concepts, notions and ideas wisely during our practices, we will bind ourselves further to our spurious and illusory egos. If we try to discard spiritual principles, concepts, notions and ideas prematurely, we could fall into a mental trap of merely quoting empty statements and assertions with no real understanding. Remember, the great sages (maha rishis) have pointed to this undefinable Self-Realization. We are ‘That’ (tattva) which is the eternal Truth, the Great Mystery, Natural Absorption (sahaja samadhi), No-mind (nirvana), and the ever-present true Self (atma nishta). It is ultimately a Mystery and great Paradox beyond all words, ideals, notions, concepts, goals and purposes.
Hazrat Babajan’s tomb, locating the mortal remains of her elusive but elevated life, is now a small white marble structure situated in a busy area, Char Bavadi, within the limits of the cantonment in Pune. In the 1970’s it was darker in tone, but as vibrant with her life and blessing as the teeming street upon which she used to live in later life; the neem tree still spreads a living parabola above, giving welcome shade. She is regarded as the second Islamic manifestation of divinity within recent history in the female form, after Rabia of Basrah.

To call Hazrat Babajan a Sufi may be a misnomer. Her tomb in Pune is certainly located near to a Muslim area of mosques and shops, but her exact birthplace and date is unknown. Her tomb is draped every day with the green shawls, as is the custom with Muslim saints. She chose her “seat” at this locale in Pune in around 1905. She left no known lineage, nor did she align herself with any particular Sufi group or teaching, she

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Hazrat Babajan

A Sufi Saint

John Maynard

John Maynard is the curator of the photographic collection in the Ashram Archives building.
left no songs of enlightenment, or any of the more usually preserved accoutrements of well-known saints of all callings; her life itself was the teaching, a grand teaching by example, not through words.

Anyone having read the biographies of Meher Baba of Ahmednagar will be familiar both with her name and the account of a mystical kiss upon his forehead while still a teenaged boy in Pune, merging him immediately in samadhi. Dr Abdul Ghani Munsiff writes:

“According to the Indian spiritual master Meher Baba, Babajan gave him God Realization through a kiss on the forehead in January 1914 when he was 19 years old on his way home from college in Pune. After this, he said that he experienced being in bliss for nine months, after which he was helped to return to normal consciousness by a second sadguru, Upasni Maharaj of Sakori. Meher Baba said that Babajan was one of the five Perfect Masters of her time.”

This occurrence indirectly connected her with Sai Baba of Shirdi, the exact religion of whom is also in dispute by parties interested in such discursive wandering. It was Sai Baba who sent Meher Baba on to Upasni Maharaj; it was he who brought Meher Baba back to earthly consciousness. That she called the other masters of this era such as Baba Tajuddin her “Children” showed her high spiritual status. Other than this we have little information besides the source of the quoted original biographical work in Marathi of Dr Abdul Ghani Munsiff, a recognized authority on Sufi genealogy and history in his time, and a contemporary and devotee of Meher Baba. He visited Hazrat Babajan regularly.

I revisited her tomb in April 2009 while making a pilgrimage through Maharashtra to Pandharpur. The kerb side tomb is now clad in soft white marble, the Neem tree beneath which she lived has since died, but the stump remains within the humble edifice. The road is now a non-stop traffic thoroughfare. I had almost forgotten this place, but whilst staying in the Sai Baba ashram in Shirdi a strong invitation came somehow, ‘via the ether’, to revisit her shrine and this was to become one of the high points of the whole Maharashtrian journey.


To be in this sacred place and stay for some hours is to be transported into the very living Presence. A custom here is that the devotee, upon entry, is brushed on the back with a peacock feather bundle before prayer or circumambulation of the tomb. This mirrors the sensation of the descent of divine grace into the human body, as well as being a purificatory gesture. After this short initiation one is left to meditate, pray or walk in silence. The Muslim caretakers within the shrine are silent, caring and reverential; all types including fakirs are seen to come and go freely and to be affected by the natural silent presence spreading through the area, despite the non-stop traffic on the threshold.

Hazrat Babajan was a Pathan born to an aristocratic family in the Baluchistan border area of Afghanistan, close to Quetta. Her maiden name was Gul-rukh (“rose-faced”). Before the age of ten she became a hafiz-i-Qur’an, one who has memorized all the verses of the Qur’an. She was also familiar with Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages as well as her native Pushtoo. As is the case with many saints she developed mystical tendencies at an early age and solitude and prayer took their place above play. Pathan girls were fully expected to marry upon reaching maturity, an idea which was abhorrent to Gul-rukh. She somehow managed to escape from her family home before matrimony and journeyed towards Rawalpindi via Peshawar. It should be remembered that this area, the Khyber Pass, even now, is a remote wilderness; in those times it was populated by bandits who were known to capture vulnerable travellers as slaves for resale. That she reached Rawalpindi unscathed at the age of eighteen must be seen as an act of grace.

Here Gul-rukh led an ascetic life for some years and later met and was initiated by an unnamed Hindu saint; she then went into seclusion in the nearby mountains, and later journeyed to Multan. Of this period, her chief biographer Dr Abdul Ghani writes:

“It was in Multan, when Gul-rukh was 37 years of age that she contacted a Muslim Saint — a Majzoob or one immersed in Divinity

2 The Qur’an is divided into 114 chapters, containing 6,236 verses (comprising some 80,000 words or 330,000 individual characters) — approximately the size of the New Testament.
who put an end to her spiritual struggle by giving her God-Realization. Gul-rukh once again wends her way to Rawalpindi, and there she is spiritually drawn to the same Hindu saint responsible for her first initiation. The Saint helps her to come down from the super-conscious state of God-Realization to the normal consciousness of a personal god. In the language of Sufis, the super-conscious state is called Mushahida and the return to normal consciousness is called Irfan.

There is traced out here, between the lines of her biography, the initial stage of God realization followed by a long stabilization process, in which the Sufi, Saint or Yogi, is re-enabled to live in the world and even teach if this mode is within their prarabhda karma after Self realization. In Sufi terminology these two states are named fana and baqa. (We see these ‘stages’ clearly in Sri Ramana Maharshi’s own life, well documented by Kunju Swami in _The Mountain Path_, July 1979, page 154; Ramana Maharshi was at pains to point out that the realization of Self is the same, only the outer reflection changes). Gul-rukh or Hazrat Babajan as she should now be called is said to have been aged sixty-five when the final refinement of the baqa stage occurred.

To the so-called neo-advaitin or new-age seeker of the instant ‘you don’t need to do anything as you’re already enlightened’ variety this may all seem quite unnecessary but this re-balancing time period of some years is seen to have been a normal requisite since antiquity.

Gul-rukh then journeyed throughout northern India, possibly including the Calcutta of Ramakrishna’s times, and made her first trip south as far as Bombay, after which she returned to the Punjab. It was here that an incident occurred that was to have a positive affect on her later life in Pune. As one possessed of God she would occasionally still utter ‘an’aal haqq’, ‘I am the Truth’, or ‘I am God’, in moments of ecstasy. She was overheard making this blasphemous utterance by some local orthodoxy in North India who had her sentenced to be buried alive. This heinous act was performed with the help of locally stationed Baluchi troops. It is further testament to both her high spiritual state and her robust Pathan constitution that she somehow survived this ordeal!

In 1900 she arrived back in Bombay for the second time and made her humble home in Choonna Bhatti near Byculla; traveling all over the teeming city and visiting local Sufi masters such as Hazrat Maulana Sahib of Bandra and Hazrat Baba Abdur-Rahman of Dongri, both of whom she referred to as ‘My Children’ despite their fame. She is known to have travelled to Mecca twice and possibly to Medina in this period, contributing to the baraka of these sacred sites, and returned to Bombay between 1905 -1907.

It was Pune to which she finally came, and found her ‘seat’ after what would be a full lifetime for most. She settled beneath a neem tree in the cantonment fringe after a few more years of local itinerancy.

Dr Ghani again gives us a vivid first-hand account of her life:

Although shabbily dressed, there was something very magnetic in her personality, very unusual in the street mendicant that she looked, so that no passerby could resist giving her a second glance. She was seldom seen moving about or sitting anywhere all alone. There were always a few people loitering round eyeing her curiously or sitting with her smoking bidis (Indian cigarettes). Her bodily requirements were very few, and she ate very sparingly at long intervals. She was very fond of tea, which was offered her very frequently by visitors. Whoever caught her glance as she walked the streets could not but halt or stand up reverentially until she passed by. The tea-shop wallas and fruit sellers would expectantly invite her to help herself to anything she liked; if perchance she condescended to accept anything; that was deemed a great honour and an auspicious token of good business for the day.

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3 Munsiff, Dr. Abdul Ghani, op.cit.
4 Hazrat: Hadrat, Hazrat or Hazret is an reverential Arabic title used to honour a person. The literal translation of Hazrat means ‘Great Presence’.
6 Baraka, in Arabic, Islam and Arab-influenced languages such as Swahili, Urdu, Persian, Turkish, meaning spiritual wisdom and blessing transmitted from God; or in a Sufi context, ’breath of life’.
7 Munsiff, Dr. Abdul Ghani, op.cit.
Paul Brunton described his spontaneous feeling of reverence for her in one of his meetings with her, near the end of her life:

“Those eyes puzzle me. They seem to be quite uncomprehending, entirely vacant. She silently grips my hand for three or four minutes and continues to look blankly into my own eyes. I receive the feeling that her gaze penetrates me…Respect rises unbidden within me. I find that the contact has diverted my normal thought currents and raised up an inexplicable sense of that element of mystery which surrounds our earthly lives…”

Her chosen but squalid area underwent a positive metamorphosis during the first few years of her arrival. It had been the hang-out for drunkards, opium smokers and hemp users, a place shunned by the respectable after dark, but after Babajan’s arrival the area became slowly transformed. Crowds began to gather around her; Muslims and Hindus, all types of people, from the merely curious to those seriously seeking knowledge, sought her out and questioned her, or were merely satisfied to sit in her presence. Incense burned and the crowds impeded the traffic in this cantonment area. The squalid slum area became electrified in both senses; tea shops sprang up for the constant throng of visitors.

In 1914 the Baluchi Regiment arrived in Pune on their way to fight in the Dardanelles against the Turks. Seated as she was near the Cantonment area they must have seen and recognized her as the heretical old woman they had previously buried alive hundreds of miles away to the North. Recognizing this as the miracle that it was, and begging her forgiveness, they now became her resolute guardians, bringing their Pathan sepoys brethren to the area also, where she now became their patron saint and they her private voluntary bodyguard.

She was never seen to sleep in the normal sense. Again Dr Ghani gives us a first hand account of her appearance at this time:

“When Babajan first came to Poona, people surmised her age to be not less than 90 years and thereafter even 30 years added to her life in the city wrought no material changes in her personality. Short

in stature, firm and agile in gait, back slightly bent with rounded shoulders, skin fair and sun-burnt, face broad and heavily wrinkled, high cheek bones, liquid blue eyes possessing great depths, head covered with a silvery crown of thick white hair hanging loose to the shoulders, deep sonorous voice, all conspired to make her personality very unique and unworldly. Her attire was simple, consisting of a long apron extending below the knees, a pajama narrowed round the legs, and a linen scarf thrown carelessly round the shoulders. She always went about bare-headed; the luxuriant crop of white hair—never oiled or groomed—was for all practical purposes a headdress in itself.”

“…But the matriarch gave no formal teaching, no weighty discourses. Visitors reportedly felt the sheer impact of her presence, which in many cases exerted a transforming influence.”

She lived open to the elements, within a minimalist self-constructed and flimsy shelter. Numerous miracles were attributed to her and she referred to all as Bacha or Babu, child or baby. Babajan possessed a unique method of healing the sick. She would hold the affected limb of the patient between her fingers and give a few jerks, all the while muttering that the ‘child’ was tormented by goliyan (lit. small round pellets) meaning samskaras or amal and order the entity to quit. Dr Ghani stated that he witnessed numerous instant cures through her healing method.

Once a local well-to-do businessman came to Babajan to pay his respects. He offered to take her to a local tea stall and buy her tea. When she told him she would pay he proudly jingled the change in his pockets to demonstrate his own affluence. They proceeded to the hotel he had suggested, drank tea, but when the pretentious visitor went to pay he discovered he no longer had any change in his pocket at all. Others were watching and he felt the sting of humiliation. He returned to Babajan and explained the problem. She said, “A little while ago you had a good amount of change in your pockets.”

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9 Munsiff, Dr. Abdul Ghani, op.cit.
then paid the bill herself with the alms money she had collected. Back at the neem tree the now subdued visitor discovered his missing change intact in his pocket. She was well-known for saving many in a disastrous fire which struck a movie-house some twenty miles away; she had shouted suddenly, “There is fire, there is fire! Doors are locked, people are burning! Oh you fire, be extinguished!” It is said that many escaped, the doors having suddenly released allowing most people out of the over-crowded hall.

Once a thief wanted to rob a costly shawl that had been presented to Babajan whilst she apparently slept. He had succeeded in removing most of the material but a part was still trapped under her body. Babajan raised herself slightly so that the thief might achieve his aim. A devotee from Bombay had presented her with a pair of gold bangles. Again a thief came and removed them; he ripped them from her wrists so sharply that she was left bleeding. Those around raised the alarm and the thief was promptly caught. Babajan asked the police to arrest those making the fuss about the theft and allowed the thief to leave unpunished.

“It was observed that if anyone asked Babajan for material benefit (rather than the alleviation of suffering), she was liable to pick up a stick that she kept by her side and adopt a threatening attitude… There were other occasions when the cause of Babajan’s angry moods of jalal were not so obvious. It may have been some attitude or habit in those around her… When in a mood of jalal she would rise from the ground with flashing eyes and her stick in hand, the sepoys would run from the spot; even the strongest men in this group would not stay their ground.”

Thus to the casual onlooker she could appear as if mad. She made constant mutterings such as: “Vermin are troubling me incessantly, I sweep them away, but still they keep on gathering.” And, “Why do you torment my children; nay, you even kill them. They have done no wrong to you. Do I not feed you, and clothe you? What is it you lack? And still you perpetrate all these atrocities on them. What have I done to merit all this?” When questioned about these unintelligible mutterings Meher Baba explained to Dr Ghani:

“…Babajan was never married and had no children. By children, she evidently meant the Saints of the time (Awliyae-waqt) who are misunderstood, vilified and persecuted by the churches of all denominations, unmindful of the circumstances of which they are the outcome. Babajan was equally concerned with the enlightened and the ignorant, and hence her reference to feeding and clothing the latter. She was as much for the material well-being of the world at large, as for the spirituality of the godly few whom she called her children.”

As to the “Vermin” Meher Baba explained:

“Annihilation of all Amals, good and bad, means Najat (salvation); and Babajan, being God-realized, was much above the state of salvation. She not only had no Amal (actions) to account for, but was in a position to destroy the Amal of others. The physical body of a Saint like Babajan, when working on the earthly plane after Realization, becomes the focal point to which myriad and myriad of Amals of the universe get attracted; and getting purified in the furnace of Divinity, i.e., the body of the Saint, they go out again into the universe as spiritual Amals… Likewise perfect Saints like Babajan give out more spiritual Amals to the world than what they destroy. Hence it is that living Saints are a blessing and mercy to the world, whether one knows it or not.” This condition (halat) in Saints is the aspect of Divine love and beauty (Shan-e-jamal).

Babajan’s status in the hierarchy of Islamic saints is that of Qutub, literally meaning a peg or pin. A Qutub functions as a hub around which the apparent universe revolves. One returning to normal consciousness after Self realization is said to possess Divinity and Gnosis, when Divinity is uppermost he is called Majzoob; when Gnosis is uppermost he is Salik. She possessed both properties and

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11 Kevin R. D. Shepherd, op. cit., p.64
12 grandeur, retribution
14 Munsiff, Dr. Abdul Ghani, op.cit.
15 Referenced as ‘Actions’ in the same article quoted, akin to karmas.
16 Munsiff, Dr. Abdul Ghani, op.cit.
was therefore said to be the *Salik-Majzoob* of the time, a storehouse of spiritual energy to all the Saints in her era.\(^\text{17}\) Her presence remains potent to this day.

The British cantonment board knew better than to try and move her; she was too influential. After some deliberation they constructed a slightly more substantial shelter for her to one side; she refused to move one inch from her chosen spot. So an awning was constructed between the two areas and she used this expanded area until her maha-samadhi on September 21\(^a\), 1931, after some thirty-five years in Pune alone. Said to be born between 1806-1820 she had reached a ripe old age in all ways.

Her funeral saw the largest procession ever witnessed in Pune. It was attended by people of all religions and layers of society and her tomb was erected at exactly on this spot under the neem tree. Dr Ghani ends his article with this Sufi quotation:

> “Cycles change, the worlds rotate,  
> But Qutubs ne’er their seat vacate.”

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\(^{17}\) Munsiff, Dr. Abdul Ghani, op.cit.

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**Silence**

*Martin Wolff*

Everything happens in Silence — have you heard?  
Gentle or harsh, all is in the unsounding Word.

Mysterious, this continual arising — even seemingly perturbed,  
But Silence is always now, continually undisturbed.

Call it Witnessing, if you like, Brahman if you please;  
But who stands mute, beyond all name, completely at ease?

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**Ramana Maharshi: The Crown Jewel of Advaita**

*John Grimes*

This is a new publication on Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi written by a recognised academic authority of Advaita. It is a comprehensive survey of Sri Ramana’s teachings in the light of Advaita Vedanta, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Ethics, Spiritual Practice and Liberation, the Jivanmukta and the Sadguru. It is published by Indica Books, Varanasi. pp.320, Rs.395. ISBN: 81-86569-95-2. www.indicabooks.com

The following is from the Preface.

Ramana has often been called an Advaitin’s Advaitin. He has been praised as one of the greatest living embodiments of Advaita Vedanta, as great as the greatest of that illustrious group. Such a wonder the world seldom sees. He has often been described as ‘an incarnation of Advaita’. The description is an intriguing philosophical oxymoron as the thunderous truth of Advaita boldly declares that no one has ever been born, lived, or died, and yet it is, without doubt, an astonishingly powerful image in conveying the profound affinity that exists between the teachings of Advaita and Ramana. As one passes the philosophically relevant portions of Ramana’s teachings through the lens of Advaita,
they will be seen to be in perfect accordance with the essence of Advaita’s philosophical teachings. What is all the more astonishing is that Ramana’s teachings emerged spontaneously as the fruit of his sudden Great Awakening and only subsequently, almost by accident, did he learn of the ancient Upanisadic and Advaitic teachings.

This book is an attempt to view, to see (have darshan) the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi through the lens of the philosophical system (darshana) known as Advaita Vedanta. Replying to a question from a visitor to Sri Ramanasramam, Ramana said: “To have darshan (being in the presence) of a Sage is sure to bring good to you. Thousands of people pass by Tiruvannamalai in trains every day, but few alight here and fewer still visit the ashram. About darshan of, and association with, a Sage, the scriptures say that it is a vessel that enables you to cross the vast ocean of birth and death (samsara). What more benefit do you want?”

Not only does the word ‘darshan’ mean ‘being in the presence’ of a Sage or deity, but it is also the nearest equivalent Sanskrit word for ‘philosophy’. Darshana, from the Sanskrit root drs meaning ‘to see’ implies not only vision (which includes insight, intuition, and vision of the truth), but also the instrument of vision (such as viewpoint, worldview, doctrine, philosophical system). In a word, darshana implies ‘sight’ in all its myriad connotations and the term, like many Sanskrit terms, is multi-significant, multi-valent. Thus, besides expressing viewpoints or perspectives, the term also suggests the idea of right vision or realization (moksha). The former meaning customarily refers to the six great orthodox Indian philosophical systems (shaddarshana). Here, it is not so much a search for the truth as it is an exposition, elaboration, clarification, vindication and conceptual fixation of what has been received. The latter meaning, on the other hand, refers to the person experiencing a vision of or insight. In this case, it is direct, personal and experiential. In other words, the “seeing” implied by the term darshana includes both conceptual knowledge and perceptual observation, critical exposition and intuitional experience, logical enquiry and spiritual insight, concrete and abstract, gross and subtle. The English expression “I see” contains a hint of this multi-valence in that it denotes both a direct vision as well as a correct understanding.

Darshana, as a systematic elaboration of the truth, encompasses fundamental interpretations of reality more commonly known as the classical philosophical systems. In this technical sense, the term embraces the different streams of philosophical thought running parallel to one another and which were engaged in mutual dialogue, discussion, debate, criticism, and counter-criticism for the past two thousand years.

Ramana was a Sage, a jnani, an embodiment of the Self, a momentary appearance of the nameless, formless Reality. It may appear as if he had a birth, a personality, a history, spoke, acted, taught – all the raw material which informs a biography and which comprise all that ordinary people can and do perceive with their mind and senses – but know that all this is but a tale that a mind that is possessed by the defect of duality tells. In whatever way one perceives Ramana, know that Ramana remains what Ramana is, always has been, and always will be, the nameless, formless, indivisible Self.

What were Ramana’s contributions to philosophy? He blazed forth anew the path of Self-enquiry. Through it, anyone, at any place or time, can attain Self-realization. No one is excluded. No one is too low or too high, too small or too great for this path. Even as Ramana’s Presence was always accessible to all, so were his teachings meant for the good of the entire world.

Ramana’s life and teachings were an incredible confirmation of both the Upanisadic teachings as well as the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. However, in an interesting twist in this instance, Ramana’s teachings are the primary revelation and the Upanisads and teachings of Advaita are of value because they are found to be in accord with his teachings! It is a wonderful phenomenon that the words of Ramana, in numerous instances, are virtually the exact words found in the Upanisads, in the teachings of the Sages, ancient and modern, like Dattatreya, Ribhu, Sankara, and a host of others. What is remarkable is that Ramana had no knowledge of the ancient teachings before his Self-realization and only came to learn of them many years after.
Ramana has left an indelible footprint on the sands of time by giving a new exposition of the spirit of contemporary Indian philosophy that will continue to reverberate and inspire generations to come. The tradition of Advaita has been renewed from time to time, by Sages and philosophers. Ramana revealed the Light once again. Ramana demonstrated in his life the truth of Advaita. He revealed how it is possible for a Sage to be in the world but not of it. He demonstrated, as well as occasionally explained, how a \textit{jnani} acts in the world. The objects of the world don't disappear to such a one's perception – though they are no longer objects being perceived by a subject – they are now appearances of the one, indivisible Self. The mind works by division but once the mind is divested of the ‘I’-thought, reflections are observed as they truly are nothing but reflections of the prototype, the original, the Self. “The moon shines by reflecting the light of the sun. When the sun has set, the moon is useful for displaying objects. When the sun has risen no one needs the moon, though its disc is visible in the sky. So it is with the mind and the Heart. The mind is made useful by its reflected light. It is used for seeing objects. When turned inwards it merges into the source of illumination which shines by itself and the mind is then like the moon in daytime.”

\footnotesize{Maharshi's Gospel, 2002. Part One, Chapter Three, p. 12.}

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Maha Bhakta Vijayam

Vithoba Returns to Grihasthashrama

\textit{Nabaji Siddha}

“Come, O my wish-fulfilling gem of saints! Apple of my eyes! Listen to the wonderful story of the greatest of mystics, Jnanadev.” While Vithoba was spending his days in spiritual bliss, Sidhopant was heart-broken to see his daughter's plight in Alankavati. He wailed, “O Lord, why did you unite my daughter in wedlock to Vithoba who has no desire to lead a householder's life? Why have you separated the life-partners? I can't bear to see the anguish of my daughter who is unparalleled among chaste women.” While his wife prayed to the Divine Mother Lakshmi to restore happiness to her daughter, Rukmabai observed rigorous austerities. She would get up at early hours of the morning, take bath in Chakra Tirtha, circumambulate the neem and peepul tree 108 times wearing wet clothes, chanting the name of her husband 10000 times, and reach home in the late afternoon. She subsisted on a single meal a day, wearing only worn out clothes, leaving her hair uncombed which became matted and
sleeping on the bare floor. She talked to none in the house. Thus
her careless appearance and abnormal behaviour gave her the eerie
appearance of a mad woman. About sixteen months passed. The
impact of austerities and worship performed by the three entered
the heart of Sripada Swami, disturbed his samadhi and roused a
wave of desire in him to undertake a pilgrimage. He set out towards
Alankavati, passing through dense forests on the way. On reaching
the place, overcome by fatigue, he sat down under a Peepul tree. It
looked as if the Lord of the universe Himself had come to Alankavati
to grant the prayer of Rukmabai to grant the prayer of Rukmabai
to grant the prayer of Rukmabai.

When Rukmabai came for her daily routine of perambulation of
the tree, she beheld a radiant Sannyasi sitting motionless under the
Peepul tree immersed in bliss. She realized that he must be a great
being. Hoping that his blessings would soothe her pain, she repaired
home fast, prepared an elaborate feast and placing it before him with
reverence said, “O Swami, are you hungry and tired or are you lost
in the bliss of the Self? Will you kindly accept the food this servant
has brought and refresh yourself?”

Hearing the mellowed voice, Sripada Swami came out of his
meditative state. Looking at Rukmabai he enquired, “O mother, who
are you, appearing like a Tapasvi? Pray tell me, what kind of sorrow
has consumed you and made you take to a life of harsh austerities?”

“Swami, please appease your hunger first with this food and rest
for a while. I will apprise you of my lot later.” Pleased with her warm
hospitality, Sripada Swami blessed her to become the mother of four
children. He advised her to give up the austerities and live with her
husband happily.

The strange circumstances of desertion by her husband on the one
hand and the saint’s blessing on the other brought a faint smile on
Rukmabai’s face. She wondered, “How and when she would unite
with her husband and beget four children!”

“Why are you smiling? You don’t believe that my words will come
ture? Even if the Trimurtis stand in the way, my blessing will not
become futile. I promise you that you will become the mother of
four children.”

Overwhelmed by the favourable tidings in her life, she stood dazed,
shedding tears of joy. Sripada Swami insisted on an explanation for
her strange reaction.

“Revered Swami, though your words will certainly bear fruit, I
wonder whether it is possible to cook food without fire, or light a
lamp without oil, or for a ship to set sail without water and similarly
for an abandoned wife to beget children.”

The Master reassured her, “Even if your husband has left you out of
hatred, my blessings will draw him to you. There is no need to lose heart.”

“Swami, before I could apprise you of the story of my life, you
were so moved by compassion that you showered bounties on me.
My misgiving is, my husband did not desire me even when he was a
householder. Now, having become a sannyasi, will he get back to me?”

“O meritorious woman, one can become a disciple of one thousand
Gurus, but to become the Guru of one disciple is an onerous task.
It is as dangerous as setting fire to seven holy cities and reaping its
consequences; or like changing the course of destiny in seven births
for that disciple. Even the burden of redeeming the sin incurred by
the former act is much lighter than what a Guru has to go through
to burn away the karmas of the disciple performed in countless
births in order to uplift him from samsara. It is not an ordinary
responsibility. Without knowing the hidden implications of giving
sannyas to a disciple, many half-baked Gurus seeking name, fame
and a large following for their service and mission, ordain sannyas
indiscriminately. Such thoughtless sannyas brings ruin to both the
Guru and disciple. What is the name of the Guru who initiated your
householder husband into sannyas? Where does he live now?”

“Swami, I don’t know the name of his Diksha Guru. Now, he lives
in Varanasi.” Then Rukmabai unfolded the woeful tale of her life
beginning from the pilgrimage of Vithoba, the Lord’s command to
her father and husband, subsequent marriage, Vithoba’s indifference
to Rukmabai and his mind set on renunciation, death of his parents,
shifting to Alankavati and departure for Varanasi followed by sannyas.

Amazed to hear her story, Sripada Swami broke out saying, “O
incomparable woman, foremost among Tapasvis, gracious hostess,
please let me have a description of your husband’s physical features.”

On hearing the name and description of Rukmabai’s husband, Sripada Swami recoiled. When he guessed that the runaway was none other than Vithoba, his mental condition became like that of a public woman who was exposed, or the guilt of a criminal brought to justice, or like a sick person finding the taste of sugar bitter. He became disgusted with himself.

Becoming furious with Vithoba, considering him a liar, he said, “I am bound by my promise to you and hence I am not able to lay any curse on your husband. Deserting a noble woman like you, uttering falsehood to me, he has committed a terrible sin. I will hasten to Varanasi now and deal with him severely.”

Frightened by the Swami’s reaction, Rukmabai holding on to his feet cried, “Please spare my husband. I don’t care for either progeny or the eight-fold wealth. To know that he is alive and safe is more than all auspiciousness.”

Sripada Swami consoled her saying, “O virtuous woman, please don’t be agitated. I will set right everything to your satisfaction. He will join you joyfully and my blessings will come true. Please await our arrival with a peaceful heart.”

Sripada Swami rushed back to Varanasi. Exploding in anger, he addressed Vithoba, “O impostor Chaitanya, are you not a grihastha? Let the blaze of my fury burn you now. Come out with the truth now, or else I will dispatch you to your doom with my curse, just as sage Agasthya cursed his disciple to remain a mountain till eternity or Brihaspati cursed his student to become a leper.”

Seeing the wrath of his Guru, Vithoba trembled in fear like a guilty man before the king, a daughter-in-law in the presence of her mother-in-law, an adulteress before her husband and a student before his Guru. He reflected, “O my God, for a dispassionate aspirant, what is the connection with samsara? How can he be contaminated with I and mine? Where are the bonds of parents, wife and children for him? Why does my Guru look so furious, asking about my marital status? By uttering falsehood, one incurs the wrath of the king, hostility of a friend, disgrace before the people and curse of the Guru consigning one to hell. Further, affliction of the body, bondage for several births also will befall a liar. One can be redeemed from the curse of parents, elders and even gods by the grace of the Guru, but the curse of the Guru is absolute and irredeemable. If I say that I am a samsari, he would fly into a temper that I lied to him earlier. If I deny it, I will be transgressing from truth.”

Driven by turmoil, Vithoba fell flat at his Guru’s feet and cried out in despair, “O Lord, I have surrendered my body, life and wealth at your feet. Even if you burn me down into ashes or cut off my head, will any harm befall me who has taken complete refuge in you? Even if misfortune comes to me, it will be yours only, not mine as I have no separate or independent existence, having staked everything at your feet. O Master of all Vedas, O Lord, O exalted One, O transcendent Lord, O eternal One, O blemishless One, O peace-incarnate, O eternal One, you have conquered all temptations, Source of all, wish-fulfilling gem, Eye of Knowledge, you are beyond attributes, you are all purity, all auspiciousness! O Light of lights, my Redeemer, O Witness without the ego, adored by all gods, Uplifter, Jewel of Jnana, I take total refuge in you.”

Inspired by Vithoba’s adoration, other disciples also prostrated at the feet of Sripada Swami and glorified him. Vithoba continued to weep inconsolably. The entire scene pacified Sripada Swami somewhat. He was lost in thought for a while,

“Succumbing to anger is the greatest sin, source of all sins. The immensity of fortitude is greater than the ocean; Killing a person is not as murderous as as hurting his feelings; Attachment in the heart is no more adulterous than the physical act; Love in the heart is true worship, more than merely uttering adoration; Caring for a person is love, not mere physical embrace; Water offered with love is a feast greater than nectar offered without love; To be fearful of wrong conduct is greater devotion than rendering service; To be without deceit is purity rather than a dip in holy Ganga;
Orthodoxy is not purity nor is dignity found in palaces and wealth; Meditation is not steadfastness, but to be equanimous; To be learned in scriptures is not learning, but Self-knowledge is.

“Without restraining my anger, how did I come to lose my head over my beloved disciple’s lapse? Acting like a worldly person, I have brought ignominy to my austerities. Great Rishis lost their power of austerities through anger. Vasishtha conquered Viswamitra by his power of serenity. The knowledge of Brahman is contained in self-restraint. If one is inclined towards liberation, can he lose himself in mad fury? Tranquility is all attainment, all moksha. Acting otherwise is certainly not spirituality.”

Now turning to Vithoba, Sripada Swami said, “I learnt about your past from a noble woman in Alankavati. In obedience to the Lord’s wish you were married to her. Fearing that I may not initiate you, you lied to me about your marital status. Without panic, you will now accompany me to your village.”

On reaching Rukmabai’s house in Alankavati, Sripada Swami called her out. Hearing the saint’s soothing voice, Rukmabai rushed out. She prostrated before him and then to the sannyasi with matted locks standing behind him. Vithoba was surprised to see his wife who looked as much a tapasvi as himself with matted hair and frail physique. However, he was terrified that his Guru would command him to live with his wife. When Sripada Swami asked him whether he recognized the woman, he kept silent.

“O Vithoba, abandoning a noble woman like her who is not any less in chastity and greatness than Anasuya, Damayanti and Chandramathi, what are you going to gain by your outer renunciation? One thousand sannyasis cannot hold a candle to a householder-saint. To tell the truth, fire of this woman’s chastity and austerities will scorch both of us. Even the mighty Trinities were reduced to the state of helpless children before Anasuya. By the power of chastity of Brinda, her husband Jalandharan conquered the gods. Did not Nalayini’s power block the sunrise and envelope the world in darkness for seven days?

“Injuring the feelings of chaste women will throw the offender into the worst purgatory. Without disregarding my words, please live together with this noble woman adored by lofty virtues. Is there any gain of external Sannyas that one cannot attain by internal renunciation? Will a wise person refuse to comply with his Guru’s wish? Will a loyal disciple humiliate his Guru? One who earns the blessings of his Guru by obedience will never meet with a downfall in life. O noble one, you have excelled in your devotion to the Guru! O supreme renunciate, desireless one, who took total refuge in the Guru! You are ripe in wisdom, without the sense of I and mine and indifferent to worldly existence. Remaining in the noble householder’s life, may you emerge as a jivan mukta.” Thus, showering his blessings on Vithoba, Sripada Swami took leave of them.

Grief-stricken, Vithoba ran after him and clutching at his lotus feet wept bitterly, “O my Lord, bliss-incarnate, just in order to get rid of me, you have flung me into the desolate samsara. Do I have any other refuge than you in this world? Can an infant live apart from its mother? O Pure One who removed my impurities, O Supreme Lord adored by humans and gods, you bestowed on me the highest wisdom in a trice. Lord’s grace came to me embodied as my Guru and enslaved me by His compassion. Forsaken by you, can I survive in this arid life?”

Sripada Swami raising him up and hugging him to his chest, spoke endearingly, “Incomparable jewel, I hereby make over to you all the powers of my austerities that I have earned until this day. I hereby redeem the sins of your folks born in the previous seven generations and yet to be born in the next seven generations. Without any mental agitation, live happily with Rukmabai. The Trinurts and Adishakti will be born to you both as your children. I am blessed to have initiated you. May you be absorbed in the bliss of the Self! May you attain the vast empire of Brahman!”

Vithoba again begged his Guru to protect him from being lost in the illusory existence. Sripada Swami advised him to behold the entire universe as the form of the Guru and abide in the transcendental state. Thereafter, Vithoba absorbed his teachings and strove for the exalted state. By the grace of the Sadguru, Vithoba experienced the glorious state of universal vision of beholding his Guru everywhere.

(To be continued)
Sannyasa is of two kinds according to scriptures: i) vividisha sannyasa, ‘renunciation of the seeker’; and ii) vidvat sannyasa, ‘renunciation of the knower’.

The first is primarily a means to gain knowledge about the Self (paroksha jnana) by the systematic exposure to scriptural knowledge (shastra vichara) under the guidance of a competent guru. Vividisha sannyasa means ‘desiring to know (vettum icchaa), one renounces’. The catalyst for such renunciation arises out of intense aversion towards all worldly pursuits, coupled with a driving desire for the saving knowledge. To facilitate this one-pointed pursuit of brahma vidya, the seeker sheds all the encumbrances of worldly life such as a career and family life. He seeks refuge with a guru and listens to his teachings based on Swami Sivananda Sarasvati's teachings.

Swami Tanmayananda Sarasvati is a disciple of Swami Virajeshwara Sarasvati, hailing in the lineage of Swami Sivananda, Rishikesh.
the Upanishads. Scriptures strongly advise that ‘after renouncing the world, one must pursue listening (sannyaya shravanam kuryaat)’. This is followed by contemplation (manana), meditation (nididhyasana) till one eventually gains the vision of the Self.

The direct recognition of the Self (pratyabhijna) now transforms the ‘renunciation of the seeker’ into ‘renunciation of the knower’. The purpose of vividisha sannyasa is fulfilled upon atma sakshatkaram and the jignasu (seeker of knowledge) is transformed into a jnani — a true brahmana in the Upanishadic sense, that is, a knower of Brahman. However his sadhana does not end here but intensifies and shifts gears to a higher, exalted dimension. In the ‘knower’ stage of vidvat sannyasa, he should endeavour to consolidate his illumination by constant Self-abidance (nididhyasana) till he attains cessation of mind (manonasa) and complete effacement of desires (vasanakshaya) which characterize turgyaga, the seventh plane of jnana.

There have been instances of seekers who, due to some obstacles, could not take sannyasa early on in life, but while remaining in any one of the earlier stages in life (brahmacharya, grahamsha or vanaprastha) and correctly following the scheme of studies, reflection and meditation, they could attain jnanam. When such a person finally enters into the formal order of sannyasa, for protecting his jnana nishta until it becomes sahaja, it comes under the category of ‘renunciation of the knower’. Yajnavalkya is a celebrated example for such vidvat sannyasa in the Upanishadic lore.

In summary, the primary objective of vividisha sannyasa is to gain direct knowledge of the Self (which at the least ensures kramamukti) while that of vidvat sannyasa is to attain ‘liberation while living’ (jivanmukti). The transcendence of vidvat sannyasa is expressed forcefully by Sankara in Upadesa Sabhasri (4.5), as “the direct knowledge of the Self is so firm and natural to a jnani in the same manner as dehatmabuddhi is to an ajnani and thereby attains jivanmukti, even if he does not want it”!

In the Srimad Bhagavatham, Lord Krishna declares to Uddhava, “Among the four stages of life, I am the fourth ashrama” (ashramanam aham turyah) and “amongst all dharmas, I am renunciation” (dharmanam asmi sannyasah). Sannyasa is thus described as the special glory (vibhuti) of the Lord and is characterised by total renunciation (samvak nyasa). An atyashrami in this context, is one who has transcended all the four ashramas as did Bhagavan Ramana, Shuka Brahma, Vamadeva, Rishabhadeva and Sadashiva Brahendra (by the sheer power of vichara and anubhuti mahima), where no rules whatsoever bind them in the least. (nistraiguṇye pathi vicharatah ko vidhiḥ, ko nishedbhah?)

With this background, we can see that the king in the present text Maharaja Thuravu, is a person who renounced an enviable life like the Buddha, purely in order to know Truth and not out of any frustration or failure in life. This is called jignasu vairagya and he graduates from vividisha sannyasa to vidvat sannyasa by the power of his penance and enquiry. His life and spiritual journey of renunciation culminating in jivanmukti were described in the preceding 62 verses. The rest of the text deals with his teachings to a devoted minister regarding the glory of sannyasa (as a means) and Knowledge of Truth, which we shall see presently.

— Translator

63. Among the king’s former council of ministers, there was a wise minister who learnt the king had attained enlightenment and was wandering as a perfected sage. He desired to trace the king’s whereabouts and seek answers to some questions troubling his heart. He soon found him and bowed in great humility and reverence before his former master.

64. The minister saw the king radiant in his happiness, enjoying the plain earth as the flower-bed, with the sky as the canopy; the sun and the cool moon as his lamps; the natural breeze serving as a hand fan; the renunciation (of all attachments) attending on him like a faithful wife and his majestic solitude conferring upon him consummate bliss.

(Note: Earlier while ruling over a kingdom with a finite identity, all his luxuries and comforts were also finite and the pleasures fleeting and petty but now in keeping with his immeasurable status of sovereignty over the all-pervasive empire of Brahm, his creature comforts also acquired cosmic dimensions. After all, everything is in the mind!)
65. The king was earlier accompanied by all royal insignia of chariots, an army of elephants, cavalry and soldiers who protected his frontiers. He was seated on a golden throne adorned with diamonds and priceless gems and dressed in the dazzling splendour of royal robes with a shining crown and sceptre and commanding love and respect from his subjects, ruled over the kingdom. Now he stood majestic in conspicuous isolation as a sage, clad in a single loin-cloth. He was unrecognizable, smeared all over the body as he was with the holy ashes, with loose unkempt hair on his head.

66. The king now went on foot everywhere without mounting an elephant or a chariot, and sought alms not from a single fixed house but from different houses. After renouncing all the royal paraphernalia, the king had gracefully adopted the austere lifestyle of a wandering ascetic. Moved by this heart-melting sight, the minister addressed him with the following words.

67. “Oh, king! There was no other king more exalted than you in glory or power. After giving up such a powerful position, for what earthly purpose did you assume this dreadful mode of stern self-denial and roam about everywhere? Your strong, youthful body is meant to luxuriate in regal pleasures but by assuming the rigorous lifestyle of an ascetic, what are the new states worthy of conquest that are still to be attained by you? Please be gracious enough to answer my doubts in this regard for my edification and solace.”

68. The minister continued, “If one desires to gain a heavenly abode after death, one should first take up the life of a householder and live in perfect accord with the requirements of grahastha dharma and be a role model for society. If, on the other hand, one desires the highest attainment of human life, liberation (moksha), one should choose the right course of enquiry for the Truth, to gain the vision of the Self. For either of these legitimate pursuits, it is neither necessary nor desirable to choose the punishing mode of a mendicant’s life. Which goal of life then do you desire by becoming such a self-denying, stern ascetic? Please do illumine my sorrowing mind.”

69. The king took pity on the pleading minister and replied: “Oh virtuous Minister, you were foremost among my council of ministers. You have suitably approached me and asked me to clarify the doubts that assail your mind. Now I shall answer your queries. You should listen patiently with one-pointed attention without allowing your mind to run into worldly matters even for a moment. You have rightly said that there is no king greater than me in this land who can surpass my glory.

70. When you said that, for one desiring heavens after death, a well-led householder’s life in harmony with dharma is the appropriate means, it is quite true. You rightly also said that moksha is attainable by receiving the right vision of the Self through self-enquiry. But if a person derives pleasure being mired in the unending burdens of a householder’s life, pray tell me, how can the vision of the Self ever occur?

71. …the mind can focus its attention upon only one thing at a time [be it the sense of sound or touch or form or taste or smell, as these alone constitute the so-called world of perceptions]; it cannot attend to two subjects simultaneously. You may have a doubt that people skilled in ashtavadhanam have specialised in performing eight different jobs at one time but you should remember that such feats appear to take place simultaneously only because of the rapidity with which the mind functions in such gifted people. But really even for them, the mind functions as a series-processing unit and not simultaneously. Such amazing capabilities are, however, possible only for an extroverted mind, which leaps speedily from one thing to another. But moksha is possible only for a tranquil mind, which is capable of a steady inward gaze. The bondage of a house-holder’s life exists only for an outward-oriented mind and never for the renunciate. I shall clearly explain to you the differences between the predilections of these two types of mind. Listen carefully.

72. For those who are living south of the Ganges, can they ever have a dip in the Ganges by travelling further south instead of going northwards? In the same way, those who are desirous of moksha should
pursue the inward journey of jnana marga. Moksha is never possible for those who follow extroverted pursuits. Kings ruling over great empires, besides being busy with their family life, have necessarily to confer with their ministers in private regarding matters of administration to ensure the wellbeing and safety of their citizens. With such an extroverted attitude in life, it is not possible for them to pursue jnana marga undisturbed and attain moksha. With proper discrimination, you should investigate and realise this truth.

73. If a person sees clearly that attachment to a secure family life is inimical to the pursuit of moksha, will he be ever again infatuated by worldly life and cling helplessly to them? People with mere bookish knowledge of scriptures which proclaim that attachment to worldly life is bondage, will not assimilate that knowledge but waste their time mouthing quotations that 'everything is pervaded by the supreme Lord'. Though possessed of scholarship and eloquence, they are incapable of renouncing in their hearts greed and desire.

74. Some Vedantic texts do say that renunciation is superfluous to attain moksha, which has no beginning or end; one can remain in householder’s life and yet gain the exquisite Self-Knowledge that ends the transmigratory cycle of birth and death. Understand that such mild teachings are addressed only to the immature (manda adhikaris) and that scriptures never give compromised, diluted instructions to intense aspirants (uttama adhikaris), who thirst for Self-knowledge and are willing to renounce everything for its sake.

75. I shall now expound the nature of all manifest objects in this creation and the nature of Brahman which is the material cause (upadana kaarana) as well as the intelligent cause (nimitta kaarana) behind this manifest creation. Listen carefully so that it eradicates all the misery born of delusion. All manifested objects in creation are products of Maya and are tainted with the defects of transience and impurity. They are riddled with misery. On the other hand, Brahman, which makes them manifest [being the first cause of this Maya-born world], is free from these defects and shines as the eternal, pure and everlasting source of bliss.

76. When we are born into this world, we are first children. This will quickly vanish and is replaced by boyhood which too is evanescent. The lovely phase of youth that follows adolescence quickly slips away. Later, inexorably comes the sorry state of senescence when bent with age, the old man leans on a stick. Then Yama, the Lord of death enters; he is our final visitor. He beckons us to his abode. When he takes us away, all the near and dear relatives of our temporal life grieve; they forget our honourable name, and call our body by a new, universal name, ‘corpse’ and promptly take it to the cremation ground. Know that this sequence is inevitable for every being born into this world.

77. Moreover this body is subject to death even when it exists as a foetus; after it is successfully delivered into the lap of the mother earth, it can die as a new-born child. There is no guarantee of its survival when it grows up into boyhood/girlhood either. The body can perish when it enters the phase of a strong youth. In old age, when every limb of the body trembles in weakness, it can die at any moment. Thus we see that the nature of this body is such that in all the stages of life, it is fit to be devoured by death — such is the inherent instability of human life right from conception.

(Note: Sri Sankara sings in Bhaja Govindam: Life is so delicate and unstable like the water drops tantalizingly poised on a lotus leaf which can roll off any moment.)

78. Even the five elements like space, are subject to dissolution. The sun, moon and all the stars, are perishable when the creation is swallowed up in pralaya (cosmic dissolution). The evil-minded asuras also will die. Even the heavenly realms will perish one day and the celestial gods Indra, Brahma and Vishnu will face extinction at the end of their allotted span of sovereignty. The supreme abode of moksha, which is Brahman, is alone imperishable and truly immortal.

79. Further, this body is merely a material manifestation of the seven fundamental humours (sapta dhatus) — skin, blood, bone, fat, vital fluids, nerves and brain tissues. Everything that it consumes is absorbed into itself. But a person lacking subtle discrimination fails to
see the material body as an assemblage of parts which are perishable and impure by nature. He is deluded by the belief that it is an enduring source of enjoyment. He does not realise that moksha, which is the supreme abode of bliss, is alone pure and eternal.

80. Listen to me, Oh minister, I shall now recount all the miseries that emanate from this body. In this vast world, the three great activities namely creation, maintenance and destruction constantly take place in an apposite sequence, maintaining balance and order in the phenomenal life. At the time of birth, the foetal jiva experiences as it emerges into the world the five great afflictions in the womb while at the time of death, the jiva experiences an agony which is eight-fold worse. Between birth and death, the jiva goes through the afflictions of youth and old age.

81. In old age, the troubles that one faces are endless. In youth, one faces twice as much afflictions and restlessness! All youth can be classified into three stages, namely childhood, boyhood and adolescent youthfulness. In childhood, one suffers from utter ignorance and as a consequence, absolute dependence.

82. In teenage-hood, one faces constant admonitions and reprimands from one’s parents and teachers and thus one lives in fear of disapproval and tongue lashings. In the best phase of youth, one suffers the devouring pangs of hunger and lust; to neutralise these afflictions we appease them, by seeking a job to earn money and in the process one engages in work day and night without respite — thus one is incessantly tormented in youth.

83. Suppose, on account of meritorious deeds, we acquire wealth. In its wake, there ensues the angst of safeguarding it from thieves and evil-minded, greedy relatives. If one happens to be a king, he will invite the wrath and jealousy of a more powerful king and its consequent troubles. Even if one is an emperor ruling over the entire earth, still one will be haunted by fear of disease and death and the anxiety of his lot in the next birth.

84. If you examine if there is at least unalloyed happiness in the heavens, we are told that devas are plagued by the enmity of asuras; they also alternately go through spells of joy and despair. Even their celestial bodies are subject to illness and are further afflicted by the arrows of Kama [the god of Love]. Desires torment them. They are also immersed in sensual pleasures which entail consequent pain. They also suffer extinction when the creation undergoes dissolution. With such buffeting between pleasures and pains, what lasting happiness or peace can one find even in celestial domains?

85. Thus upon examination, one finds only aggregates of pain and misery in the lives of human beings and celestial gods. But there is no comparison to the sufferings in the existence of lower levels of beings such as animals and the plant kingdom that are constantly subject to the cruelty inflicted by the higher race. Such being the case of life upon earth, what to say of the endless agony and unspeakable torture jivas are put through in the hells that follow after death? Discriminating deeply, one must conclude that there is nothing but pain and suffering in being born as a jiva. Moksha alone confers endless bliss.

86. Oh, dear minister! Think well and see for yourself. This worldly life which is driven by Maya is perishable, unreal and fraught with all kinds of misery. The immortal Brahman alone is truly real. Which of these two will be rejected by the wise people who are endowed with sharp discrimination, which will they wholeheartedly cherish and pursue? You should arrive at the logical conclusion yourself by proper, intelligent analysis.

(Note: The purport of the verse is that wise ones will discard the sorrow-laden worldly life as Maya and shall always nurture and nourish the life that is replete with knowledge of Brahman.)

87. After ascertaining that this maya-prapancha is false, will they ever again have any attachment towards it, in the form of ‘I’ and ‘mine’? After appreciating that Brahman alone is real and hence worthy of attainment through right knowledge, is there anyone who will not strive to gain it? Dear Minister, can there be any doubt in this regard? Those who cannot discriminate and do not know the means to get out of this bondage of samsara, will continue to wallow in this world
of Maya. They cannot discard the delusion of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, which bind them to this false world.

88. In the absence of the knowledge of Truth, people believe this unreal world to be real and ignore the truly real Brahman as if it were non-existent. Thus they suffer endlessly all the travails of samsara. On the other hand, wise seekers, by the Grace of the enlightened Guru, come to understand that this phenomenal life is insubstantial and devoid of reality. They will always focus on Brahman which is understood as the only reality and will obtain release from the afflictions of bondage.

89. Dear Minister, if any one develops the discrimination that sees a house-holder’s life is a terrible yoke to burden oneself with, it is natural for him, whatever his position, to immediately renounce family life and live in solitude and contemplation to gain the bliss of the Self. If, on the other hand, a person has the notion of happiness (sukha buddhi) and sense of reality (satya buddhi) in the lifestyle of a householder, he will develop a great liking for it and will never find it worthwhile to renounce it for a higher pursuit. Tell me, then, how can such people pursue the contemplation of Brahman and gain the knowledge of the supreme Truth?

90. Oh Minister, once a person realises the contemptible nature of this false world, whoever he may be, he has no other option but the pursuit of the superior Brahmavidya. Conversely, if one does not realise the ghastly nature of this unreal world, he can never aspire to attain the liberating knowledge of Brahman. If a person is under the sway of evil qualities such as anger, vanity and desires, one wonders how many ages it would take for such a person to understand the utter worthlessness of worldly life. Please do ponder over this and arrive at the right conclusion yourself through proper reason and analysis.

(To be continued)


Swami Virajeshwara (Hamsa) is an uncompromising, blunt teacher whose simple language belies a profound original understanding of Vedanta. Though well versed in scriptures, he arrived at his deep understanding through personal experience and sharp discrimination, as befits one trained as a professional scientist, who studied and worked in the USA for some 13 years in, among other places, the research labs of IBM developing high-speed computers. He maintained a strict personal life-style of brahmacharya, yoga, pranayama and the study of scriptures. He finally returned permanently to India and was taught by Swami Vidyananda of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh. Hamsa’s account of his personal journey is refreshing for its forthright comments of life in the USA and the challenges faced by a sincere aspirant in India. The two most important chapters concern his guru. The first, during his initial interaction at Rishikesh, was a rare mystical experience when he realised that the ‘I’ am is simultaneously infinite and infinitesimal. What is remarkable about the experience is not just the incident, when he rose above his physical body and saw the whole universe as his body, but Hamsa’s ability to put it into context with the Upanishads. The second is the account of the intense teaching he received from his gracious guru. We are given an idea of what the true relationship between the guru and mature disciple is, in accord with tradition. Again Hamsa methodically describes another mystical experience in which the deep training in the Upanishads opens up an understanding that the sense of ‘I’ associated with the body is a cipher and is not to be confused with pure consciousness.

This brief spiritual autobiography stands out for its candour and humility. Hamsa’s observations are sharp and precise. With clear dispassionate eyes, he describes the delusions and traps to which many seekers are prone. Because of his humanity and natural ability to tell the plain facts, we vicariously share in his journey and learn what is of value for our own quest.

His story deserves a better presentation. The book ends so abruptly, it is a shock. The proof-reading, though mostly good, needs improvement. There is much that has been left out of his story, principally his childhood near UdiPi and a glimpse of his family background which set him on a spiritual course, the ordination as a sannyasi and his days after departing from Rishikesh. Nonetheless, it is an inspiring book.

The second book is Sadhana & Meditation is a practical guide to meditation and the meticulous preparations necessary to purify the mind. The teachings are based on the great Upanishadic tradition. Hamsa’s simplicity of presentation belies the considerable learning which lies beneath. Only a teacher who is thoroughly in command of his subject can effectively communicate the subtleties of the subject. The driving forcing of the book is the imperative need to find release from the cycle of birth and death. The reader can sense the utter sincerity of Hamsa in stressing the urgency of this task. Mere book learning is of no value unless it is applied. Practice is emphasised above all else. This is one of the best condensed books available today on practical sadhana.

— Christopher Quilkey


This book presents an introductory analysis of the main philosophical-theological principles of Trika Saivism of Kashmir. There are three fundamental categories common to the Indian philosophical systems: epistemology, metaphysics, and liberation/practical teachings and this book deals individually with each of them. It begins by summarizing and reviewing the textual sourcebooks of the Trika and then presents the Trika’s theory of knowledge, conception of the Absolute, doctrine of cosmic manifestation, theory of appearance, theory of recognition, bondage, liberation and the methods to liberation, each in a separate chapter. In the last fifteen years, there have been an increasing number of books surveying the thought of Saivism in Kashmir, and especially Trika Saivism and this book can now be added to the list. Though the book is not overly insightful nor does it probe deeply into the Trika’s presuppositions and consequences, and though it appears to make a number of dubious claims as far as other systems of Indian philosophy (especially in regard to Advaita Vedanta) are concerned,
its presentation and analysis of Trika Saivism makes a useful introductory book regarding the main philosophical principles of Trika Saivism.

— John Grimes


The Buddhist Publication Society based at Kandy, Sri Lanka has performed a remarkable service over the past 50 years. Their books and booklets have given guidance to many seekers who turned to Buddhism for knowledge and understanding. We have reviewed a number of BPS publications notably the teachings of the great Thai meditation master, Ajan Chan. The book under review is an anthology of the Buddha's teachings on santi, peace. The Buddha used many terms to describe this state of mind, tranquillity, contentment, the list goes on and on. For those who have visited a Theravada Buddhist country one can notice, with a little discernment, the sense of calmness which can be experienced in that society. Peace along with an underlying impression of respect. The aim of this collection is to bring together all the most important teachings of the Buddha culled from the so-called Three Baskets, that is, the complete works of the Buddha. It is a helpful introduction for those keen to deepen their knowledge of Buddhism with the view to follow its precepts. Through meditation, we begin to observe the mental processes and the rise and fall of thoughts and slowly disengage their hold on our attention, so that we become more detached and peaceful.

— T.V. Ramamurthy

Books Received


SRI SHANKARACHARYA SADHANA PANCHAKAM Trans.& Commentary by Nagesh D. Sonde. Mumbai 2007. pp129,Rs200. nageshsonde@gmail.com

On August 14th at 2:46 p.m., surrounded by family members and devotees, Ravi Ramanan was absorbed into his Master, Bhagavan Sri Ramana. Ravi was the second son of the President of Sri Ramanasramam, Sri V. S. Ramanan, and his wife, Srimati Susheela.

Since Ravi landed in America, about 12 years ago, he was a source of inspiration and support to all devotees. Throughout his successful career, he often told us that whatever Bhagavan had given him belonged to Bhagavan's devotees. Even without his saying this, it was clearly demonstrated by his generous deeds, which were numerous. Although residing in the USA, Ravi continued to be a dedicated, active player in the affairs of Sri Ramanasramam. He went to great lengths to obtain copies of photos taken of Bhagavan by Eliot Elisofon, owned by Time-Warner and archived at the University of Texas in Austin. He was also successful in persuading the Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation to release Sri Ramana Maharshi's photos from their archive in France.

He, along with his wife Ranjani, was the founding editor of Saranagati, the Ashram's online monthly free newsletter. During the last few years, he guided web designers in shaping Sri Ramanasramam's website (siramanamaharshi.org). In every aspect of the Ashram he took immense interest. His guidance in administrative matters was always decisive and correct, coming as they were from a pure, totally dedicated heart. His early demise is not only a tremendous loss to his immediate family, but to the ever-growing family of devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi the world over.

Ravi had always told his family that at the age of 45 he would wrap up his commitments in America and together with his family return to Tiruvannamalai. On the threshold of his 45th birthday, his Master and Lord Sri Ramana, took him directly to His eternal abode, bypassing whatever noble plans of serving his Guru at Sri Ramanasramam Ravi had envisioned.

It was about two years ago when Ravi's brain tumor was first detected. This was soon followed by major surgery and continued therapy. The existence of a tumor first became apparent on September 23, 2008, when he suffered a seizure and lost consciousness while exercising in the early morning. As he was losing consciousness, not knowing what was happening to him, he first thought of the uncertain fate of his wife and two daughters, but no sooner did that thought come than another overwhelming thought rushed in, formed in the following words of the second verse of Sri Ramana’s Sri Arunachala Ashtakam: “Kandavan evanenak karuttinul nadak, kandavan indrida nindradu kanden”, which means, “Who is the seer? When I sought within, I watched what survived in the disappearance of the seer (that is, the Self).” Spontaneously focusing on the import of these words, he experienced a flood of pure awareness filling his entire being. That was the beginning of his final journey on Earth, a journey he felt to be the direct grace of Bhagavan Ramana.

Everyone who had heard of Ravi’s illness during these last two years was naturally saddened by the news. But those who went to visit him, surprisingly, came back inspired and encouraged. On seeing him we never felt any weakness of spirit, paucity of faith, or absence of complete

Bhagavan Advent Day 1st September
Advent day celebrates the arrival of Bhagavan at Arunachala on the 1st September 1896. The day began with the traditional Mahanyasa puja and abhishekam. After the centenary celebrations in 1996, it has now become an annual event that devotees from Madurai associated with the Sri Ramana Kendram, have continued the spirit of the yatra and still the Kendra devotees walk some of the distance at from Mambalapattu to Arakandanallur. They all chanted a special Panayanam on the day at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine in the early morning and the next day also at the Matrubhuteswara Temple and Sri Bhagavan's Shrine once more. There was a special sense of kinship and devotion in the air.

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surrender or devotion to Bhagavan. Ravi never allowed others to dwell on his illness or be inconvenienced because of it. As the months passed he became spiritually transformed and indrawn, yet sensitive to the concern and feelings of all his friends and relatives. Knowing his departure was imminent, he gave instructions to his family on every detail regarding where they should live, the girls’ education and even the destination of his remains, which travelled within days to the foot of Arunachala.

All those present on Ravi’s last day tell of the overwhelming experience of peace that flooded his room. They said it was like a surging wave that washed up on the shore of his consciousness and overflowed into the heart of everyone present. And some time after he had breathed his last and that wave of peace and joy receded, they found themselves left behind, standing, while Ravi, totally surrendered, was swept away into that eternal ocean of pure awareness.

We regret the passing of Sri M. Govindarajan (1926-2010), who merged in Sri Bhagavan on 17th April. He was an earnest and much-loved devotee whose passion was the practice of atma-vichara. He inspired and encouraged many fellow devotees to cling earnestly to this practice, for which he will always be fondly remembered. He first visited Tiruvannamalai in 1976 after reading Sri Ramana Vazhi (The Path of Sri Ramana) and later, immersed himself in the Tamil writings of Sri Bhagavan. Poor health compelled him to return to Trichy, where he peacefully lived his last years in remembrance of Sri Bhagavan and his teachings.

Sri Thambiah Navaratnam passed away on the 26th July in Sri Lanka. He first came to Bhagavan as a young man in 1943. During his stay he went up one day onto the hill, met Bhagavan as He was descending the mountain and requested His Grace. Bhagavan told him, “The forest has been set on fire and it will burn out of its own accord. No need to worry hereafterwards.”

Born into a wealthy family who were religious minded, he sincerely yearned from a young age to attain the feet of God. A devotee of great natural dignity, he spent many years later in life at Arunachala.